

Expecting and Explaining Your Harvest

7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. (Gal. 6:7-8)

I have been in more than one counselling situation, or conversation, where someone says something like, "How did we end up like this? How did we end with up with such a bad marriage? Or, how did my child turn out so aggressively against the things of God? How did I end up with so much conflict around me? How did I end up in the grip of an enslaving habit?

They are living with an experience, but can't seem to trace their way back to where this began.

Why is my Christian life so dry? Why do I feel so backslidden and far from God? When did my devotional life, or my family devotions, or my church commitment become so intermittent?

They can't trace it to one major decision, and they haven't done things radically differently, but yet things are not at all what they wanted or expected. They don't really understand why their Christian lives are where they are, or why they are not where they wish they were.

We have in these verses three things: they are an explanation, they are a promise, and they are a warning. In one way, they explain what is in your life right now, and why. In a second way, they hold out a promise for what it may yet be in the next year or more. In a third way, they warn us of what may be in the next year or more.

What you have here is a way of understanding the last year, and years. It is a way of retracing your steps, not looking for massive events, but for many little ones. It's a way of easily and neatly dividing the choices we make which add up to the harvest we have.

It's also a way of charting the way forward for the next year.

This image of sowing and reaping is used for many things in the Bible: to illustrate the preaching of the Word, to illustrate giving. But here it is used to illustrate our choices and their consequences, or acts and their results. Sowing is what you and I do, all through the year, and the reaping is the life that results.

I. Your Spiritual Life Always Corresponds To What You Have Sown

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This is unbreakable cause and effect. Whatever you sow, that you will reap. The results will correspond to the cause. Apple seeds bring apple trees. Corn seeds bring corn. Thorn seeds bring thorns. You cannot put one seed in and have a different result. The kind of seed determines the kind of result.

In verse 8, he explains what kind of seed he means, and what kind of harvest he means.

8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. (Gal. 6:7-8)

Sowing to the flesh brings the harvest of decaying, rotting, dying fleshliness. Sowing to the Spirit brings the harvest of Holy Spirit blessed life. The one fruit is rotten, putrid, and sickening, the other fruit is healthy, and gives health.

Now, it is very easy to misunderstand what is meant by these fruits. It has nothing to do with how wealthy you are, how you look, whether you've got possessions, power or popularity. According to Psalm 73, you can be swimming in wealth, your cheeks fleshy with abundance, and your life neat, tidy, and problem-free, but you may still be harvesting corruption. And according to 1 Peter, you may be suffering financially, and suffering from persecution, and suffering in the body, and experiencing all kinds of loss, but you may still be harvesting life.

If we want to understand what he means by the corruption of the flesh or the life of the Spirit, all we need to do is look back a few verses.

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

If you are sowing to the flesh, then what you reap is a harvest that also comes from the flesh. The flesh refers to the selfish, sinful nature. So as you feed it, it grows and produces this harvest: a backslidden idolatry of other things, resentment and hatred of people in your life, ongoing arguments and fights and conflict with others, outbursts of anger and rage, perpetual discontent and envy of other people, a total self-focus and inconsiderateness of anyone outside your tiny circle, pornography, immodesty, mental or physical unfaithfulness to your spouse, premarital sex, abuse of drugs to obtain highs or relaxation or happiness, use of alcohol to revel and lose control. The world calls this fun. The Bible calls it dying while you die. It calls it corruption. In God's eyes, this is rotting fruit. It is decay. It is rust on the metal, mould on wood. It is the shrivelling of your beauty, the winter of your soul.

Now there is only one kind of person who can live this life consistently and not feel utterly depressed by it, and that's the unbeliever. The one who is still in the flesh, and not in Christ, the one who lives under the citizenship of this cursed world, and calls Adam and his rebellion "father", that one can do these sins, and be acting according to nature. But this is why Paul says that if this characterises you, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. If this stuff marks you, if it is the accent with which you speak, if it is the way you walk, then in dying you will die: your corruption will one day turn to eternal corruption. In a place called Hell, where the worm never dies: the maggots are never satisfied, because the corruption is an eternal degradation. If you don't want God, then that is the alternative.

