

Sow to the Spirit

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. It's planting season, if you haven't noticed. My wife has been straining! I keep saying Mother's Day, Mother's Day, Mother's Day, but she's just eager, eager to get out and put things into our garden. Peas and lettuce early, tomatoes late, and who knows what else will come up this year. We've never had much success with green peppers, and the worms eat our squash. So, that's been our gardening plan. But however you, or may or may not, be engaged in gardening and planting, the principle is very clear. The things that we get to reap from our garden are directly related to the things that we sow. If we make a tomato plant, we don't expect to get peppers.

God uses this agricultural imagery often in Scripture to depict spiritual realities. And this morning, as we continue in our series in the book of Galatians, chapter 6, we are going to look at the question that the passage poses to us this morning, which is, what are you and I sowing to as spiritual farmers in our lives?

If you remember the book of Galatians, if you haven't been here, let me just try to summarize the whole book in 30 seconds. The gospel of justification by faith in Christ alone is the center of the Christian faith. That is, we are accepted by God not because of any good works that we might do, but because Christ has done the good work of dying on the cross for our sins, having lived an obedient life, and rising from the dead. Therefore, by faith, as we take hold of Christ, we are now brought in to being the true people of God, not keeping the Old Testament law, but now keeping a law of Christ, the law of Christ, which gives freedom to love, freedom to serve, and the transforming power of God's Spirit in us to produce in us increasingly Christ-likeness, so that we are more and more like Him, conformed to His image in increasing ways. This is what the first five chapters of Galatians is all about. And in chapter 6, in these first 10 verses, there's a move towards, therefore, what kind of community ought we to be? And Pastor Nick last week talked about a community that both confronts and comforts, that bears one another's burdens while also helping one another escape from the entanglement of sin. And today, we're going to look at spiritual farming as a community together. What do we sow? What do we reap? So, that's what we're going to look at this morning.

We're in Galatians chapter 6, starting in verse 6. I think it's page 917 in your pew Bible-ish, somewhere around there. So, Galatians chapter 6, verses 6 through 10. Let's read it and pray together.

[3 : 1 9] Paul says this, One who is taught the Word must share all good things with the one who teaches. 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. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Let's pray and ask for God's help as we look at His Word this morning.

Lord, we pray for Your help this morning. We thank You for Your Word that it teaches us and instructs us what it looks like to be Your people, what it means to live as Christians who bear the name of Christ.

Lord, I pray this morning that You would be our help, that You would make our hearts receptive to Your Word, make our minds alert to understand Your Word, make our wills submissive to Your Word. And I pray for Your help that I might speak as I ought, that we together would be blessed as we sit under Your Word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

What will we sow in our lives? We're going to walk through this passage literally verse by verse. So I have five points for five verses. We're going to look at the foundation of good spiritual farming.

We're going to look at the danger in spiritual farming. We're going to look at the principle of spiritual farming. We're going to look at the temptation of spiritual farming. And we're going to look at the application of spiritual farming. There we go. There's your outline. The first one, then, the foundation of good spiritual farming is in verse six, which is we need to sow the Word of God in our lives. Now, look, this is an uncomfortable passage for someone like me, or verse for someone like me to have to preach, because there are some people who, in the work of ministry, will preach constantly about how the people that they preach to have to give them more money, right? And it seems to me that often people who do that are driven by greed or self-aggrandizement. But I don't think that's what Paul has in view here. I think what Paul is saying is, as a community of believers, to be good spiritual farmers, you have to sow the Word of God, God's revelation, what He has given us so that we might know Him and learn from Him. And so, he encourages in the context of bearing one another's burdens and doing good, as we've seen. Hey, those who are teaching God's Word regularly among you, help them out. Support them. Think about how to support for their basic living needs. Think about both hospitality and generosity as principles of how you would live this out in your support of those who regularly teach the Word of God among you, right? And remember that the book of Galatians, this was so important because Paul had to write this book to correct where there was false teaching that was coming into the church and leading people astray from the true gospel, right? So, planting the seed of the Word of God is so important because when we do it poorly, or when we do it wrongly, or when we do it falsely, the fruit we bear is terrible. And so, God says, I want to encourage you.

