

Hey, there's been a Bible truth that's seemingly but rather unsurprisingly faded in impact over the past several centuries in many places around the world. And that is the teaching, the understanding, and the intentional, fruitful practicing of *sowing and reaping*. So, just why would that be—especially when that reality is so pervasively true in all facets of life...and death?

Well, the reason why looks really pretty simple. For thousands of years, every king and all the peasants were acutely aware of the realities—both good and bad—of *agricultural* sowing and reaping. That's because most folks lived just a short distance from the all the crops...the everyday food...that they were going to eat. And if people didn't sow, their families and their neighbors ultimately didn't reap. And, yeah, if they *did* sow they *were* in a position to reap. Pure and simple. And that made people inescapably aware of their position in and dependence upon the natural world. Furthermore, those with a spiritual bent and background were aware of their position in and dependence upon the *supernatural* world.

And for some, that was because—from the very start—God made His involvement in sowing and reaping clear. Here's Genesis 1:11-12 (ESV): “And God said, ‘Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.’ And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.”

And you know what the order of things was in this wonderful world? Yes, all Adam and Eve had to do was to eat of the fruit provided by God...that is, *every fruit but one!* And you know the rest of that particularly profound story—Adam and Eve both ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Sadly, Adam and Eve made a bad choice—and that choice to disobey yielded this (Genesis 3:17b-19): “...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By this sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground.” Yeah, the sowing and reaping of food was not going to be easy for Adam and Eve.

Now, let's fast-forward to modern New York City with about, say, nine million residents. Many such city dwellers literally have no direct connection to the reality of sowing and reaping food their entire lives—let alone the novelty of growing food by *the sweat of their face*. Sweating is what gymnasiums are for!

Here's the thing: in the minds of many in a nation like America, the settled assumption is that humanity has used ingenuity to virtually erase any perceived involvement by God in, say, this month's food supply. Yep, from crops to death, God is often considered irrelevant by many. But even nature itself isn't given a whole lot of thought or consideration when it comes to food: when there's a big hailstorm covering a large geographic area, the vast majority of Americans are freaking out about dents in their cars from the hail—*but not about the destruction of crops*. And when there's a giant snowstorm that will have significant direct effect on the relatively few folks that are farmers, most everyone else is rejoicing over the fresh new powdery snow for skiing or snowboarding. ...Or they're complaining about airport delays!

Let's back up a minute to capture the mind of God on this. After these first chapters of Genesis, the Bible continues very deliberately with many handlings of *sowing and reaping*, sometimes clearly overt and sometimes a bit more hidden. Yes, when it comes to sowing and reaping, there are warnings, proverbs, parables, real-life stories, prophecy, and the very actions of God Himself. And, of course, God speaks through the Scriptures in these ways for the overarching purpose of specifically instructing His people. And that's important, because God and His people are intertwined in all kinds of sowing and reaping.

Take Isaac in Genesis 26:12: “And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him, and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy.” More broadly, yeah, for the entirety of Israel is the offering of firstfruits—that offering as gratitude for the blessings of God in the reaping of what was sowed.

Still, God didn't want His people to be mistaken as to sowing in a very key way in Leviticus 26:15,16: "[if you] break my covenant...you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it." Yeah, that's right, break the covenant, and whatever is sowed, *others* shall reap. Yeah, for the people of God's covenant, God was involved. And as to the sowing and reaping unto God's New Covenant today, God is still involved!

So nowadays a New York City resident may not easily perceive the power and presence of God in sowing and reaping as strongly as a Kansas farmer who sees one little corn seed yield hundreds of corn kernels in the space of one season. After all, it's simply harder for a city dweller to perceive that "routine" miracle of an ear of corn happens as designed from the start by God. But it doesn't excuse the unbeliever in NYC any more than the unbeliever in Kansas *not to see creation* and wonder at the extraordinary design of it all. Romans 1-2 is about that—where Paul eloquently establishes God's accountability for willful unbelief.

And for believers in every era, God keeps right on target with the reality of sowing and reaping for every believer who has an ear to hear. Galatians 6:7-8 says, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 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."

So...sowing and reaping clearly cuts both ways, especially so in God's economy! As to the downside of reaping, Proverbs 22:8 says, "Whoever sows injustice reaps calamity." But on the upside, Proverbs 11:18 says this: "One who sows righteousness gets a sure reward." Of course, for New Covenant Christians, righteousness is not the insufficient law-righteousness of the Old Covenant—but rather the imputed righteousness only available through Christ and Him crucified. The important question is: ...are we as believers focused on the *better covenant that's enacted on better promises*, as it's identified in Hebrews 8? Surely every close observer finds both the downsides and the upsides to be as true today as ever.

And we can see the final, end-times reality of these principles cutting both ways...we read God's stunning Revelation where the destiny that unbelievers will reap from their sowing is very sobering—but the upsides to born-again believers are stunningly good. Yeah, the story for believers is fantastical, beyond anything we could dream up. And the sowing is multifaceted. It's about sowing treasure, it's about sowing time, it's about sowing God's love to every neighbor, it's about sowing the Great Commission everywhere!

But here's what may be the greatest, most extraordinary dimension of God's sowing and reaping—partnership with God! Do you remember Isaac a few moments ago? "And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him, and the man became rich." Yes, Isaac partnered with God. Likewise, a Kansas corn farmer: he plants...and he waters...but God gives the growth!

And just so—it's time to hear that same exact formula from one of the greatest disciples of Christ ever, one of the greatest sowers unto the Kingdom ever—the Apostle Paul. He wrote this in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building." Yeah, that's right, like a Kansas corn farmer, Paul and Apollos were partnered with God...but Paul is careful to give God the credit. Nevertheless, Paul is just as careful to say, "...each will receive his wages according to his labor." Yes, that's God's reality of reaping from sowing: the fruit of a partnership!

And it's no coincidence that the next verses that follow in 1 Corinthians 3 tie right in. "According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ... If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved..."

That's right, salvation is by grace alone, but our sowing on the foundation of Christ will bring great reward, great reaping. Hey, some Christians are just so-so in their faith...but God is looking for true, Godly sowing!