But if you are a believer and you sow to the flesh, and reap the corruption of the flesh, then you should feel disgusted. You now have a new nature: you have a taste for the heavenly, so you can smell when the rotting fruit of fleshliness is in your life, and you know it should not be. A believer sowing to the flesh more often than not, and reaping corruption is the most miserable person on Earth: knowing he should be eating at a polished table, but gnawing on used mealie husks in a pig pen.

Now look at the opposite harvest.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Gal. 5:19-23)

If you are sowing to the Spirit, then what you reap is a harvest of love. You love God, you love your family. You love the body of Christ. You love your neighbour, and even find grace to love your enemy. You harvest joy: a deep, rich, contented pleasure in God and what He has given. You are

not torn by angst and unhappiness and fretting all your days, but the glow of contented joy is on your face. You harvest peace. Without your circumstances changing, you face the thrashing of the storm like someone safely in the house, seeing the rain pelt the windows, hearing the rumble of thunder, but serenely enjoying the comforts of home within. A restful, tranquil, inner settledness. You harvest a patience and gentleness to take the thorns of life without exploding, to endure discomfort and still deal out answers that do not hurt or crush, responses that do not wound or harm. You harvest a kindness and goodness that finds pleasure in blessing others with words, thoughts and deeds that strengthen them, ennoble them, encourage them. You harvest a self-control that can control your appetites, control your time, your speech, your thought life, your money so that a beautiful order characterises your life. You harvest a life of faith, enduring, persevering faith, that continues under pressure, and does not abandon its first love.

That's what the Bible calls life. In fact, this is the quality of life we will enjoy in eternity. This is everlasting life, life in its fullness, life that doesn't wither, fade, or die.

We often look at our finances, or our possessions, or our debt, or our health, and we try to find out what did I do to end up with this? But that's a waste of time. You will never find an exact correlation between what you did and how much money you have, between things you do and the state of your body, because there will always be someone who did almost exactly what you did and ended up very differently. There is a relationship between work and money and lifestyle and health, but the Bible promises no exact correspondence, because many of those things are ordered by the Lord for specific reasons, and the secret things belong unto the Lord.

But here, we do have an exact correspondence. Sow to the flesh, reap corruption of the works of the flesh, sow to the Spirit, and reap the fruit of the Spirit, which is the flavour of everlasting life. What that means is that there is no way around this.

You cannot beat this law. You cannot hack the system. You cannot find a cheat-sheet. There is no one to bribe to get you over this hump. That's why Paul says, God is not mocked. He means, if you could hack the system, then God would just be another computer programmer having made a finite programme with a flaw in it that you exploited. God would just be a limited law-maker, and some clever lawyers and clever clients mocked Him, and found a way to avoid this law and its consequences.

But Paul doesn't say, God should not be mocked. He says, God is not mocked. In other words, you cannot beat God, you cannot cheat God, you cannot outwit God. This law is engraved into the stone of creation, you can't erase it, tippex it, or press delete. It's there, like gravity, like laws of velocity, like time itself.

In other words, it is the explanation for the moral harvest of your life. Not the explanation for your career or relative health. But why your home has the moral and spiritual fragrance it does. Does it smell of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, or does it smell of strife, outbursts of anger, selfishness, jealousy, envy? Your work-life, your interactions with neighbours, extended family, strangers on the road or in the mall – what's the flavour? Hatred, rage, dissensions, lust? Or self-control, purity, restraint?

The religious and moral taste of your inner life cannot be blamed on anyone else. Your life always corresponds to what you have sown.

II. You Can Sow Only Two Kinds of Seed: Sowing to the Flesh or Sowing to the Spirit

8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. (Gal. 6:7-8)

Paul makes it black and white for us. You get two packets of seeds. You either sowing one or the other. There are no hybrid seeds. There is no third kind of seed. And when you choose not to sow from the one packet, then you necessarily are sowing from the other.

What does he mean by sow to the flesh, and sow to the Spirit? What are these seeds?

Very simply, seeds are deeds. They are things we do, the thoughts we think, the words we speak. They are choices, actions. There are choices which are fleshly, and choices which are Spirit-controlled.

In fact, again, in chapter 5, Paul makes it abundantly clear, by using another image: walking.

