

## Pick Ripe Fruit John 4:35-40

Is there anyone in this room who finds sharing their faith frustrating?

Is there anyone here who wishes they could lead more people into a real encounter with the living God?

Do you look at your ministry or ministries and wish that you could see greater impact?

I want to share with you a simple, biblical principle that will help you become more effective in how you help others encounter God. And I wanted to share this with you at the start of my time with you because it will help you understand why I do, why some people get more attention and time than others, and it will also help you enjoy a greater effectiveness in your own ministry. This is just a short message about a simple biblical principle but it can make your ministry so much more effective and enjoyable.

This morning I want to speak very briefly about harvesting. That is, knowing when people are open and ready to hear about and following God's lead in serving them. Firstly let me say that it takes a team to make a disciple. If we are to bring people through to real faith and into mature faith you won't do it apart from a good church, a team. Virtually everyone you meet in NZ has had more than one God encounter with other Christians, We can all be continually sowing the good news into people's lives, continually watering their faith as it grows and every one of us can be continually looking for ripe fruit and being involved in the harvest. Using the term 'ripe fruit' to describe a person who is ready to hear about God and to grow closer to Him, I want to show you how to spot ripe fruit, so that you can have the joy on a regular basis of helping people meet Jesus.

In John 4 we have recorded an epic encounter that Jesus has with a Samaritan, woman at a well. At the end of that encounter when he has boldly told her stuff about her that only God would know and she has boldly gone and witnessed to her neighbours saying come and see, come and meet Jesus. In response to what is happening Jesus says these words:

***John 4:35-40 (CEV)***

***<sup>35</sup> You may say that there are still four months until harvest time. But I tell you to look, and you will see that the fields are ripe and ready to harvest.***

*<sup>36</sup> Even now the harvest workers are receiving their reward by gathering a harvest that brings eternal life. Then everyone who planted the seed and everyone who harvests the crop will celebrate together. <sup>37</sup> So the saying proves true, “Some plant the seed, and others harvest the crop.” <sup>38</sup> I am sending you to harvest crops in fields where others have done all the hard work.*

Here's some good news you can go to the bank on:

- **The harvest isn't months away, it's today!**
- **All around us daily are people who are ripe for the gospel!**
- **Get over focusing on the people you want to be saved and identify those that God has prepared for salvation (ripened).**
- **You can reap now, what others have sown. i.e. you can help people who are ready to know God today even if others have been witnessing to them for years. IF.... You look for the ripe fruit.**
- **Gathering ripe fruit (helping people come to salvation) is harvesting souls for eternal life.**

In James Mc Donald's book "The Vertical Church" he speaks about Green apples and red apples. It's a really helpful illustration.

**Green apples are those people who:**

**Are not that interested in God, don't want to ever hear a message on giving (because money is their idol), don't want you to tell them they are sinners (as far as they are concerned they are good people), they don't want to make God the boss of their lives they want to remain in charge.**

Green apples might be your son or your daughter, your mum or your dad, your best friend or your colleague at work. We love Green apples, and we pray for them and treat them respectfully but they should not be a key focus for you when it comes to sharing the gospel.

The truth is if you push a green apple and shove the gospel on them and pressure them before they have ripened you will bruise them and damage them and they may never really be ripe and ready to become Christians.

Once there was a young man, a green apple that seemed like such a good guy except His God was his possessions not the God of the Bible. He said to Jesus, "I keep all the commandments, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

And Jesus said put God above your possessions, go and sell all you have and follow me. That green apple walked away from Jesus and Jesus from him.

*Luke 9:57-62(CEV)*

### *Three People Who Wanted To Be Followers*

*<sup>57</sup> Along the way someone said to Jesus, “I’ll go anywhere with you!”*

*<sup>58</sup> Jesus said, “Foxes have dens, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man doesn’t have a place to call his own.”*

*<sup>59</sup> Jesus told someone else to come with him. But the man said, “Lord, let me wait until I bury my father.”*

*<sup>60</sup> Jesus answered, “Let the dead take care of the dead, while you go and tell about God’s kingdom.”*

*<sup>61</sup> Then someone said to Jesus, “I want to go with you, Lord, but first let me go back and take care of things at home.”*

*<sup>62</sup> Jesus answered, “Anyone who starts ploughing and keeps looking back isn’t worth a thing to God’s kingdom!”*

Jesus turned away three green apples. To the first one he said; “you are not ready to follow me, I don’t even have a place to call home”. To the second Green apple he said “Leave the dead to bury their own dead.” There are far greater priorities in the kingdom. Effectively, there are people who can be saved who are still alive. And to the third green apple he said “followers don’t look back, you are not ready.”

