

# You Reap What You Sow

Galatians 6.6-10

Christ Church Liverpool

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illustration: I grew up about 40 miles straight west of Chicago, we lived right on the border between suburbs and farmland. If you walked out my front door it was pretty much nothing but suburbs for the next 30 miles and then nothing but city until you hit lake Michigan.

But if you walked out my back door it was nothing but cornfields for 1000 miles across Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska until you hit the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. And I can't read this passage without thinking about going out my back door. Everything out the back door was governed by the cycle of agriculture. Which to be honest, I know almost nothing about—I was always going out the front door, always drawn to the city.

But there is one agricultural principle that even us front door kids knew growing up: You reap what you sow.

If you went out the back door in the spring, you'd see the farmers out in the fields sowing their seeds. In the summer, you'd see them out tending their crop, and then in the autumn they'd be out harvesting the crop.

So, I want you to picture a cornfield in the middle of July...Here's a picture to help...

The corn stalks are about 5 feet high, and a rich, deep green. There's perfectly straight rows that seem to go on for miles and miles swaying in the gentle summer breeze. Each stalk is heavy with corn cobs that are getting ready to be bbq'd and covered with butter and salt and eaten at a summer barbecue.

And that's the image of the Christian life that Paul has given us throughout Galatians...of a new life lived by faith in the Son of God...of freedom from the curse of the law which means we receive the blessing of being called God's children...of the great fruitfulness of we receive from the Holy Spirit.

And if you're a Christian that's what you hope for. One day to have such a fruitful Christian life

that it's like a luscious field perfectly planted and watered that bears it fruit in season.

But if we think of our lives today, perhaps we think the field looks more like this...

We know there's parts of our lives where we're not living that new life yet....not free...not fruitful...etc...

So, in our minds we think our field looks like this. There's some good healthy rows of corn, but then there's some empty, dry patches mixed in.

But here's what this passage is saying: If you think of your life as a Christian like these two fields, you're deceiving yourself. What this passage is going to show us is that it's not a question of bearing fruit in some areas and no fruit in another. Life is not a field with some healthy green patches and some empty patches.

Life is much more like this field. There's some weeds mixed in. There's no empty patch. Every square inch of soil is bearing some sort of fruit.

This passage is going to show us that we're always bearing fruit. There is always a harvest coming in every inch of the field of our lives. And some of the seeds we sow will lead to eternal life but others will lead to corruption.

This passage is showing us there are no empty patches.

## 1. There Are No Empty Patches

And if you think there are empty patches, verse 7 tells us you've deceived yourself.

Take a look at verse 7...

text: Galatians 6.7 - Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

It's important to remember why Paul has written this letter in the first place. Remember there were some people who had come into the Galatian church and they started teaching that to be a good Christian—to really be saved from the consequences of your sin, you have to follow the Jewish Law.

Most of the book is Paul reacting to that teaching saying salvation from the consequences of our sin is by grace through faith, not by works. But then about the beginning of chapter 5, Paul feels he's made his point and the argument takes a turn.

And he begins to address a lingering question in the minds of these teachers who said to be a good Christian you have to follow the law, and it goes like this: If we are free from following the law, how will you ever please God?

To these legalist teachers it sounds like Paul is saying as long as you believe in Jesus, everyone is free to live however they want. So Paul spends all of chapter 5 saying that the freedom we gain from trusting in Jesus doesn't mean we can just go on living however we want, we need to use our freedom to love other people and by doing that we will please God.

And verse 7 here in chapter 6 is Paul's nail in the coffin argument to say that line of thinking is foolish.

Don't be silly, don't be deceived. God cannot be mocked. You can't fool him. Everyone reaps what they sow. If you live without concern for other people—without love for other people—you will reap what you sow.

The principle, "you reap what you sow", is an absolute principle in agriculture.

If you take some tomato—sorry: tow-mah-tow—no, I just can't—tomato seeds and plant them in your garden, there is no circumstance, no instance where you will grow potatoes—or is it po—tah-tows?

You reap what you sow.

But it's true in life too. If you sow anger in your heart—if you dwell on a wrong or on the person who has wronged you, you're going to reap malice and hatred.

You reap what you sow. There are no empty fields.