16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Gal. 5:16-18)

Walking illustrates one choice after another. When you walk, you have to take one step at a time, transferring your weight from one leg to another. You're used to doing it by now, but there was a time in your life when balancing from one leg to another was quite a thing to learn. You had to learn to transfer your weight and trust from one leg to another.

Paul says, you can either walk in or according to the flesh, or you can walk in or according to the Holy Spirit. In other words, you either depend on yourself, and trust your own nature and act in your own interests, or you transfer the weight of your trust to the Holy Spirit, and take each step under the lordship of Jesus, for the glory of God.

But one thing is true: they desire and strive against each other, so that it is impossible to do both at the same time. You are either taking a step, which is sowing a seed by the Spirit, or you are taking a step, or sowing a seed by the flesh. Just two choices on the shelf: please God or please self.

That seems very severe, unless we see that this is something God makes possible by grace.

14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. 16 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer.

17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Cor. 5:14-17)

Verse 14 tells us that the reason we can choose to sow to the Spirit instead of self is because of love. Christ loved us, and included us in His death. We are freed from sin's penalty, but also from the flesh's hold over us. Now, we don't have to serve self. Jesus cut the umbilical cord between us and our old sin nature. Now we can go back to it, and give that corpse a kind of life, and live in our graveclothes. But we don't have to. Love compels us to no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died for us and rose again. Verse 16 means we don't think of people and life in fleshly, worldly ways. Instead, we know we are new creations. When we are saved, when we are born again, there is an act of creation in our souls which uses the same language as the creation of the new heavens and the new earth: old is passed away, the new has come.

If this is true of you, then you wake up in the morning, and you can choose to sow to the Spirit and

go down to prayer and meditating on the Word, or you can sow to the flesh and procrastinate until you've run out of time. You can sow to the Spirit by treating those in your home with kindness, or you can sow to the flesh by pouring moody contempt on them.

You are at work, and as we've been studying, you can choose faithfulness and fairness, you can choose to not be idle nor to make work into an idol, and that is sowing to the Spirit. Or you can please self by being lazy, dishonest, controlling, difficult, irresponsible, harsh, sloppy.

In the car, you can choose either of these. When you sit down in front of your TV screen or laptop or tablet screen, you can sow to the Spirit, or to the flesh. When you shop, when you do housework, when you do your hobby or sport, when you're exercising, it can be controlled by the Spirit, as to Christ, for God, or for self.

If you are looking for an explanation for the harvest, simply ask yourself: what have I been sowing? Have you been sowing the spiritual disciplines? Reading and meditating on the Word? Praying? Memorising the Word? Assembling for corporate worship as often as you can, taking the Lord's Supper? Actively serving other believers in the local church? Giving? Making disciples?

Have you been sowing habits of holy character? You know those areas of your life that need most work. If you don't, just ask your spouse, or your parents, or those you work with. Are you taking steps to develop habits of holiness, or sowing seeds to the flesh and entrenching old habits of ungodliness?

Have you been sowing regular exposure to what is godly? Do you try to be around the godliest people you know to learn from them and observe them? Do you read books and listen to music that the Lord Jesus would happily listen to with you? Do you watch what pleases Him? Do you take in the eye gate and ear gate whatever is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, reputable, virtuous and praiseworthy?(Phil. 4:8) Or are we sowing to our hearts what is false, dishonourable, unjust, filthy, ugly, base, impure, and defiling?

This might seem very severe, but actually, it makes life very simple. As Moses said to Israel: I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; (Deut. 30:19)

For the Christian, that looks like choosing to keep in step with the Spirit as He leads you to please Christ and glorify God moment by moment.

Only two kinds of seed. Our life corresponds to what we have sown. Here's a third principle.

III. Seeds Are Small: It is What and How Much You Sow That Matters

Here is a very literal translation of verse 8: because he who is sowing to his own flesh, of the flesh shall reap corruption; and he who is sowing to the Spirit, of the Spirit shall reap life age-during; (Gal. 6:8)

The words for sow in verse 7 and 8 are present active verbs. That means they suggest continuous, repetition action. It isn't a seed here and there. It is repetitive, continual, ongoing sowing.

