

SOW FOR ETERNITY

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This month, I am speaking to you about making your salvation fruitful.

One day, you will return to God or Christ will return for you. When that day comes, Christ will make an account of His investment in your life, to see what it has produced.

Do not imagine that He is thrilled simply that you're here, filling a seat. That is true initially, but it is only the introductory stage of your relationship. He expects more of you. He expects more from you. Because He has given more to you.

Jesus said, *"Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required."* (Luke 12:48)
Did you notice He used the word *"required"*?

This is not ungodly, neither is it legalistic; it is simply godly realism. Jesus Christ is the Judge of all the earth; never forget it.

If you have come home just to mooch from the family table and not contribute, your welcome will be short.

In the last day, "many" will come to Jesus, saying, "Lord, Lord, didn't we do many wonderful and supernatural works in your name?" He will turn them away with the words, "I don't know who you are."

It's not that He had never met them before, nor that He did not know their names. It will be that He does not recognize His likeness in them! The family resemblance will be missing. Their hearts—their values, their priorities, their character—will be unlike His, because whatever they did, they did for their own benefit, not for His.

I raised three kids. I know that they have to find their own way. Some find it sooner than others. We help them get educated, we give them space to save up some money, but we also urge them to spread their wings and fly solo. The majority of life's education is a learn-by-doing program—working, earning, saving, giving, marrying, raising children, following Jesus. You simply CANNOT know all you need to know about almost anything without TRYING it (just when you think you don't know enough).

This month, I'm speaking about Telling the Story—His story and your story.

His story is who He is, why He came, and what He's done. Your story is who you were, how you met Him, and what you're becoming.

Here's a quick review of the last two messages:

Principle of Process

The words evangelism, evangelist, evangel refer to the proclamation of good news. Today, the words are widely used about any kind of announcement, especially new products. Biblically, however, it refers to the announcement of the Good News about Jesus Christ.

Christian evangelism is a four-fold process: sending, telling, believing, praying. As the Apostle Paul wrote, *"How can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent?"* (Romans 10:14-15)

Who are the "they"? They are the people God has put in your life, in a variety of social networks: biological (relatives), geographical (neighbors), vocational (co-workers), and volitional (voluntary service). You have a part to play in each of their lives.

Remember: You have been sent. You are a "witness after-the-fact," because of your confession of faith and conversion; plus, you may have been commissioned (formally by a church body, or informally by the Holy Spirit).

Principle of Opportunity

Therefore be very careful how you live—not as unwise but as wise, taking advantage of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:15-16)

How do you know if you have a divine appointment? By the fruit.

That could take some time, though, so don't operate by knowledge alone; operate primarily by faith. Trust that the Lord has sent you and, therefore, will use you.

How do you "take advantage" of an opportunity? You recognize it as one and seize it. Step into it. Make use of it. Don't let it slip away.

Today, I speak to you about the Principle of Sowing.

Principle of Sowing

(Luke 8:4-15)

⁴ One day Jesus told a story in the form of a parable to a large crowd that had gathered from many towns to hear him: ⁵ “A farmer went out to plant his seed. As he scattered it across his field, some seed fell on a footpath, where it was stepped on, and the birds ate it. ⁶ Other seed fell among rocks. It began to grow, but the plant soon wilted and died for lack of moisture. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns that grew up with it and choked out the tender plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on fertile soil. This seed grew and produced a crop that was a hundred times as much as had been planted!” When he had said this, he called out, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

⁹ His disciples asked him what this parable meant. ¹⁰ He replied, “You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables to teach the others so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled:

‘When they look, they won’t really see.

When they hear, they won’t understand.’ (Isaiah 6:9)

¹¹ “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is God’s word. ¹² The seeds that fell on the footpath represent those who hear the message, only to have the devil come and take it away from their hearts and prevent them from believing and being saved. ¹³ The seeds on the rocky soil represent those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But since they don’t have deep roots, they believe for a while, then they fall away when they face temptation. ¹⁴ The seeds that fell among the thorns represent those who hear the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so they never grow into maturity. ¹⁵ And the seeds that fell on the good soil represent honest, good-hearted people who hear God’s word, cling to it, and patiently produce a huge harvest.

What to Sow

The first thing we must take away from this passage is this: The seed is God’s word. If we are uncertain about what we’re sowing, the rest will make little difference. The seed determines what we will harvest.

Of your own life, it is written, “he who sows to his flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6:8). What you sow is what you’ll reap; that’s a universal law.

So, what are you sowing? If you want to produce the harvest Jesus is looking for, sow the words of God.

How to Sow

The second takeaway is this: the sower scatters the seed across His field. Remember those circles of relationships, your social networks? Those are your field. To be a sower of God's word, you must scatter it. That's the usual method. There may certainly be occasions for planting individual seeds—as in counseling an individual—but generally, the word gets sown by scattering.