[7 : 22] Support those who teach among you that they might teach the Word faithfully and truly. And this has been a pattern throughout the church age, and it is not merely for my salary or my benefit, but it is also for the good of the good of the church. I'm so glad that Joshua got to share this morning so that we could say, hey, there's more things to give than just me, right? There are lots of things to give, and that this kind of generosity, this giving is actually a spiritual discipline. It helps us to live a God-centered life. It helps us to recognize that all that we have, we are stewards of, not owners of, because God has given it to us so that we can think about how do we bless God and bless God's people and the work of the gospel around the world with all that we have. And so, we make giving a pillar of the Christian church, not for selfish reasons or for my comfort, for a life of luxury, for heaven's sake, but for the work of the gospel. As a personal note, I just want to say how thankful I am. You all have taken good care of me and of our staff over the years, and I just want to praise you as a congregation for the way that God has provided through you for us in so many ways. So, I just want to say thank you, and as Paul says, may God richly supply you with all things as you generously give. Thank you for that.

The principle then, the foundation of good spiritual farming is the Word of God, and we need to treasure it. Now, I want to move on to the second point, and as I do so, I want to recognize it is almost like Paul is giving a few last like aphorisms or like principles, and you're kind of like, what's the flow of thought? I'm going to try to tie it together with this idea of spiritual farming. So, if the seed of spiritual farming is the Word of God, the next verse talks about the danger of spiritual farming, the danger that we might be deceived and somehow mock God.

You think, well, how is that? How does that flow from the verse before? Well, here's the idea, right? The principle that's expressed in this passage, in this verse, in verse 6, is that you will reap what you will sow in your spiritual life, right? If you... whatever kind of seed you put forth, that's the plants you will grow, and that's the fruit that you will bear in your life.

And this is a principle that God has laid out for how the world works, and we'll talk about later how it relates to the gospel, because that's important, but how this basic principle works all the time.

Now, why would this be something that people would be deceived about into mocking God? Well, here's my thought. A characteristic of our sinful nature is that we love instant gratification. This is intensified in our modern world where we live with microwaves and online, and when our phone doesn't connect, how frustrated do we get, right? When the website gives us that circle, we'd think, oh, it's a terrible website. Why doesn't it respond immediately, right? We live in an immediate society, and we often want in our spiritual lives the same thing to happen. We want immediate fruit.

[11 : 08] And there are lots of people out there who will say, yeah, that's what you should get. There are televangelists who will say, just give to us, just follow us, and we'll give you healing, happiness, prosperity, the life you always wanted right now. Sometimes we want a quick fix where we think deliverance is going to happen today, and I'll never struggle with sin again.

Or if I have these three steps, then I will suddenly overcome my sinful tendencies and never have to struggle with them again. Or sometimes in our selfishness, we think God has saved us. He doesn't really care about the little things, does he? So we can follow him mostly, but then I've got my little pet things on the side that I kind of cultivate and I grow on the side, and I just love those little indulgences, right? Is it really a big deal to God? And God says, you will reap what you sow. Do not be mocked. Do not be deceived. The shortcut is a lie. God's ways are often not instantaneous.

They can be. Praise God, he sometimes does it. Jesus, when he was on earth, he instantaneously brought freedom, deliverance, healing. But we all know that that is one part of what God can do. And in fact, we might say that often God causes us to have to suffer for a while so that we might grow through those trials. So, we need to be aware of the danger in spiritual farming of expecting instantaneous results. Third then, the principle, where are we at? Verse 8, the principle of what field are you going to sow to? And from this, Paul pulls from the end of chapter 5 where he talked about two kinds of life, right? There's life in the flesh and life in the Spirit, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit. And he says, these are the two fields that we get to choose which ones we're going to sow in, right? And the flesh is not merely our physical body or our physical appetite, so it may include that, but it's actually our much deeper. It's our fundamental selfish, self-oriented, self-serving nature. It is our desire to be self-dependent rather than humbly dependent on God. And there are actions and attitudes and character traits that ultimately exclude God and put us in the center of our lives.

[14:03] You can go back and read verses 19 through 21 of chapter 5 to see what the fruit of the flesh is, what the result of living in the... and that's a representative list, not an exhaustive one, so you can probably imagine others. If you want the whole sermon, go back and listen to the sermons we preached on that a couple weeks ago. But the flesh then is contrasted with the Spirit, right? The Spirit that God has given to all believers upon faith in Christ. And the life in the Spirit is a life that is dependent on all that Christ has done for our salvation, and that increasingly reflects Christ in our character as we put God in the center of our lives and as we become more and more, we diminish so that He might increase in our lives and in our character and in our community. Friends, this is where we're sowing to the Spirit means sowing to the gospel of grace.

This is so important. I want you to hear this. It's so easy to hear that this principle of we reap what we sow becomes the foundation of works-based relationship with God, right? It's so easy to think that. But God holds both of these things together because He says, no, you will reap what you sow. Sow to good things.

