



My wife is the green thumb of our family. We have a large planting area in our backyard and that's where she does most of her work. She's planted all kinds of flowers and shrubs that are colorful and healthy. On the other hand, on the rare occasion that I plant something, it usually dies. And so, as a result, I just don't plant anything. And when you don't plant anything, you don't get anything.

When it comes to working in the garden there's a fundamental law of nature at work: you reap what you sow. If a farmer wants a harvest, he has to sow seed in his field; otherwise, there'll be no harvest. Not only that, the kind of harvest will be determined by the kind of seed he sows. If he sows barley seed, he'll get barley crop. And if he sows generously, he can expect a generous harvest. If he sows sparingly, he can expect little. This is the way God made the world: you reap what you sow.

What's true in nature is also true in life. In Gal. 6:7 the apostle Paul lays down this fundamental principle. He says, *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap."* He's not talking about farming; he's talking about life. Actions have consequences. Whatever we hope to reap in the future will be determined by our present choices. Every time we think a thought, speak a word, or perform a deed, we plant a seed. What you get down the road at reaping time is all about what you did long before at sowing time.

Sometimes we wonder if this is true. Isn't it true that we see people all the time who seem to be doing just fine, but the seeds they're sowing are bad? The writer of Psalm 73 once confessed he *"was envious of the arrogant, as I saw the prosperity of the wicked"* (Ps 73:3). If we're honest, sometimes we wonder about this, too.

Maybe that's why Paul begins this verse with a warning, *"Do not be deceived..."* The warning is there because we so often are deceived about this very thing. The deception comes because of the delay between the time of sowing and the time of reaping. Recently I hired someone to reseed part of my lawn. It took weeks for the first tender shoots of grass to appear above ground. Every day I went to check. It seemed like it took forever. At one point I was sure there would be nothing but a harvest of dirt. I wanted to say: it's **not** true; you don't always reap what you sow. But it was true. And it's true in life. Later in that very same Psalm, the writer says he was troubled about the prosperity of the wicked until God allowed him to see their end (verses 16–17). You can't

look at the now; you have to look at the end. Reaping always follows sowing, but sometimes it doesn't follow for a long time.

About ten years ago, comedian and actor Chris Farley, of *Saturday Night Live* fame was found dead in his Chicago apartment. The medical examiner reported that he died of an opiate and cocaine overdose. Farley's drug problems were no secret, and his death at age 33 was no surprise to his friends. He had been in and out of various programs to clean up his life many times. In an interview, Farley once said: "I used to think that you could get to a level of success where the laws of the universe didn't apply. But they do. It's still life on life's terms, not on movie-star terms. I still have to work at relationships. I still have to work on my weight and some of my other demons. Once I thought that if I just had enough in the bank, if I had enough fame, that it would be all right. But I'm a human being like everyone else. I'm not exempt." In essence, he was saying, you may think you can get away with living like that, but it doesn't matter who you are, you'll reap what you sow.

That's why Paul adds, *"God is not mocked..."* The word Paul uses literally means to turn your nose up at someone; to sneer at them. When we think we're above this law, we're basically sneering at God. But you can't do that for long. The day will come when God himself will bring in the harvest.

In Galatians chapter 6 this is the fundamental principle Paul is trying to get across. And in verses 6–10 he applies this law of sowing and reaping to three areas of life.

### **Christian Ministry**

The first area comes up in v.6. *"The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him."* Paul mentions two people here: the teacher and the one who is taught. In a way, they're both sowing seeds. The teacher sows into the life of the one taught by teaching him the word of God. But the one who is being taught also must sow. He's told to *"share all good things"* with the teacher. He's probably talking about financial and other forms of remuneration. You can imagine why this is one of my favorite verses in the Bible. I think we should all memorize this verse! We should do a whole sermon series just on this verse. This may be the most important verse in the Bible. Actually Rob Hall told me to say that! But in all seriousness, this is a repeated theme in the Scripture. Jesus sent out the 70 and said, *"the laborer is worthy of his wages"* (Luke 10:7). Paul said to the Corinthians, *"If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?"* (1 Cor. 9:11).

The assumption, of course, is that it's hard work to teach and preach the word of God. To do it well, week after week, takes time and effort. That's why Paul writes to Timothy, *"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching"* (1 Tim. 5:17). Honestly, most people don't understand this. So many pastors get asked, "Is that a full-time job?" or "What do you do all day?"

