

Digging for Worms, Planting Sunflowers

A daughter once reflected on an afternoon she had spent with her mother in the garden.

As a little girl, she was delighted when her mother placed a small shovel in her hands and allowed her to dig in the yard. Digging holes was not something she was ordinarily permitted to do, so the digging itself felt like a treat. She plunged her shovel into the soft earth gleefully and carelessly, tossing dirt from one side to the other.

Every now and then, she uncovered a worm.

That was the prize—the icing on the cake. She would lift it on the edge of her little shovel and watch as it squirmed forward and backward, bending its body into tiny S-shapes. Then she would laugh, drop it back into the soil, and begin digging again, hoping to find another.

Her mother was also digging, but she was doing something entirely different.

Her mother knew exactly where each hole belonged and precisely how deep it needed to be. She carefully measured the fertilizer, added the proper amount of water, and gently placed a sunflower seed into the prepared soil. When she covered the hole, she was not merely replacing the dirt. She was protecting a seed. Every movement was made with purpose and in anticipation of something the daughter could not yet see.

To the little girl, they were both digging holes.

But she was digging for worms. Her mother was planting sunflowers.

Weeks later, tall green stalks rose from the places where her mother had worked. Soon, bright yellow sunflowers stretched above the garden, turning their faces toward the sun.

Looking back on that afternoon years later, the daughter said to her mother, “I remember when we dug in the garden together. I thought we were doing the same thing.”

Her mother smiled. “We may have been making the same motions, but we were not doing the same work. You were digging for what you could find immediately. I was planting for what would grow eventually.”

This is the danger for every child, student, disciple, and mentee. We can imitate the leader’s actions without understanding the leader’s assignment. We may use the same tools, repeat the same words, attend the same meetings, and perform the same motions, yet still miss the purpose behind them.

Children playing house are not building a home, and digging a hole is not the same as planting a sunflower. The outward action may appear identical while the intention, understanding, and expected results are entirely different.

The follower may reproduce the movement and still miss the mission. The student may imitate the method without inheriting the mind. One digs for what can be discovered immediately; the other plants for a harvest that only time will reveal.

Stop Digging for Worms

Some of you are holding a Bible in your hands, but you are just digging for worms. You are performing the actions without understanding the assignment. You may attend class, take notes, repeat pastoral language, stand behind a pulpit, and follow a leader through the routines of ministry. But being near pastoral ministry is not the same as being formed for pastoral ministry.

Pastoring is not merely something you do publicly; it is a life you live privately. It is meeting with God before speaking for God. It is studying the Word, loving people, sharing the gospel, serving without recognition, developing disciples, planning wisely, and creating opportunities for others to grow.

It is time to stop merely holding the shovel. Lean in. Ask why the work is being done. Understand what is being planted. During this semester, commit yourself to these measurable actions:

1. **Meet with God privately.** Spend at least thirty uninterrupted minutes in Scripture and prayer five days each week. Record the passage you read and one truth you will obey. (*Mark 1:35; Psalm 1:2–3*)
2. **Study the Word carefully.** Each week, study one biblical passage and write its main idea, a brief outline, and at least two specific applications. Learn to handle the Word before attempting to preach the Word. (*2 Timothy 2:15*)
3. **Lead the Word publicly.** Lead at least one Bible study, devotion, or teaching session each month. Afterward, ask a pastor or mature leader to identify one strength and one area for improvement. (*1 Timothy 4:13–16*)
4. **Share the gospel intentionally.** Initiate at least one clear gospel conversation every week. Record the person's first name, pray for that person, and make an appropriate follow-up contact. (*Matthew 28:19–20; 2 Timothy 4:5*)
5. **Care for people pastorally.** Make at least two intentional pastoral contacts each week through a visit, telephone call, meal, prayer meeting, or encouraging conversation. Identify any need that requires continued care and follow through. (*1 Peter 5:2–3*)

6. **Serve without seeking a spotlight.** Complete at least one ordinary or unnoticed ministry task each week. Arrive early, stay late, prepare a room, clean an area, carry a burden, or assist someone without needing recognition. Being unnoticed is not the goal; being faithful is. The goal is not fake humility but faithfulness. **Leaders do not work because the work is thankless; they work because God has called them. Human appreciation is welcome, but divine calling is sufficient.** (*Mark 10:43–45; John 13:14–15; Colossians 3:23–24*)
7. **Disciple someone younger in the faith.** Choose at least one younger or less mature believer and meet with that person twice each month for Scripture, prayer, accountability, and practical obedience. Do not merely tell that disciple how to live; demonstrate it. (*1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Timothy 2:2*)
8. **Practice private integrity.** Meet with a trusted mentor or accountability partner at least twice each month. Answer honestly about your devotional life, relationships, purity, family responsibilities, finances, speech, and digital habits. Your private life must support your public ministry. (*1 Timothy 3:1–7*)
9. **Plan and complete a ministry initiative.** Before the semester ends, identify one genuine ministry need. Establish a measurable goal, create a written plan, determine the necessary people and resources, execute the plan, and evaluate the results. (*Luke 14:28; 1 Corinthians 14:40*)
10. **Create opportunities for others.** Develop one new opportunity through which members, new members, or guests can connect, grow, serve, or lead. Personally invite at least five people and train at least two others to share responsibility for the work. (*Ephesians 4:11–12*)

Keep a simple ministry-formation record containing the date, the action completed, the people served, what you learned, and your next step. At the end of the semester, you should be able to point to more than classes attended, notes taken, and sermons discussed. You should be able to identify people you served, truth you taught, gospel conversations you initiated, disciples you strengthened, and ministry opportunities you created.

Do not tell me only that you dug a hole. Show me what you planted.

Pastors do not merely carry shovels and imitate movements. They understand the field, prepare the soil, plant the seed, tend the people, and trust God to produce the growth: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (*1 Corinthians 3:6*).