

And that brings me to today's message!

Turn with me if you will to John 15:1-8 and 16 (a).

**In January, my predecessor, Jacque Wagner went home to be with the Lord. She had been suffering from an untreatable form of cancer for about a year – and God took her home...**

For those of you who didn't know her ... Jacque was the executive director at Care Net from 1994 until she retired in 2012.

And her entire life – from the time she dedicated it to serving the Lord – is a really good case study on the correlation of submitting to Jesus, stepping out on faith, and bearing fruit as a byproduct of obedience...

And as I've thought about the fruit of her life against the backdrop of Scripture – there are a number of things that really spoke to me that I thought to present as the core of today's message.

The first is the way Scripture played a part in identifying the role God had her fill...

Years ago I remember her telling me how a couple of passages played a big part in her life:

Isaiah 1:17: "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."

And James 1:27: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

- A single mom may not be a widow – but they often lack the support a caring husband would bring...
- And a fatherless child may not be an orphan – but when mom doesn't have support – abortion is often the first thing that comes to mind.

Moved by the meaning behind these passages – Jacque started praying and asking the Lord to open doors and lead her "somewhere" where she practice true religion that God accepts...do good...seek justice...correct oppression ... and plead the widow's cause.

And of course that place happened to be Care Net...

**A second thing that really stands out:** Was Jacque's willingness to sacrifice ... In order to fulfill the calling God had on her life, she had to be willing to set aside some of her own goals and aspirations...

In John 12:24-25, Jesus said:

“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. <sup>25</sup> Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

In order to fulfill the calling God had on her life – Jacque gave up a lucrative career in management at Met Life.

- She gave up a good insurance plan complete with dental and full disability coverage,
- She gave up a great retirement plan and a 401K that matched dollar for dollar on the first 4% of your income...

Why?

Because somewhere along the line Jacque gained the faith to believe that in order to follow him – she could no longer live completely for herself ... and that God would take care of her...

**A third thing** I saw in her – was the way she stayed connected to the VINE:

In John 15:5, Jesus said: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Jacque was a woman that kept her nose in the Bible, her knees on the ground when her head was bowed, and her eyes looking towards heaven...

The Lord was always her inspiration – and whatever she felt God was leading her to do – [she might bathe it in prayer and seek the counsel of others] – *but she never failed to follow His lead.*

And often – where the Lord would lead her – was to the courtyard of very sinful people...

She knew – that in order to serve Jesus – like Him - we must be a friend of “sinners” and not see them as lower class citizens or perverts, or as our adversaries...

- No the mind of Christ would say: “Go out into the streets and bring the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.”
- Find the woman at the well...

- Protect those who like the woman caught in adultery, protect them from being stoned by religious hypocrisy...

Give them Jesus...

After all – Jesus himself said: thieves and prostitutes were entering the kingdom of heaven faster than the average person – because when they heard the good news – they believed while the others didn't.

And as a result of Jacque's obedience to Christ, under her leadership at Care Net, the ministry grew from having locations in just two communities to five, and from seeing just over 400 client appointments each year, to more than 2,900.

During that timeframe, 1,687 women who were at risk of abortion changed their mind and made decisions for life, and 292 made decisions for Christ.

And that my friends, is fruit that lasts...

And isn't that what Jesus died for?

Isn't that what he gave the great commission for?

- Anyone willing to follow Christ can bear "much fruit"
- You just need to be willing to die to self a little bit...
- Abide in the Lord...
- Be a friend of sinners...

And perhaps like Jacques Wagner – Ask God to burden your heart for something specific – and when the door opens – step out in faith.