A lot of Christians and Pastors spend a huge amount of time trying to please Green apples, trying to give them what they want in your friendship or in your church and it doesn’t work. It’s tiring and discouraging and you begin to wonder about the power of the gospel.

Jesus said that He came to save the lost, not the pride filled person or thinks they are Ok and don’t need God but the humble person who realizes that they don’t have it all together, that they are sinners, that they need a saviour. Those people are the ripe fruit ready to hear the gospel, ready for you to witness to them. They are the ones that Jesus is looking for.

**Red apples are those people who:**

**Are humble, they know they haven’t got it all together, they have honestly evaluated their own lives and concluded it’s just not**

**working, something needs to change. Red apples are facing something, feeling something, needing something or searching for something.**

Pride is always the biggest barrier to the Holy Spirit connecting with someone.

And it's often when pride has been stripped away through a redundancy, or through a marriage break up or through some kind of crisis or loss that the once green apple turns red.

I have often found that when a person is new to the country or new to the area there is a short period of time when they are red apples before they turn green again.

God doesn't want you to bring your green apple mother-in-law to WCBC where she will hear me tell her she is a sinner who needs to repent. And she will sit there with her arms crossed trying to stare me down.

God does want you to talk to and bring to church that humble person, who just doesn't know what it is they are looking for, they just want something else.

All around us every day are people. Some of them are green apples; they don't want to know about Jesus yet, they see lots of faults in you and Christianity and your church.

Some of those people we see each day are red apples. They are just hoping that someone with real answers is going to love them enough to pray with them, to share with them what they know, to help them make sense of life. They are open to any spiritual person (Christian or not) who will care about them enough to put their faith to words.

The fields are ripe. There are red apples everywhere today, not in a few months' time. Other people may have prayed for them and witnessed to them but God wants you to boldly bring them home. You can make an eternal difference this week if you focus your attention not on the green apple you want to be saved but the ones that God has ripened.

Now I may really want that wayward relative to have a God encounter, I may be heartbroken over that prodigal child who is living as a sinner. I may really enjoy this person or care for that person and want them to experience God, and we should pray for such people and love them but don't forget that it's God who convicts people of their sin, Its God who saves

people. We are called to be co-workers with Him. The most effective way to do ministry, any sort of ministry is to focus on the people that God is already at work in. That might mean investing time in that stranger you just met and not pressuring your wayward son. It might mean discipling a colleague you find it hard to get along with when your best friend is showing no interest. As a pastor I have always had a lot of people coming for marriage counselling or food parcels or budget help. And while I care about them all I have learnt to give only a short amount of time to the proud person or the closed person and focus my energies on the ones that are open and questioning.

Now I am going to put you to the test and get you to vote.

**Imagine you are a young man wanting to help people meet Jesus and you walk into a room and there are four people there:**

- a) John is the captain of the local rugby team and so many people look up to John. He is a self sufficient sort of a guy.**
- b) Sarah is pretty hot and really nice to talk too.**
- c) Steve is sitting by himself in the corner of the room looking a bit awkward.**
- d) Amie is on her smart phone texting hard out.**

**Which person is likely to be the most open to a God conversation?**

**Vote.**

**Out of these four people who should you concentrate your prayers and evangelistic efforts on?**

- a) The Mormon guy at the door who wants to tell you about this new revelation that Joseph Smith got.**
- b) Amanda who seems to believe a whole lot of funny things spiritually but has so many questions about the bible, God and Jesus.**
- c) Peter who reminds you that Christians are meant to care for the needy and he has a lot of needs that you need to help him with if you are a 'real Christian'.**
- d) Faruk your Muslim neighbour who has never shown any interest in you, God or the church.**
- e) All of the above**

**Vote**

