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 **Fruitful congregations ‘Go’ (vv. 16&17)**

***Fruitful Congregations make an impression for God locally and globally through outreach and involvement in His wider activity in the world***

**Outward mission**

Thinking about becoming a more fruitful congregation could cause us to become very inward focused, thinking only about ‘us and ours’ in the congregation. But Jesus’ vision of fruitfulness grows outward from within. He ‘chooses’ and ‘appoints’ us to ‘go’ and bear witness for Him (v.16). Jesus doesn’t choose us to selfishly luxuriate in His love, He intends us to generously lavish it on those around us.

For congregations, that means creating points of contact, building relationships and finding appropriate ways to show and share the gospel with the local communities in which they have been ‘appointed’ to be bearers of God’s love and light and truth. ‘Bearing fruit – fruit that will last’ (v.16) will only happen as we make deep and lasting impressions on the communities around us. This requires us to move out and ‘go’, not remain within and ‘stay’ as we are.

However, if mission begins as we exit the pew, these days it can reach to the ends of the earth. Congregations can find all sorts of ways of making an impression further afield through involvement in God’s wider activity in faraway places in the world. As we set ourselves to be imaginative about what being fruitful in mission might mean, God will surprise us as to how and where He can work in and through us to leave the imprint of His love on many lives.

**Upward prayer**

None of this can happen by our own efforts or through our own ingenuity. As we go to bear fruit, we can only do so by ‘remaining’ in, and relying upon, Jesus. Without Him we can do nothing (v.4). So, Jesus reminds us again in verse 16 of the priority of prayer and the unanticipated possibilities it opens up. When He says, ‘the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name’, Jesus repeats the extravagant promise of verse 7. When we pray for outcomes in and for the mission of God, we should expect Him to answer, not always in our time or in the ways we can imagine – but that’s what makes the reality of answered prayer all the more amazing when we see it.

**Inward heart**

Finally, Jesus brings us back to the heart of the matter in verse 17 - His command to ‘love’ one another. Fruitfulness in congregational life and witness is ultimately a matter of the heart. It is about love for God that shows itself in love for others. Learning to ‘love each other’ in practical ways in church life spills over into finding ways to ‘love every other’ in witness. We will never be fruitful congregations without having a heart for the people God gives to us as brothers and sisters, neighbours, friends, and even enemies. That love expressed in our actions and reactions is what God uses to make an impression in outreach and involvement locally and globally.

*How would you describe the local community in which God has chosen and appointed your congregation to be His witness?*

*How is your congregation trying to bear fruit in the life of your local community through creating points of contact, building relationships and finding appropriate ways to show and share the gospel?*

*In what way is your congregation involved in God’s wider activity in faraway places in the world?*

*Describe some ways in which you have seen answered prayer for growing fruitfulness in your congregation’s life and witness? What marks of growing fruitfulness would you like to focus on in prayer for the future?*