

A Devotional Prayer Guide on the Subject of Financial Stewardship

Prayer Time #8 Sowing and Reaping

Focal Passage: 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

⁶Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

On our family farm, crop production has been part of the operation. The three main crops have been corn, soybeans, and wheat. When I was a boy, I recall hearing farmers speak of yielding 100 bushels per acre of corn and feeling good about it. That has certainly changed; a 100-bushel yield on corn today would be a borderline crop failure. Thanks to advancements in genetics and improved farming practices corn yields have risen greatly. Even here in Southern Illinois where the soil type is less fertile than other places in the Midwest, farmers routinely produce 150 to 200 bushels per acre. This increase has come with higher costs. In addition to inflation, the improved genetics in seed corn have lifted input prices much higher than years past. Add to that the cost of other inputs such as herbicides and fertilizer, and planting a corn crop is a major investment.

In 1975 American farmers paid an average of approximately \$130 per acre to plant corn. The cost of the seed corn was \$9.30 per acre. In 2023, agronomists estimate the cost per acre will be approximately \$870 per acre, and the seed alone will be \$102 per acre. Farmers today plant a significantly higher rate of seed per acre compared to decades past. As with most items in our nation, input costs to produce a crop have soared. Has that stopped farmers from planting corn and sowing beans this spring? Take a drive around our area and you will observe farmers at work. They continue to plant their crops, and they are putting more seed in the ground than ever before. Why would they do that? The potential for a higher yield. They know you reap what you sow. If you don't sow, you won't reap. If you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly. If you sow liberally over the years, yields over the years will be higher.

Farmers know about the principle of sowing and reaping. That principle has guided farmers for millennia. The Lord Jesus was the greatest Teacher the World has ever known. He often used illustrations from everyday life to teach theological truths. He spoke of this matter of sowing and reaping on more than one occasion. In the Parable of the Soils and the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, Jesus described a farmer out in the field, liberally sowing the seed. That seed the farmers in Jesus' day was sowing was not the latest genetically advanced variety from a world class seed company. It was the seed set aside from the previous year's harvest. Food production was a matter of life and death, so what the farmer was spreading liberally upon the field was the source of bread, the staple of the Jewish diet. The farmers literally sowed food upon the ground, and not a little of it! They sowed plenty, even though they knew the wind would take some away, and the birds would get their share. They had to sow in order to reap. To stop sowing, meant to stop reaping. And it would ultimately lead to the end of crop production, and people would starve. All who heard Jesus understood the principle of sowing and reaping.

In our focal passage this week, the Apostle Paul applied that principle to the “city people” who made up the Church in Corinth. City or country, all people understood the principle of sowing and reaping. If a farmer tried to skimp on the volume of seed sowed, he could expect a lower yield. No farmer with any sense at all would do that! Paul applied that principle to grace giving. God’s people are to sow liberally, not sparingly.

This brings up an important question. We understand the principle of sowing and reaping as it relates to crop production, and investment in general. But should we view our giving to the Lord through the lens of sowing and reaping? Is giving a matter of mere numbers? No, we have learned in our Grace Giving Devotionals giving is a matter of the heart. In this passage in 2 Corinthians 9, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to use this accepted principle to teach an important principle of stewardship. It is not a matter of return on investment numerically, but rather a return on spiritual investment.

The next pair of Grace Giving Devotionals will flesh this subject out more fully. But in this piece, let’s consider the basic principle of sowing and reaping. We can do so in a similar manner to how Jesus applied it. Farmers sowed with expectancy. They knew the return was proportionate to the investment. They did what they needed to do to prepare the soil, then sowed the seed. They might water the crop if possible. But they knew the return was ultimately in God’s hand. Farming was a matter of faith. That faith was rooted in their knowledge of God’s faithfulness. The Lord would bring forth a crop. Yes, there were years of drought. Yes, there were times when the Lord caused crops to fail as He disciplined His people for their sin. But God could be trusted. They sowed liberally, and left the rest to the Lord. When the ancient farmer harvested, it was a festive time. They rejoiced in the Lord. They had times of thanksgiving to Him in worship. And the next year, they did it all over again, and the next, and the next. They ate the harvest, and rejoiced in it, and sowed expecting another harvest, and rejoiced in it and ate it too. I think you get the picture.

Our giving to the Lord is a matter of sowing and reaping. What we reap is a blessing from God. We give because we trust the Lord to bring a return on that gift. What is that return? What can we expect? We can expect the Lord to yield spiritual blessings that reward our trust in Him. We give, the Lord is faithful to supply our needs, and we have an abundance of joy. Then we sow (give) again, and trust Him again, and He is faithful again. When we do not give, we fail to trust the Lord. We will not reap abundant joy when we do not give generously. We will learn more about this in the next piece.

One more thing to consider this week regarding the principle of sowing and reaping. In previous Grace Giving Devotionals, we learned we are stewards of what the Lord has provided us. We give to Him what we purpose in our hearts, and from the firsts He has given us. The principle of sowing and reaping is intertwined with purposing in our hearts to set aside an amount to give and making that a priority. Here’s why: When you make giving to the Lord a priority, you are acting in faith. You are trusting the Lord. You give a generous portion of your income to the Lord right off the top, first. By doing this, you are sowing. You are trusting the Lord to bring a resulting harvest. Your sowing of your first indicates something huge about your relationship with the Lord. You want to honor and obey Him, and, and don’t miss this, you believe the Lord will bring blessings in return you would never receive if you didn’t give, or waited until you had something left over and gave that.

You have heard the saying, “you can’t outgive God.” I assure you that is true! If you give a good percentage off the top to the Lord, you are saying in essence, “Lord I trust you and believe that you will help me do more and have more spiritual blessing with the remaining amount after I give than I would have if I kept it all and did what I could with it. Do you concur? Let’s not ignore this principle

of sowing and reaping. Let's not miss the opportunity to walk by faith and experience the abundance God provides. More about that abundance in the next devotional piece. Thanks for reading, and please continue to meditate on these Scriptures and seek the Lord in prayer on this matter of stewardship and grace giving.

Suggestions for your prayer time:

- Think about your current giving to the Lord and ask yourself if you are sowing sparingly, or liberally.
- Thank the Lord for the abundance of spiritual harvests you have experienced.
- Ask the Lord to help you sow generously.
- Confess any failures you may have regarding giving generously, or to the Lord first.
- Ask the Lord to use the teaching in this session to prepare you for a blessing from the subsequent devotionals.