But we like to think of it like this. If I sow a seed of lust—just a quick visit to a website. Or if I sow a seed of jealousy—just a little bit of longing for what one of the other moms in the playgroup has at home. Or if I sow a seed of

pride—just want to take a little bit of credit. Whatever seed you sow. We like to think that if I do that, it's not too bad, it just means an empty patch in my field.

The problem, Paul says is: you reap what you sow. There are no empty fields. If you sow lust, it doesn't result in an empty patch, it results in a harvest of lustfulness. If you sow anger it results in a harvest of malice. If you sow jealousy it results in a harvest of greed and so on.

You reap what you sow, there are no empty fields.

So, if you have in mind that in the future your life will look like this green luscious field ripe for the spiritual harvest, but today you sow little seeds of lust, little seeds of pride, little seeds of drunkenness, this text is telling us that you won't reap a harvest of righteousness. You won't have the luscious spiritual harvest you're hoping for.

In fact, even if you don't have a luscious spiritual harvest in mind, but just a field with some empty patches. Perhaps you have a "that'll do" mentality. Just enough Jesus in your life to get by as a Christian.

You reap what you sow. There are no empty fields. The seeds you are sowing today. The seeds you've sown over the past week. The seeds you sow this coming week will one day grow out of the soil of your life and grow into fruit bearing plants. Whether those are seeds of patience or jealousy, seeds of kindness or anger, of self-control or drunkenness, faithfulness or laziness. Those seeds will one day become full grown, fruit bearing plants.

So, how do we grow a field full of luscious, healthy spiritual fruit? Paul shows us three simple, very accessible resources to help us reap a life-giving spiritual harvest.

But before we look at those 2 resources, I want us to see the corrupt harvest we can reap if we're not careful.

## 2. The Corrupt Harvest

Take a look at the first part of verse 8...

text: Galatians 6.8a - Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction

We read this verse and we see the word “destruction” and we think destruction like a bomb going off that levels everything around it. But that’s not exactly the sense here. The way Paul is using it is more like corruption. In fact, if you have an ESV translation it uses the word “corruption.”

illustration: It’s like the ring in the Lord of the Rings. The one ring of power that commands power over all of Middle Earth. Every character who comes into contact with this ring begins to be corrupted. The fisherman, Smegal, has the ring for so long that he becomes a completely different person, he becomes Gollum. Bilbo Baggins has the ring and it makes him greedy. And Frodo has the ring just long enough that by the end of the third book he’s only a shell of his original self and in the end—even though the whole mission was to destroy it—he desires to keep it.

That’s the sense that Paul is using the word here. This is a corruption that little, by little over time you reap a harvest of corruption. The sense here is of an on-going destruction.

The seeds you sow that please the flesh. The list mentioned back in chapter 5...

text: Galatians 5.19-21a - The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; **20** idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions **21** and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

We read that list and think, that’s a pretty extreme list! I’m not involved in debauchery, I don’t hate anyone. Of course you don’t. That’s the harvest. What Paul’s warning us about here are the seeds.

illustration: Little Shop of Horrors...In 1986 a strange little film was released that fit into that ever-so-popular rock musical horror comedy genre called Little Shop of Horrors. And in it, the main character Seymour works in a small florist shop on Skid Row in New York City. And during an unexpected solar eclipse he finds a small strange looking plant and brings it back to his florist shop. The plant looks something like a Venus fly trap.

Did I mention this movie is weird? Well, the plant starts to die, but one day, while he’s tending to this plant, he accidentally pricks his finger and the plant tastes a drop of his blood.

The plant perks up and Seymour discovers that the plant needs human blood to survive. Eventually the plant grows to be pretty big and —again, did I mention this movie is weird?— the plant starts talking and now it doesn’t just want blood, it wants human flesh.

So, Seymour starts feeding it the body of his nemesis who just happened to die right in front of him. And in the original script—which was changed to make the story more palatable—Seymour thinks he will get away with it. He thinks that he’ll be able to destroy the plant and move out to the Suburbs and live happily ever after. But in the original script—not the film version—the plant ends up eating him.

That is the image in this text. If you keep feeding the flesh a meal or two every day, one day it will eat you. You reap what you sow. There are no empty fields

Listen, I don’t want you to think of feeding the flesh as these big sins. I don’t want you to think only big-time sinners feed the flesh. Seeds are small. Just as it was only a small drop of blood that first fed the plant in Little Shop of Horrors, even the small sins feed the monster.

The small sins matter. The small decisions you make that you think are inconsequential matter.

