

# Praying for Fruitfulness at OBC

## Success, Faithfulness, and Fruitfulness

One of the looming questions in Christian ministry is trying to figure out how to measure whether or not what you're doing is "working"

**Success:** Some look at it in terms of success, which really just means numbers.

How many people showed up?

How many baptisms were there?

How much are people giving?

And so on.

These aren't bad metrics and can be an indicator of God's working in a church's ministry, but it's not necessarily so as many critics of the church growth/seeker sensitive movement have made clear.

**Faithfulness:** Others contrast this with the idea of faithfulness alone—that all you need is to be sound in your doctrine, godly in character and faithful in preaching and ministering to people. Again, good metrics, but as Tim Keller points out on the first page of his excellent new book, *Center Church*, a bit of an oversimplification as it risks ignoring the competency factor. Simply, you can be orthodox, godly, and faithful, but still not be good at what you do.

**Fruitfulness:** Keller offers a great third option: Fruitfulness. Here's how he explains it:

*As I read, reflected, and taught, I came to the conclusion that a more biblical theme for evaluation than either success or faithfulness is fruitfulness. Jesus, of course, told his disciples that they were to "bear much fruit" (John 15:8). Paul spoke even more specifically. He spoke of conversions as "fruit" when he desired to preach the gospel in Rome "that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles" (Rom 1:13 KJV). Paul also spoke of the "fruit" of godly character that a minister can see growing in Christians under his care. This included the "fruit of the*

*Spirit" (Gal 5:22). Good deeds, such as mercy to the poor, are called "fruit" as well (Rom 15:28).*

*Paul spoke of the pastoral nurture of congregations as a form of gardening. He told the Corinthian Christians they were God's field" in which some ministers planted, some watered and some reaped (1 Cor 3:9). The gardening metaphor shows that . . . [g]ardeners must be faithful in their work, but they must also be skillful, or the garden will fail. Yet in the end, the degree of the success of the garden (or the ministry) is determined by factors beyond the control of the gardener. The level of fruitfulness varies due to "soil conditions" (that is, some groups of people have a greater hardness of heart than others) and "weather conditions" (that is, the work of God's sovereign Spirit) as well. (Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City, pp. 13-14)*

This is a tremendously helpful corrective and one that I trust will be an encouragement to many who struggle in this regard. It completely changes how we evaluate what we do. It's not a matter of just how faithful or godly a minister is, anymore than it's about how many people are showing up on a Sunday morning. And best of all, it takes the wrong pressures off of pastors and leaders who are competent and faithful. "When fruitfulness is our criterion for evaluation, we are held accountable but not crushed by the expectation that a certain number of lives will be changed. dramatically under our ministry."

Aaron Armstrong: <https://www.bloggingtheologically.com/2012/09/05/success-faithfulness-and-fruitfulness/>

## **The Top Ten Prayer Requests for Fruitfulness at OBC**

- 1. Embodying God's Word in the Life of OBC**
- 2. Commit to Corporate Prayer and Fasting at OBC**
- 3. Cultivating a Culture of Peace at OBC**
- 4. Supporting the Ministry at OBC**
- 5. Gathering Together for Worship and Discipleship at OBC**
- 6. Practicing the One-Anothering Commands at OBC**
- 7. Creating a Biblical Structure of Authority at OBC**
- 8. Training and Doing Evangelism at OBC**
- 9. Nurturing Families at OBC**
- 10. Engaging Culture at OBC**