But recognize that sowing to good things isn't doing good work so that God's going to say, oh, now you've sown to good things and you're reaping good things, then you're fine, right? But what he's saying is sow to the gospel of grace. Sow to knowing Christ more. Sow your whole life in pursuit of living in these things that God has given us. It's fascinating when you think of the New Testament and all the different words that Paul uses to take this metaphor of sowing and try to bring it into practical realities.

Paul says in Colossians 3, seek these things. In Colossians 3, he says again, set your mind on these things. In Philippians 8, he says, think about these things. In Colossians 3, 9, he says, practice these things. In 2 Peter chapter 1, he says, make every effort. So, God wants us to engage all of ourselves, our thinking, our hearts, the things we love, our actions, what we do, our intentions, our will, what we choose, all of these things to pursue Christ and the gospel of grace that Paul has spent six chapters in the Bible. And we learn about these things through all the things that we know already.

The means of grace. We come to church. We read our Bibles. We pray. We have fellowship with one another. We pursue the fruit of the Spirit. Look at that list. God, make me more like this. Help me in these ways. Pursue a knowledge of God that is both intellectual and heartfelt relationally.

[17:30] That we might live our lives to please God in all that we do. We are to be people who are obsessed with the grace of God in Jesus Christ. You know how you meet people and they're, I think of like Eagles fans, Philadelphia Eagles fans. They're like so rabid. You meet them and they're like wearing it. They're wearing the stuff. They're talking about the birds. And you know, you can, you know, greet someone by saying, go birds go, or whatever it is. And that's all they talk about all the time. Friends, Paul is presenting us a picture that we want to be as followers of Christ, those who have that kind of excitement and commitment and investment in the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ

alone.

Because when we are like that, we are sowing to those good things. And we need to recognize, friends, that our spiritual lives are not a slice of the pie of our lives. If you think about all you do, right, your spiritual life is not a slice of it. Like, you have your work, and you have your family, and you have your hobbies, and you have sleep, and you have your workout, whatever it is, right? Spiritual life isn't another slice of that. A spiritual life is like the pie tin. It holds the whole thing together and gives it shape. And in everything we do, in your relationships, in your work, in your hobbies, in your exercise, in your sleep, and yes, your church activities, in your life. So, to the gospel of grace, as you pursue Him. Think about how we use our technology, our money, our time, our affections, our love. Do we do these things? Do we invest these things to please God? Or in the end, do we invest them to please ourselves? And of course, friends, it's not only how that we invest them, but how we do it and why we do it. Because it's not just that we should give, but God loves a cheerful giver. What is our character as we do the things that we do? So, we want to stand for truth, but we stand for truth with kindness and graciousness and steadfastness, right?

We want to love others with persistence, but with a willingness, as Nick talked about, to confront sin as well as to help one another, right? So, we need to recognize that the character of Christ and the pursuit of Christ are how we sow to the Spirit of God in our lives.

There's a famous little poem. I tried to look up who wrote it. It's disputed. Here we go. Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny. The little decisions we make every day as we sow the little seeds, produce in our lives the greater things that shape and instruct who we are. And in the end, we do reap a destiny.

[21 : 03] And Paul's very clear about this in verse 6, isn't he? Right? If you sow to the flesh, if you sow to a self-centered world that excludes God, where do you end up? Corruption, which is an image of death.

It's an image of spiritual separation from God, of darkness and of unhealth. But if you sow to the Spirit, if you take hold of the grace of God more and more, then you are sowing to an eternal life, a life with God. A life with God that begins now and increasingly as we experience God and know Him more.

Though our outward bodies may be wasting away, our inward self is being renewed day by day in the glories of the eternal life.

We love other people and we love other people and you know what? They don't change as much as we thought they would. We love our neighbor and they don't actually respond to the gospel. We pursue growth in spiritual life in a battle against sin and we don't experience freedom and we just get to a point where we just think, what is the point? I am tired of this. I give up.

Paul says in verse 9, let us not grow weary. Why? Because in due season we will reap. We will reap. Right? Due season we will reap if we do not give up. Now that due season, I hate to tell you friends, that's probably eschaton. That's not going to be... We're going to get first fruits. We're going to get tastes of it. And we may see it and praise God that we do.

[23 : 19] But there are way too many perfectionists in this room to think, I don't want you to be disappointed that God isn't responding as quickly as you think it is to change the world and make it right by your actions.

You should do all of that sowing and let God bear the fruit because you will reap in due time, eternal life now and forever. It is a good thing.

Can you imagine a farmer? Goes out one day, plows the furrows, puts the seed down, goes to bed, wakes up the next morning, walks out and says, where's my corn? Right?