Certainly there is an obligation that pastors have which is implied in this. The obligation is to actually do the hard work of studying and teaching the word of God. There's a lot of temptation these days to just steal a sermon off the internet or read a verse, tell a few jokes and finish with a poem. That's just wrong. It's also wrong that a lot of pastors have stopped working hard at preaching and teaching because they're doing so many other things. Many pastors today are more like CEO's than shepherds. They're so busy managing the business of the church they have no time to study. There are also pastors who are just plain lazy. I don't always have someone looking over my shoulder to make sure I'm working hard. Some folks just don't do very well with that kind of freedom and they probably shouldn't be in the ministry. The worst case is when someone is in the ministry because not only do they see it as a "cushy" job but it also affords a comfortable living. I get a lot of wonderful offers from people in this church, which I appreciate: vacation homes, Giants tickets, Peet's cards, companion passes, rounds of golf at places I could never afford on my own. Now don't stop, but some guys abuse this and it's wrong.

Paul's assumption is the pastor is doing his work and he's doing it for the right reason. In that case, Paul says you should share all good things with him. It's interesting, he does say to pay him; he says to share with him. The word is *koinonia*. It points to fellowship between pastor and people. The Scripture doesn't speak of pastoral contracts, salary packages and retirement plans, but about sharing. You won't get a bill in the mail after listening to one of my sermons. We don't charge fees for our services; we're supported by the freely given gifts of God's people. I think the assumption is that people love them and trust them and so they want to share generously with them. Some churches think it's their job to keep their pastor poor. Others think that by paying them well they can control what they say and what they do. Both these approaches violate what Paul says here: *"Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches."*

### Personal Choices

But there is another sphere in which this law of sowing and reaping plays out. Look at v.8. *"For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."* Paul goes from talking about sharing with teachers to the choices we make in general. Back in chapter 5 Paul said the Christian life is like a

battleground where the flesh and the Spirit fight it out for control. But here the Christian life is more like a large farm with two different kinds of fields where two different kinds of seeds are sown. Paul says your future harvest depends on where and what you sow. The old adage is true: "Sow a thought, reap and act; sow an act; reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a destiny."

So we have to make choices. We can choose to sow to the flesh. The flesh is our sinful nature. Paul describes the deeds of the flesh in 5:20 as *"immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing."* There is a pull in our lives towards all these things and so we have to choose. Scripture says to *"crucify the flesh"* but when we sow to the flesh we're coddling it. Scripture says *"make no provision for the flesh in regard to its desires"* (Rom. 13:14) but when we sow to the flesh we're gratifying it. So every time we allow our mind to hold a grudge, nurse a grievance, fantasize about some impure act, wallow in self-pity, we're sowing to the flesh. Every time we abuse alcohol, log onto a pornographic web site, engage in juicy gossip, or lose our temper at someone else's expense, we're sowing to the flesh. Every time we choose to stay in bed instead of pray, isolate ourselves from other believers instead of join in fellowship, use our gifts and talents to serve ourselves instead of the body of Christ, we're sowing to the flesh.

Paul says when we do that we can expect a harvest of corruption. That word "corruption" suggests gradual decay leading to death. You can't sow to the flesh and expect a harvest of life and blessing. Sin is self-destructive. It tears us down. We go from bad to worse. We're not the victims of poor genetics or dysfunctional families or just bad luck; we're the victims of our own choices. Let me give a few examples:

A young couple in love decides to ignore God's word and get involved sexually. They figure it must be okay because one day they're going to get married. But after a few months the relationship begins to break down and finally they break up. What they failed to understand is that they were sowing seeds that would later impact their capacity for true intimacy with whoever they did marry.

Or a man has an ambitious plan to take over his company. He thinks of his colleagues as rivals and schemes ways to bring them down and make himself look good. But his selfishness is obvious to all and soon he finds himself isolated and alone. He failed to understand that he would reap what he had sown.

A husband and wife allow resentments to build up in their marriage to the point they become nothing more than roommates. Pride keeps each of them from giving in, humbling themselves, and taking responsibility for their own behavior. They fail to realize they're sowing seeds and will reap a harvest of loneliness and bitterness and even unbelief.

You see, the harvest we reap always comes back to what we've sown. God wants us to sow to the Spirit. A young couple sows to the Spirit when they decide to obey God and stay pure. A man decides to sow to the Spirit when he decides to lay aside his selfish ambition and serve others and make much of their successes. A husband and wife sow to the Spirit when they lay aside their pride and say those magic words, "I'm sorry. I was wrong. Will you forgive me?"

Just this past week I got an e-mail from a guy in our church who said something to someone else about me that he later felt was wrong. He apologized and asked me to forgive him. He didn't have to do that; I would have never known. But he felt it was the right thing to do, so he did it. Those are the kinds of choices that reap life.

