

Fruit

Rising Above

In a trade, an apprentice first learns the terms used. Next, the teacher demonstrates the easier skills needed, followed by skills of increased difficulty. At each level, the apprentice must demonstrate an ability to perform the same task. With continued "Rising Above" each step to the next, proficiency and understanding of the overall trade becomes more effortless. Finally, the apprentice becomes able to perform without supervision. At some point, a mature workman emerges who can analyze situations and problems and do what is needed. Finally, the individual can guide, counsel, and train others. Development from a newborn child of God into a mature Christian follows the same pattern.

The goal, "Rising Above," has guided much of our teaching and "growth" activities of the past year. In sequential steps, we have risen above the separations and disruptions caused by COVID, following a pattern taught in the Bible. In Scripture, there is a word that illustrates the continual growth process. There are also examples of rising above in knowledge, faith, righteousness, love, good works, and in general, becoming "a workman who does not need to be afraid or ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). We will look at a few examples of each in this series of blog articles.

The Greek word καρπός (Karpos) that translates into fruit or fruits in English is a word with both natural and symbolic meanings. It can refer to the result of a process within a tree or bush that produces a bud, followed by a flower. A portion of the flower will swell and continue developing into the final ripe fruit. From the seed to the ripe fruit ready for harvest, there is a continual "rising above" each progressive growth stage, transforming the whole into something better.

Dr. Thayer provides definitions of καρπός that we can paraphrase as 1) Fruit of trees, vines, or plants in the field, Also the posterity of a mother and father. And 2) That which originates, comes from, or results because of something. Using these definitions, it's easy to see that the idea of fruit involves growth. In application, hearing and learning will lead to doing something such as work in the Kingdom, an act of kindness, or worship. The initial effort, with practice, will lead to some profit or advantage. Increased prayer and faithfulness will result if the growth is in a spiritual direction. As one matures in faithfulness, the result will be increased treasure laid up in Heaven, and the reward will be eternal life. Each growth stage should encourage one to rise above their current level of faith and ability until the final reward is reached.

The Hebrew writer mentions the training administered by parents to help their children as they continually rise above and master necessary skills (Hebrews 12: 10-11). The application is for everyone of every age as they develop and face the trials of living in this world. A Christian must constantly rise above the world to the riches found only in Christ and His inheritance freely offered to us. Each difficulty, trial, or temptation is an opportunity to grow stronger and better able to overcome the tribulation presented by the world.

Paul's letters mention the ever-increasing fruit, producing better and better work in the Kingdom and the treasures laid up in Heaven. He said, *"We heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, **the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you** also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth"* (Colossians 1:4-6). And to the church at Philippi he wrote, "You

*yourself also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica **you sent a gift more than once for my needs**. Not that I seek the gift itself, but **I seek for the profit which increases to your account**" (Philippians 4:15-17). The objective of growing and bearing fruit is stated in (Colossians 1:10), "So that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."*

Jesus used "fruit" many times in parables and examples, indicating that being fruitful is a requirement of a faithful child of God. He said, *"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples"* (John 15:8). And Paul comments to Titus, *"Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful"* (Titus 3:14). These people were baptized believers, but they needed to "Rise Above" their current knowledge and service to grow into mature Christians.

How do we compare? Are we Rising Above where we are to new heights of faith, knowledge, love, and fruits?