Don’t you see, it’s all the small sins that corrupt you? Most people don’t wake up in the morning and make a decision to cheat on their spouse. No, there’s a thousand small glances —small seeds, if you will—then those seeds do what seeds do, they start to grow and eventually after weeks and months or maybe even years the corruption has taken over and it eats you. And you find yourself making a decision you never thought you’d make.

Listen, we default to sowing to please the flesh all the time, and then somehow we’re surprised when we reap destruction.

Here’s what Paul wants us to grasp: If you’re not reaping anything spiritual in your life, or at least not much spiritual it’s not because your being neutral. It’s because you’re sowing to please the flesh. You’re always sowing one kind of seed or another. Even in the decisions and the times you think are neutral

You cannot thoughtlessly watch TV every night and expect to reap the fruit of the Spirit.

You cannot skip church or your connect group for weeks at a time and expect to reap joy and faithfulness.

You cannot leave your Bible on the shelf day in and day out and expect to reap self-control.

You cannot leave prayers un-prayed and expect to reap a harvest of peace.

You cannot leave fellow church members or neighbours or co-workers unloved and expect to reap a harvest of love.

You reap what you sow, there are no empty fields.

The good news of the book of Galatians and indeed the good news of the gospel is that Jesus has taken all the corruption of your harvest upon himself...Every single one of us has sown a field of destruction. And apart from Jesus Christ, our field would consume us. But, instead of us being consumed. Jesus Christ—the eternal Son of God—entered into our field and was consumed for us.

He took the destruction that our seeds have sown upon himself when he died on the cross. But because he never sowed one seed to please the flesh death couldn't hold him and so he was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven where he has sent us his Spirit so that everyone who trusts in Jesus can one day bear the harvest of eternal life. That's how we get the beautiful, luscious field. It's by trusting that Jesus Christ out of his great mercy will give it to us.

How to we live a life **today** that will one day result in a harvest field like that?

Well, let's look at the Life-Giving Harvest. Look again at the second half of verse 8...

### 3. The Life-Giving Harvest

text: Galatians 6.8b - whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Now we can see the contrast between sowing these two kinds of seed more clearly. Sowing to indulge the flesh is nothing more than indulging the self. Sowing to please the flesh at it's most basic level is sowing to please yourself at the cost of serving or loving someone else.

Back in chapter 5 Paul said it this way:

text: Galatians 5.6b - The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

text: Galatians 5.13b - But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

text: Galatians 5.16 - So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Each of the fruit of the Spirit in chapter 5 verses 22 and 23 has in mind serving or loving others:

text: Galatians 5.22-23a - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Then ultimately when you get to the beginning of chapter 6, you see perhaps the most powerful example of sowing to please the Spirit: restoring other Christians who have been caught in sin.

And as you read on in verse 9, the challenge Paul gives is to do good to all people.

Sowing to please the Spirit then is serving and loving other people. The more we serve and love and restore other people, the more seeds we sow that result in a luscious green life-giving field later in life and on into eternity.

Do you see now, how Paul is answering the question of how you can please God without the law? It's by doing what the Spirit has been doing all along: loving.

So, what are the resources we have been given to sow this kind of field?

### Three Resources to sow a life-giving harvest:

#### 1. The Church

Last week we saw what it takes to be someone who restores. We've seen what the restorer, the instructor ought to do, they ought to gently restore the one caught in sin by bearing their burden.

But the one being restored is responsible for their response. Take another look at verse 6...

text: Galatians 6.6 - Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

Here's what this is showing us, the church is a great resource to help keep us from sowing seeds to indulge the flesh. Whether that is teaching from the pulpit on Sundays, discussions in your connect group, one to one meetings, or just a friend or one of the elders sitting you down and pointing out a way you're caught in sin. The church is there to keep you from sowing seeds to indulge the flesh.

Listen, when you get a call from one of the elders, when another church member talks to you about your behavior or about your lack of attendance at your connect group or at church on Sundays, the motivation is not to catch you, it's to restore you. It's to help keep you from sowing seeds that indulge the flesh.

There are no empty fields, you reap what you sow and God has given us the church to help us sow to please the Spirit not indulge the flesh.

Please don't be offended when an elder or a church member or a friend tries to restore you. Feel loved. That elder, that church member, that friend is sowing so please the Spirit in that moment when they are speaking with you to restore you.