We sow to the Spirit when we choose to do things that will nurture our relationship with God. Reading the Bible, praying, coming to worship with God's people, being a part of a small group, reading quality books that nurture your life in Christ, these are all ways to reap an eventual harvest of eternal life. That doesn't mean we earn eternal life. Eternal life is a gift that comes through faith in Christ. But when we sow to the Spirit, we begin to enjoy some of the fruits of eternal life now. Eternal life isn't just life that lasts eternally. It's God's very own life given now to us who believe. Jesus said, "**He who has the Son has the life**" (Jn. 5:12). When we sow to the Spirit we get to experience a harvest of life now. It doesn't mean life becomes easy or that we avoid trials and problems. But do you know what? If you sow to the Spirit, you'll avoid a lot of unnecessary pain and even in the midst of trials you'll experience a harvest of love, joy and peace through the Holy Spirit.

### **Christian Well Doing**

There is one more sphere in which this law of sowing and reaping plays out. Look at verses 9–10. "**Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.**" Notice twice he mentions the idea of doing good: "**let us not lose heart in doing good...while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men...**" He's still talking about sowing and reaping because he mentions reaping in v.10. But now the focus isn't so much on personal holiness but more on serving others.

Notice he says there is a season of opportunity to do this. He's talking about our entire lifetime. Life on earth is the time for sowing. Each one of us has this window of time to do good. It won't last forever. You don't know when you're going to die. So when you can do good, do it. Don't put it off. Don't wait for a better time like when your kids are grown, or you have more money in the bank, or you have more free time. Any farmer will tell you there is a time for sowing and a time for reaping. If you

miss the first you'll definitely miss the second. Harvest time is coming soon so now is the time to sow.

Notice also he tells us who to focus on. He says we should do good to all men but especially to those in the household of faith. Charity begins at home, but it only **begins** at home. We should also do good to all people. Last year CPC gave over \$55,000 to Special Needs. That's money given to those who need help buying food or paying rent. Most of the people we helped are believers, members of the household of faith, but not all of them. We understand God desires to show his love to lost people by using us to serve them and meet their needs. And it's not just about giving money; it's often about showing up and getting our hands dirty and meeting practical needs.

But there is a danger in this. Paul mentions it twice. He says "**do not lose heart.**" Later he warns against "**growing weary**" or "fainting." It's easy to get discouraged, isn't it? Discouragement and weariness come for many reasons. Some lose heart because we sow and sow and sow and don't see any harvest. We want immediate results. We're like the little girl who learned what saving money was all about. She learned that when the piggy bank was full, you take the money out and deposit it in a bank so it can draw interest. She couldn't wait to open a savings account in a local bank by herself. Her dad called the banker and told him his daughter was on the way to open her savings account. When she got there the president of the bank himself greeted her. She handed over her savings. He gave her a receipt and thanked her. But she wouldn't leave. She just stood there like she was waiting on something else. He said, "Is there anything else that I can help you with?" She said, "Yes, I want my interest." Sometimes we're like that. We want to see some fruit now, but often it doesn't come until later.

Some of us lose heart when we face opposition. Sometimes it feels like the enemy never lets up. We're tired of fighting. Sometimes we lose heart just because of the sheer immensity of the need. Anything we do seems to not even make a small dent in the problem. There is always someone who needs more help.

There are several things we can do to combat weariness. One of the things is to get some rest. When the prophet Elijah became discouraged and went out into the desert and told God he wanted to die rather than continue to serve, God told him to eat some food and get some sleep. Sometimes that's the best remedy to discouragement. You're human. You can't do it all. You have limits. Take care of your body. We can also get people to pray for us. I'm so thankful for people in this church who pray. I know there are people who meet every Wednesday night and pray for me and our staff. I appreciate that so much. I don't think I could have lasted without that. Some of us also become discouraged because we're trying to do it all in our own strength. We need to learn to trust God. We need to learn to rest in him. God lives

within us and he can give us strength. Remember Isaiah 40, *“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”*

### **Conclusion**

When you think about getting discouraged in well-doing, when you feel like your work isn't making any difference, consider the example of Luke Short, who lived about 300 years ago in the colony of Virginia. Luke became a Christian when he was 103 years old. He was sitting under a hedge when he happened to recall a sermon he once heard by a famous Puritan preacher named John Flavel. As he remembered the sermon he asked God right

then and there to forgive his sins and trusted in Jesus Christ. He lived for three more years and when he died this inscription was carved on his tombstone: “Here lies a babe in grace, aged 3 years, who died according to his nature, aged 106.”

But here is the amazing part of the story. The sermon Luke recalled had been preached 85 years before! Almost a century passed between the sermon and the conversion, between the sowing and the reaping.

You can't evaluate your work based on immediate results. Most spiritual fruit takes time to grow. But make no mistake, you and I will reap what we sow. In-between we can't lose heart. So, if you're a teacher, keep working hard at sowing seeds of God's word. If you're one who is taught, keep sharing all good things with the one who is taught. In your personal choices, keep sowing to the Spirit and not the flesh. And in your dealings with all people, especially members of the household of faith, keep doing good; for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not.