

How Does Your Garden Grow?

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The above is asked in an old nursery rhyme, “Mary, Mary, quite contrary”. While preparing some of our rocky Western Washington soil for planting, it occurred to me that a lesson is embodied here which can benefit all. What answers can we glean from God’s word?

Soil Must Be Prepared

There are all kinds of soil in the world. All must be properly prepared for planting. If not, one cannot expect to harvest a crop.

Hosea told Israel (who had committed grievous sins) in Hosea 10:12, *“Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.”* “Fallow ground” is unproductive land. Israel was unproductive because of their wickedness. Just so are we. If we commit wickedness (sin) we cannot produce the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:9).

To “break up” means to plow. Plowing is the accepted method of soil preparation. Christ said we must all *“put our hands to the plow”*, but not to *“look back”*, else we are not worthy of the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62).

When we plow, we should do so in hope. *“Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.”* (1 Cor. 9:10). Our hope is for an abundant harvest. *“And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”* (Luke 8:8). A hundredfold would be considered a good harvest!

So, then, soil reparation is an absolute necessity to a good harvest. But what if we do not prepare the soil as we should?

Wrong Way

One can neglect his soil in many ways. The results can be predictable. *“The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.”* (Prov. 20:4) A predictable result!

Jesus taught us much concerning soil preparation. *“A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.”* (Luke 8:5).

“Wayside” soil is not plowed soil. Who would sow on the shoulder of the highway? It is no wonder that some of it was “trodden down” and the remainder eaten by the birds. The predictable result: no crop!

“...some fell upon a rock...” (Vs. 6). We, in Western Washington, are familiar with rocky soil. One does not sow seed upon rocks with any expectation of a harvest. Thus sown, crops will wither away, being un nourished. Unplowed soil will not produce harvests!

“...some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.” (Vs. 8). Unprepared soil will have foul, worthless seeds, roots, etc. These are in direct competition with the sown seed and will deprive of the nourishment necessary to an abundant harvest. Crops would be choked!

Wrong Way to Plow

Some plowing, although it is vigorously pursued, is improperly done. The results are predictable.

Solomon teaches us, “...*The plowing of the wicked is sin.*” (Pro. 21:4). When we indulge in sin the results are a foregone conclusion. “*The wages of sin is death.*” (Rom. 6:23).

Hosea says of Israel, “*Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.*” (Hos. 10:13). The result is obvious; plow wickedness and reap iniquity. No harvestable crop!

Sowing Time

When soil is prepared, sowing time follows. Having prepared soil, it is necessary to put the seed in the ground. There are two ways that we can sow improperly.

Sow Nothing

To do nothing after preparing soil properly is foolhardy. It can result in a worse state than the former.

Jesus teaches us, “*When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.*” (Luke 11:24-26).

The obvious problem here is that although the man in question had cleaned out the “unclean spirit”, he had not put anything in its place. Since nothing can exist in a vacuum, the result was a foregone conclusion. Substitute “soil” for “man” and “seed” for “spirit” and we clearly see that when we clear, plow and prepare soil for planting, we

must sow promptly. Otherwise the foul seed will spring up, choking out the good and deprive us of a good harvest.

Sow Bad Seed

Paul teaches us that “...*he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption;...*” (Gal. 6:8). Foolish is the man who will sow weeds and brambles in soil which was laboriously plowed and harrowed. To what end? The results should be obvious: “...*whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*” (Gal. 6:7).

We must avoid bad seed that mimics good seed. The bible speaks to us of “tares”. A tare is a plant that is inedible to humans (some say it is toxic) but looks very much like wheat. If one should be deceived into sowing tares instead of wheat, he would be foolish indeed. What sort of crop could he expect to harvest? (see Matt. 13:37-42).

One more thought on improper sowing. We must sow sufficient seed to cover the ground thoroughly. If a crop is sown to sparingly, there is too much space bare and, as a result of this scrappiness, weeds, tares, brambles, etc. spring up, spoiling the crop (see 2 Cor. 9:6).

Sow Properly

Having prepared the soil properly and avoided all the faulty practices, bad seed, no seed, etc., we must sow our seed properly in expectation of a good harvest.

Jesus teaches us that “*The seed is the word of God.*” (Luke 8:11). He further teaches, “*It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*” (John 6:63).

If we sow the words of the spirit, we shall “...*reap life everlasting.*” (Gal. 6:8).

This seed may be small, but carries in its genes the potential of a great harvest. Jesus teaches us to have faith “*as a grain of mustard seed.*” (Matt. 17:20). Also that this seed is “*less than all the seeds that be in the earth.*” (Mark 4:31). Yet it can, and often does, grow to very large size.

We must sow this seed abundantly. Paul teaches that “*But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*” (2 Cor. 9:6).

Care for the Crop

It is necessary to tend our crops diligently. A wise farmer will spend much of his time in his fields seeing to the care of his crops. Often he

must hoe out bad growth, irrigate, when rainfall is insufficient, and in all ways see to the condition of his crops.

It is not necessary to actively sow bad seed. Slothfulness (inactivity, laziness) will allow them to spring up and choke out the good seed. Good crops need attention!

Paul teaches us this lesson clearly. *“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”* (Gal. 6:9).

The word “faint” comes from the Greek word “ekluē” which means to “relax”. Thus, we see that when we have plowed, prepared, and sown in our soil, we are not to relax and ignore our crops, for many dangers exist that can ruin our harvest if we lazily ignore them!

Brethren, how is our garden growing?

Written in love of the truth,

John Logan,