So, the first resource we see in this passage is the Church. The second is the Holy Spirit.

## 2. The Holy Spirit

text: Galatians 6.8b - whoever sows to please the Spirit, **from** the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Notice in verse 8, it's **from** the Spirit that we reap eternal life.

Do you know what's brilliant about this agricultural metaphor Paul is using? Seeds are like little miracle pods. You put them in the ground, and then it just works. No matter how skilled or unskilled the farmer or the gardener is they can never take all the credit, because nature does it's job.

And so in effect the farmer and the gardener can say: I sowed some corn seeds, or some tomato seeds or some strawberry seeds, but it's from nature that I reap the harvest.

And this life-giving spiritual harvest works the same way. We sow the seeds of love, joy, peace, patience, forgiveness, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. But it's from the Spirit that we reap a harvest.

Listen, anything good happening or growing in my character is a result not of my hard work, but of the Spirit of God's Son living in me applying the truth of the gospel to my heart. Applying the truth that I'm God's son. Any of my self-indulgent desires that are being removed, crucified is the Spirit of God applying the truth that I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me and now this life that I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who gave himself up for me.

And the same is true for anything that is happening through me or by me or around me. Anything that is life-giving, fruit-bearing is a result of the Spirit of God applying the truth that it is for freedom that Christ has set me free and that freedom is expressed in my love for other people.

But not only have we been given the resources of the church and of the Holy Spirit, we've been given the resource of time.

## 3. Time

We now live in a culture where we no longer value things that take time. You see, "instant" used to be bad. Like instant coffee— instant coffee was never a good idea.

But now, if it takes time to get done, if it takes time to be produced or delivered, that means it's bad, it's weak, it's not good enough. No, we now live in the era of Amazon Prime.

Now, I'm not complaining about Amazon Prime. I like getting things within hours of ordering them. But the fact that it exists and that they are willing to spend millions and millions of pounds to build the infrastructure to make it

possible betrays that we no longer value things that take time in the same way.

Today we value instant. And when we don't have it now we grow weary. Take a look at verse 9...

text: Galatians 6.9 - Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

If we want to one day reap a life-giving harvest like that cornfield we were thinking about at the beginning it means we can't grow weary in doing good. There has always been a delay between sowing and reaping.

Farming is not like Amazon Prime. If you put a seed in the ground by noon the plant will not have broken through the ground, let alone bear any fruit, by 6pm that evening. In the same way that if we sow to please the flesh it will one day—in the future—bear a harvest of destruction, Paul now is saying that if we sow seeds of good deeds, in the proper time, at some point in the future we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

And remember, this is not a comment about salvation. Paul is not saying that if you do enough good deeds now, one day you'll be saved. Remember, he's answering the lingering question of the legalist who is saying: But if you do away with the law, how can you ever live a life pleasing to God? How could you bear any good fruit if you don't have the Law telling you what to do all the time?

And Paul's answer is simple, yet difficult: Sow to please the Spirit. Sowing to please the Spirit means doing good. It means loving the people in front of you. If you do that, you will fulfill the law and you will please God.

Listen, are you a person who always has some degree of anxiety about whether or not you're living in a way that pleases God? The answer Paul gives is very simple, but again difficult: love the people in front of you. Do good to them.

Now, that might raise another level of anxiety, because there's a lot of people who need to be

loved. There's a lot of needs around. Well, look at verse 10...

text: Galatians 6.10 - Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

In fact, verse 10 says we need to do good to all people! I can feel the anxiety meter raising in some of you!

But, here's the simple place to start...

It's as we have opportunity. You're not expected to personally meet all the needs of all people. It's as we have opportunity. And Paul even gives the most obvious starting point, end of verse 10... especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Paul says, look if you want to so seeds that will reap a life-giving harvest, don't get overwhelmed. Look around your church and start doing good to others in the church as you have opportunity. How do we grow a life-giving harvest?

The church + the Holy Spirit + time.

Look, you reap what you sow. There are no empty fields. Why not, each day when you wake up consider what kind of field you want to sow that day? Why not, when you arrive at work, or on campus, or as you're getting the children ready for the day think about what kinds of seeds you want to sow with the people you will interact with? Why not as you get home in the evening or as you prepare for the children and your spouse to return home think about what kinds of seeds you want to sow as a family or with your housemates in the evening?

If we start there, I think we will all begin to reap a wonderful, green, luscious, life-giving harvest.