This is a somewhat indiscriminate process: a handful of seed is shaken out over a portion of land. Some of the land may have been well-prepared, but some of it is unprepared. The seed is simply scattered everywhere in the field.

What this means is that you ought not to wait until you think that all the conditions are just right, but take advantage of every opportunity that God gives you—offer to prayer, share a Scripture portion, send a card, make a phone call, pay a visit, lead a Bible study, give a hug, listen compassionately, invite to a church meeting. Scatter the seed! Scatter the seed.

Leave the Results with God

Jesus described four different conditions of soil, and consequently, four different receptions of the seed and results of the sowing.

The hardened soil of the pathway did not receive the seed at all; it bounced along the surface and was picked up by hungry birds. So, it produced no harvest. Scatter the seed anyway.

The rocky soil had no depth of moisture to sustain the seedlings, so they died before harvest. Scatter the seed anyway.

The thorny, weed-filled soil robbed the seedlings of vital nutrients, so they remained weak and fruitless. Scatter the seed anyway.

Look for the best soil you can find, but don't hold back and pocket the seed, just because the soil doesn't look like A-1 quality. Scatter the seed anyway.

Seek Good Soil

Jesus gave a tip regarding the most productive soil. If we will hear it today, it will help us to make the most of our opportunities. Nevertheless, scatter the seed anyway.

Here's the tip: *"The seeds that fell on the good soil represent honest, good-hearted people who hear God's word, cling to it, and patiently produce a huge harvest."* (Luke 8:15)

Do you know unchurched or non-Christian people whose hearts are honest and good? I don't mean perfect or pure, but "honest" and "good." People who hold honesty and authenticity and frank speech as high values. People who are caring of others and ready to help others at their own expense, without a big show or flourish of generosity. They are good soil. Don't ignore the others, but concentrate on these.

When you share God's word appropriately and authentically, those people will hear you, they will hold on to His words, and eventually, those words will produce fruit in their lives. Because the soil is good and God's words are potent seeds.

Use Good Seed

Here's what God said about His word: *"The rain and snow come down from the heavens and stay on the ground to water the earth. They cause the grain to grow, producing seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry. It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)*

It *always* produces fruit, wherever He sends it. We just need to wait for it—confidently and patiently.

"For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable" (Hebrews 4:12-13).

These verses help us to understand how the word of God works when it is received: *"Cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires."* This division—this discernment—is necessary to produce repentance and faith.

Marrow is the living, growing part of your skeletal frame. This corresponds to your spirit, where the Holy Spirit comes to dwell—the source of your deepest choices and outlook.

Joints are the functioning connectors of the skeletal system. They correspond to your soul—your mind, will, and emotions.

It is necessary to see the distinction between soul and spirit. We are deceived by sin and the devil into thinking that the realm of the human soul is the highest part of who we are. It is not. It is not where our life comes from. The soul is where our life is lived out. But its source is deeper. Lacking this distinction, we will be led by our feelings and our fears, we will not know God (however religious we may be), and we will not be saved.

Religious feelings do not a Christian make. You must be born again. That's what Jesus said.

This vital discernment is the result of the exposure of our innermost thoughts and desires. The "innermost," the deepest thoughts and desires. Why is this important? Because they express who you really are, as God made you. If you don't take the time and become quiet enough to discover them, you will never truly know yourself, nor the God who made you.

There may be a variety of ways to quiet your soul, but only the word of God can reveal your innermost thoughts and desires. Mantras and yogas and meditation techniques that do not rely upon the word of God for guidance and insight are lame, generating only religious feelings—another soulish work. The "thoughts and desires" of your spirit will only be discovered through the rigorous application of God's word to your life.

Give It Away

"For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous." (2 Corinthians 9:10-11)

God will provide and increase your resources through His word. But "impression without expression leads to depression." In other words, if you are always taking in God's word—reading your Bible, studying with others, listening to sermons, reading Biblical books—but seldom or never giving it out—telling others about Jesus and His impact in your life—you will become a fat, sad, and mean Christian.

God gives you what you need SO THAT you may be generous with it! If you hoard His gifts and provisions you may appear religious to some (from a distance), but you will remain fruitless. And you must know what Jesus did to the leafy fig tree that had no fruit.

Practice generosity. Everywhere. Be generous with your time, your attention, your encouragement, your help, your energy, your money, your courage, your joy, your humor, your patience, your kindness, and especially, with God's word.

If the word of God has found entrance into your heart, if you have become a follower of Jesus Christ, then sow the seed of God's word, sow it generously and indiscriminately, sow it prayerfully. Then you will bring a harvest of good fruit to present to the Lord at the end of your life.