Getting a harvest of life is about the quality of the seed (to the Spirit, and not to the flesh), but also the quantity of the seed. In another context, Paul is dealing with financial giving, and enlists the same image of sowing, and he says, “ But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (2 Cor. 9:6)

If I want to know who you are, I will not investigate your extraordinary moments. I will investigate

your habits. I will examine what you do every day, and what you do weekly, and monthly, and annually. I will look at your routines, and your rituals and your habits. Because those are the seeds you sow most, and they are the very things that are forming you and shaping you the most.

Now here we come to the root of the problem for many Christians. They understand all we have said up to now. But the fatal flaw in their lives is that they are looking for some extraordinary, unusual thing that will jumpstart their walk with God. Some sermon that will make them weep and then set them on a rocket trajectory of spiritual growth. Some book with some new take on the Christian life that will caffeinate their spiritual desire. Some meeting with some celebrity Christian, or attendance at some Christian conference, that will inject, infuse, and electrify them with revival. Because, they reason, *we tried reading our Bible, and it didn't work. We tried praying, and nothing happened. We tried going to church pretty regularly, but nothing changed.*

Here are Christians who have been disciplined by the 21st century's impatience and demand for instant everything. It is not that God's ordained means of grace don't work. It's that God's process of change is very slow and steady. You have to keep sowing, keep adding what seems like a tiny thing each time. Tiny seeds don't seem like much, and you can't eat them, but they turn into an edible harvest. A daily half-hour of prayer and the Word might not seem like much. An hour on Wednesday night might not seem like much. But it is continually sowing, and not giving up, that the harvest actually changes.

This is why Timothy was told Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.¹⁶ Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. (1 Tim. 4:15-16)

It's why we read the first church in the Bible, the church at Jerusalem experienced such growth: 42 And they **continued** steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:42)

46 So **continuing** daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, (Acts 2:46)

Some Christians have either arrogantly dismissed things like Bible study and church attendance as too simple and ineffectual to really help me, or they have lazily given up when they didn't see massive results within a week or two.

They want the miracle-gro seed. Add one once and you'll get a massive and self-replenishing harvest of a great Christian life.

And sadly, these kind of Christians keep looking for the shot in the arm, living on a roller-coaster of revived emotions and down-in-the-dumps emotions, when the answer is hiding in plain sight: do the spiritual disciplines, do the things God told you to do. Do them every day, or as close as possible to that.

It's amazing how people understand this regarding their bodies, but not their souls. They know the secret to health is not crash diets or an emergency fat-loss 20 kilometre run. It's what you eat regularly. It's how much you eat. It's how often you exercise. It's your healthy habits that make all the difference. It's forming habits so that you do it automatically, but then it I also reminding yourself of why you are doing those habits.

Sowing and reaping. But then it comes to their souls and they think it's brand new rules. They think you can starve yourself of the Word for weeks and then cram some sermons. They think you can skip worship and fellowship for weeks or even months and make up for it with a long Sunday spent with Christians. They think they can feed their minds primarily secular movies, music and

magazines and then make up for it with coming to a church that takes the Bible seriously. They starve the Spirit, gorge the flesh, and hope that the occasional binge, starve and purge will fix things.

Some Christians are doing something similar with their cramming of a sermon or two, their massive catch-ups, their new-years resolutions. But the same fleshly habits are still there, right under the surface, and before long, the harvest is what it always was. The fleshly seeds vastly outnumber anything they're putting in.

If you want a new harvest, that tastes like the fruit of the Spirit, you have to sow to the Spirit. How often? All year long. How many times? Thousands of small, almost insignificant deeds. Hundreds of little intakes of God's Word. Hundreds of short prayers. Fifty-two Sunday School hours. Fifty-two Church services. Fifty-two Wednesday services. Twelve Lord's Suppers.

There is no revival kit you can buy and download. There is no Christian energy drink that will flood your heart with religious affections. Christian growth is like physical growth, it is so slow you don't notice when it's happening. But if you stay healthy, it happens, and everyone notices.

Here then is an explanation, and a warning, and a promise. It is the explanation for the harvest in our lives right now. It is a warning that fleshly sowing always brings the result of corruption. But it is a promise: if you want to experience the paradise-garden of the fruit of the Spirit, even if you're going through trials, sow to the Spirit every day.