I don't even know why I did it. I'm going to dig it up and try again. Sometimes I think we're like that, friends, in our spiritual lives. We grow weary of doing good. Good. And the antidote to that is for us to lift our eyes to see not the immediate, but to see with eternal perspective what we are doing. God is at work. You will reap what you sow.

But it is under God's sovereign timing to when and how. And so we are called to trust Him. And, ooh, guess what? Walk by faith. This is what He's been talking about for six chapters. Walk by faith, just as in our justification, so also in our sanctification and in our investment of our lives.

[24 : 54] We walk by faith that God is at work and that what God has begun, He will bring it to an end, to a completion in our lives. So this is the danger is that we might lose heart. And then in verse 10, He summarizes it, the application. We are to do good to all, right? This is the summary. How do

we sow to the Spirit?

We do good things. We do good things in our pursuit of God. We do good things in our relationships with our family and with our church family. We're here to do good in our neighbors and in our world. This is what a spiritually filled community of God looks like. But He does have important modifiers. And I want to close with, as we look at this, right? First, He says, as we have opportunity. And then, and I think His primary purpose in saying that is to give some urgency. If you have a chance to do good today, do it today, right? The enemy is always, I'll do it tomorrow. How many things have you never gotten to because you're going to do it tomorrow, right? So He's saying, as you have chance to do good, do it today. Don't wait. Don't take time. But I also think this is a helpful qualification for some of us who have tender consciences. We live in a world of an information age where it is so easy to know all of the needs of the entire world. It would take 45 minutes on the internet to have a list, a document of the needs of the world that would be so completely overwhelming that you just want to curl up in a corner and die because you can't do anything about it. There's no way you could respond to all of those needs. How do you manage that? Well, Paul didn't live in an information age like that. So what did he do? He said, well, why don't you try your neighbor?

Why don't you try your family? Why don't you try the people that you interact with on a daily basis? And it's not just that because Paul also brought to the churches in Galatia a need of the church in Jerusalem that was suffering. And so as you hear about needs, pray and ask, do I need to respond to this need with some of the ways that I can respond to them that's broader in the world, right? So it's good to be aware of those things, but friends recognize we're not saving people by doing good. We are doing good and letting God save people through His Word, right? And that gives us great freedom to engage without feeling guilty that we can't meet every need. Okay? So that's the first qualifier. And the second one may be an interesting one, and especially to the household of faith. Why does Paul say this?

[27 : 53] Again, those of us who have tender consciousness, we think, well, shouldn't we be blessing people outside the church first and not the people inside? So here's the thing. It's not an either and. It's a both and, right? But Paul does say especially, why? Because I think he has an idea that the church is like a family. And you see throughout Scripture there is a responsibility. Just like I have a responsibility to my nuclear family to as much as God enables me to provide for them, and to my extended family as much as I have a responsibility there before God. That's not just a nice cultural pattern. That's a biblical principle that I have that. But then also, I'm a part of the family of God. And Paul has underlined that, that the church is those who are the sons of Abraham, those who have received the Spirit of God, which makes us sons of God together, which means that we are all in God's family, and we are to love and bear one another's burdens. It's so sweet to think about this when Joshua got to share this morning, because we get to come alongside of him and think about, hey, can we be a part of his team for the next year? As Tyler prayed, we have a deacon's benevolence fund that you all give money to, and that we then use as a church to bless those of you who are in need among us. And we want to make sure you know about that. And if you have a question, or you know someone in need, or you have a need, we want to invite you, come talk to us. Come talk to the deacons. Contact the church office. We'll connect you with the right people. This is the kind of family care that God pictures when He says, so do good to everyone, and especially those in the household. We don't need to choose and say it's only one or the other. It's both. But maybe there's a little bit of a priority. So Paul is summing all of this up to say, this is good spiritual farming. When we sow the seed of the Word, when we are aware of the dangers, when we know that what we're sowing to is the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ, this is doing good, and it overflows in all sorts of good practical ways where we love and care for one another. And this is Paul's exhortation to us this morning. But I want to start to end our time by thinking just for a minute about what God sowed. Jesus spoke this in John 12, the week that He was going to be crucified. He said, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. By saying that,

He was talking about His death. He said, truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Friend, God sowed the seed of His very own Son for us. We in our sinful natures have only sown to the flesh and deserve destruction and condemnation. But Christ has come, and through His perfect life of righteousness, He sowed to eternal life, and yet He gave Himself for us. He reaped what we have sown so that we might reap what He has sown. This is the good news of the gospel, friends, that God did that

Himself in love for us when we didn't deserve it. And this is why we live out this principle of sowing to the Spirit, sowing to the gospel of grace, because this is what God has done for us. And this is our segue into celebrating the Lord's Supper.