

High Performance - High Grace Randy Reynolds

My true disciples produce much fruit. John 15:8

Is there a church that emphasizes Christians performing well and yet is loving and accepting. It seems we can have values that emphasize being productive but are they antithetical to grace? Psychologists have found that families that produce the healthiest children have parents who are both loving and have high expectations. Do high expectations lead to more grace? We know that Christ loved us enough to lay down His life for us but He seems also very demanding of us as well.

Do you remember the incident where Jesus approaches the fig tree and sees that it does not have any fruit?

What did he do? Usually we think about Jesus as a healer, a feeder of the hungry, as a comforter of the afflicted, a preacher of good news, a messiah who brings forgiveness, love, and grace. Then we see Him get angry at this poor little fig tree and curse it and it dies. What did this fig tree ever do to Him? Wow! What a judgmental guy! You can imagine the disciples seeing this and talking among themselves saying, "Don't get Jesus mad you don't want to be cursed by Him! We're glad we aren't fig trees who don't produce or - are we?" How strongly did Jesus feel about being productive? How many times does He teach on the subject and give object lessons like the fig tree?

All of us as believers want to feel safe and know that God is a good and loving God. When C. S. Lewis portrays Jesus as Aslan, in the Chronicles of Narnia, the children ask of this Lion is he safe? We all know the answer Lewis gives, "no he is not safe, but he is good." Yeah but what about the story of the Prodigal or the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to find the one lost sheep? Well what about the story of the talents and the response of the master to the steward who buried his one talent? Sounds a little like the fig tree story. Man, is Jesus into grace or is He into performance?

The Old Testament is full of exhortations to be hard workers, industrious, productive, and not to be lazy, read the Proverbs. "Hard work means prosperity; only fools idle away their time." Proverbs 12:19 Our Protestant work ethic comes from scripture and has helped form the culture of America, but it also applies to the culture of the Kingdom, "be fruitful."

From 1918 to 1971 there was a pastor in Tucson who was very productive. He planted 38 churches. He was a tough guy who would go out to the bars on Saturday night and confront people who he thought needed Jesus. It is told that he often came to church on Sunday morning with black eyes from getting into fights the night before, but his foes were now in church. He went out looking for lost sheep and brought many into the fold. This pastor was one of the pastors of our town who was very productive and I believe when he met his Master and Jesus asked him what he did with his talent he showed him a life that multiplied the gifts he stewarded. After Peter betrays Jesus the Lord comes to him and does not just say you are forgiven, I died to pay for your sins; however, Peter did need that grace. No he lays out a requirement, "Do you love me then feed my sheep." Be productive and do what I require of you, of course you are loved and forgiven now do what I have asked.

Question: Are we responding to a savior who requires us to be productive to perform the tasks given us in our lifetime?

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to be a true disciple who is fruitful in my lifetime.