

Sowing and Reaping

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I spent the biggest part of my growing up time on my family's cotton farm in eastern Lubbock County. After the 1979 season my Grandfather fired me and, in the summer of 1980, I would move to Houston ... the firing story will have to hold for another time. While almost 40 years have now passed, I often harken back to those farming experiences. I watched as my Granddad, Uncle Ronny and Daddy worked long hard days with the hope of a successful harvest ever before them as they planned their days, weeks and months. Planning, preparation, perseverance and patience were indispensable characteristics for anyone choosing to make their living on the farm.

Not too far removed from the previous year's crop they would begin mapping out the next year ... a thoughtful plan was vital to a successful harvest in the late fall. Then they began preparing the ground for planting time. These activities would take weeks to accomplish but any failure here would be fatal to their long-term goals. Then in early April if everything worked out well, they would plant the seed in the freshly prepared soil. Springtime in West Texas is often challenging to the farmers efforts. Weekly battles were often waged resulting from a light shower, followed by high winds, and then a sand storm. You also dealt with a high probability that thunderstorms, hail and tornados would also be part of this early growing period. This would keep them on the ready ... often watching the skies with a careful, hopeful eye. The farmer learns to endeavor to persevere during the months of May and June while their young crop gets it start. By the middle of the summer they had done much of what they could in terms of investing "manpower" into this year's harvest in prospect. There might be some light cultivation with some strategic irrigation that took place, but for the most part they had begun the waiting game. A farmer who doesn't possess an extra measure of patience probably isn't a farmer for long. More times than not the fall would roll in, you'd get a good freeze sometime during the month of November and shortly thereafter they would begin stripping cotton ... harvest time was now here. This was the time that you'd pointed to throughout the year. I am grateful for their example and the lessons learned ... even if your growing experiences aren't exactly like the one described here you understand the process.

When we turn our attention to the spiritual business of sowing and reaping, we look to the farmer for lessons that are clearly applicable with a harvest in our future, the value of which far exceeds any bale and a half an acre cotton crop ever would!

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Here we see planning, preparation and perseverance in action ... one who has worked hard to be right before his maker. The farmer has a host of tools at his disposal. Knowing how to use each of them correctly with the harvest in mind is a must. The same can be said for

the approved workman ... he is skillful in his accurate handling of God's instructions to and for him.

Example ... those lessons from the farm were important in my own growth. Looking to those more experienced "hands" will be helpful to our spiritual success as God's farmers as well. "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

In Matthew's account of the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-9) we are very well familiar with the different soils discussed, but what is common to each? Seed was planted. The most finely executed plan for getting the ground ready to receive seed is wasted if the seed is never planted ... "Behold, the sower went out to sow." No seed in the planter boxes ... no crop!

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6). Having done what we can in terms of planting the seed in what we hope to be good soil we then wait and watch the seed as it begins to grow. Oh, we may do what we can to cultivate the soil to help the seed grow, but we're not in control of the results at this point. Regardless of how hard they worked, my family never once planted a crop in April and harvested it in May ... they waited.

Now the fall arrives ... the work that could be done has been done and now the harvest. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8). While Grandad Byers never had any guarantee of a harvest ... there was always the hope of one. That's why all the planning, preparation, perseverance and patience were needed to get him from the spring to the fall. Not so with our spiritual time of reaping ... the Lord has promised us a crowning jewel at the season's end, if we love His appearing.

How is your crop coming along? "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal" (John 6:27). Come to Jesus!