

MIGHTY OAK MINISTRIES



Growing Deeply Healing Progressively Maturing Splendidly

August 2010

The Berries of Life

I've been working with my berries a lot lately. I have wild blackberries across about half of the back of my little plot of land. Over the years, they've been both a nuisance and a blessing. My berries have become my own personal challenge—a challenge that rewards me with a lot of work, a lot of scratches, a lot of hours in the garden, and usually a lot of luscious fruit.

If you have berries, you know they tend to grow everywhere. They send out runners half-way across the garden. I'm always cutting them back from where they don't belong. If I weren't diligent in restraining them, I could have a whole yard full of out-of-control berry vines. And even the ones that are where I want them love to climb up the wall through the ivy (which shares the back wall) to reach for the sun. That means that my sweet hubby has to climb a ladder in the soft soil to pick the fruit. Not fun.

Several years ago I installed trellises for the berries to grow on. If I'm vigilant in the spring when they're young and flexible, I can train them

along the cross wires and tie them with plastic tape, forcing them to stay under control where I can reach them. This year I've been rewarded with about 90% of the berries vines remaining low enough that I can manage and pick them.



greenest branches on the plants. Problem is, they'll suck all the nutrients from the bearing branches, so I spend a lot of time cutting them off. They're not useless; they'll bear next year. But this year, they need to go.

Berries also send out suckers – non-productive branches that won't bear this year. For some reason, these are the healthiest,

*They will be called (mighty) oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. Isaiah 61:3*

Then there are the thorns. Oh yeah. Friends always know when I've been gardening. My forearms are scratched beyond belief. Doesn't matter how careful I am; those thorns get me every time.



When I'm working with my berries, I always see spiritual lessons. As I seek to "grow deeply, heal progressively, and mature splendidly" and to help others to do the same, here are some lessons I've learned from the berries:

Corral those behaviors: There are branches in my life that will bear fruit, but I need to corral them. I need to align them on the trellis of God's Word and keep them accessible in my life. Likewise if I'm ministering to another person, I'll encourage the good, productive behaviors through self-discipline and good habits.

Prune the suckers: Whether it's a sin or an unhealthy habit, the sooner I recognize it and allow the Gardener to cut it off, the better. I may need a friend or partner who will help me identify those

out of control issues, prune them, and require me to behave. Yes, that sin or habit may look lovely, but if it isn't bearing good fruit, it's got to go.

Watch the thorns: I need to be alert to the thorns that will harm me, but at the same time, I need to be willing to endure a few scratches if those will contribute to my goal. I know too many people who say, "If it's hard (or risky or scary or...), don't do it." Wrong. If it's hard, press through. Be smart, but press through to success. You'll enjoy the fruit even more.

Don't forget to stay connected to the Source: Sometimes in the tangle of branches, I'll accidentally cut off a productive stem – one with berries growing. When I remove that branch from its source, the vine, I might as well throw it away. It won't grow another berry. Likewise, when I don't stay connected to Jesus, the true Vine, I risk being cut off and remaining unproductive. I can't bear fruit without the Vine any more than my berries can grow separated from their source.

With a little work, you can enjoy both the

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:1-8 NIV-G/K)

fruit in your garden and the fruit in your life.



Need a Speaker?



Photo: Roni Java (c) 2009

Retreats or Conferences, Large or Small

Pat's primary goal is to minister the Word of God in a way that will encourage people to grow deeply, to heal progressively, and the mature into mighty oaks of righteousness. Pat loves working with wounded and challenging people, nurturing them to healing. Pat can speak on a wide variety of topics and is always willing to work with you to tailor an event for your audience. For a list of the types of workshops and retreats available, see the [Events and Conferences page](#) on the website.

Pat is available to train your small group leaders. She has over 30 years experience in leading small groups and coaching leaders. Her first book, *Small Group Bible Studies: How to Lead Them* remains a classic, despite being out of print in the U.S. (It's in it's 8th printing in Korea!) Her second book, *Why Didn't You Warn Me? How to Deal with Challenging Group Members* continues to answer the questions

many are afraid to ask. For a list of the types of workshops and retreats available, see the Branches section of the [Events and Conferences page](#) on the [Mighty Oak Ministries website](#).

Train Your Leaders



Here's a New Resource for Small Group Leaders

[Small Groups.com](#) has introduced a free digital magazine specifically designed for equipping and encouraging small-group leaders (and the church staffers who love them). AND, I have an article in the premiere issue! The theme for this issue is "Inspiration for Small-Group Leaders," and it features great content from authors like Sam O'Neal, John Ortberg, and yours truly; video interviews with Mark Batterson, Heather Zempel, and JoHannah Reardon. Read more about it on my [blog](#).

*Pat J. Sikora has been encouraging Christians for over 30 years. She ministers through Mighty Oak Ministries at www.mightyoakministries.com and *Why Didn't You Warn Me* at www.whydidntyouwarnme.com.*

(c) Mighty Oak Ministries 2010



Resources

Mighty Oak Ministries is pleased to offer a variety of resources that will help you Grow Deeply, Heal Progressively, and Mature Splendidly. Visit our [website](#) for more resources.



[Order Book](#)

\$8.99

Why Didn't You Warn Me? How to Deal With Challenging Group Members

What problems do you face in your small group? Is Griselda gossiping? Is Quentin too quiet? Is Rhonda always chasing rabbits? Is Charlie too argumentative? Is Mona always talking? Leading a small group can be both exciting and rewarding. But sometimes, it can also be frustrating. What do you do when one or two group members create problems you don't know how to handle?

Why Didn't You Warn Me? addresses 18 common problems that well-meaning people create in small groups and it gives you step-by-step suggestions for dealing with them with grace and sensitivity.



[Order Book](#)

\$14.49

Blessing Your Spirit by Arthur Burk and Sylvia Gunter

God designed our human spirit to rule over the soul and the body. It does this best when it is deliberately enlarged and strengthened by truth--the nutrient that most powerfully transforms the spirit. Your spirit needs to know the truth about who you are and who your God is. Some of that truth is spoken by the Spirit of God directly to your spirit; some is received through deliberate nurture and blessing.

This book offers a series of blessings designed to grow and mature your spirit. For 40 days, we explore legitimacy and identity from the Father's perspective. Then after we have seen ourselves from God's perspective, He invites us to see Him through 21 days of blessings flowing from the names of God. Finally there are several pages of verses that describe the range of functions and emotions of the human spirit. As you read these blessings to yourself and to others, you will experience an enlarging of your spirit that will enable it to bring your emotions and behaviors into conformity with the will of God. Just a few minutes per day will yield amazing benefits.



[Order Book](#)

\$24.94

Biblical Foundations of Freedom by Art Mathias

Dr. Mathias takes us on a step-by-step tour of the biblical foundations of sickness and freedom. He talks about sin; discernment; accusing spirits; and the major strongholds or principalities of Satan, including bitterness, self-bitterness, jealousy and envy, rejection, fear, and occultism, pharmakia, and sorcery. Within each chapter, he discusses illnesses caused by these strongholds and provides the biblical methods of overcoming each of them. He concludes with a discussion of our authority in Christ and biblical provisions for continuing to walk in health and wholeness. If these simple principles were followed, we would see considerably fewer illnesses in the Body of Christ. This is the book I wish I had written!