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"Planting Seeds"

Today's message is from Youth Pastor, Caitlin Gothay

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1 Corinthians 3:5-9

5 *After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us.* ***6*** *I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow.* ***7*** *It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow.****8*** *The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work.* ***9*** *For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building.*

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If you would like to, you can turn back to 1st Corinthians chapter 3.

I have inherited a lot of traits from my parents, but the green thumb is not one of them. I like to say that I tend to kill plants, but at least I can keep humans alive.

Growing up we had quite the arboretum at my house. The yard was filled with plants and often my mom's Mother's Day gift from my dad and I would be a new tree or shrub or houseplant.

In the yard we had rhododendrons, dogwoods, hydrangeas, crabapples, hostas, tiger lilies, and more. Inside there were spider plants and zebra plants, the Christmas cactus that bloomed at Christmas and the other one that bloomed at Thanksgiving and the other one that bloomed at Easter.

Looking back, it is truly impressive all the many different plants my parents cared for and maintained.

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When we moved back to the area 4 years ago, three different people brought me a plant as a welcome gift. I do not remember who they all were, but I am very sorry to say those lasted about 3 days.

Christian did manage to buy me the perfect plant. This thing has been on my desk for 4 years and I've probably watered it 6 times.

Last year I tried my hand at gardening and of all the things I planted, only the peas survived. This year I tried again, and things are looking better! I am hopeful that my prayer and determination is slowly changing the color of my thumb.
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There are SO many references throughout scripture about plants, seeds, vines, gardens, fruit, trees, and more.

The word seed is mentioned almost 300 times, "plant" over 40, "vine" over 60, "garden" over 50, and "fruit" over 200. These metaphors have clearly stood the test of time; I am sure most of us here could quote a verse that has to do with one of these botanical words.

In the verses read to us Paul tells the Corinthian church "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow." When we think about it, other than sticking a seed in the dirt, getting in what is hopefully the right amount of sun, and keeping it watered, the growth process is mostly out of our control.

And just think about all the plants and trees and vegetation all over God's earth that humans really have nothing to do with.

God uses the laws of nature, the birds, bees and butterflies in the air, as well as the worms and bugs beneath the ground to make things grow.

According to Jesus during his Sermon on the Mount, observing the beauty of the flowers should dispel worry in our lives. He says "See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

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Now obviously Paul was not giving the Corinthians an actual gardening lesson. He was using this metaphor of the seed to explain how he, Apollos, and God were all a part of their growth as a church and as believers.

Paul began the work, Apollos continued the work, but ultimately God is making the church and the people grow.

Paul even refers to the Corinthians a few verses earlier as still in infancy in their faith. The church members had been arguing over whether or not they were followers of Paul or followers of Apollos.

The point of the metaphor is that neither of those things matter if you are followers of God.

It is definitely a huge temptation to want to do all of the steps ourselves when ministering to others. To be the person others are "following". To be named as the gardener. Paul gives us an amazing example of humility in service throughout all of his writings.

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We heard testimony from the Paraguay team the other night that they only had what felt like a few short moments in the communities they were in and in those moments they got to plant some seeds. The people on the mission field there will continue to work to water the seeds and they all must trust in the Lord to make them grow.
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Those that the team encountered most likely will not even remember the team members names, but the goal is that they will remember the love they were shown, and believe the message of hope they received.

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We know what happens if we plant too many seeds too close together. The roots get tangled up and start to choke each other out and the plants will usually die. Also, if we over water, the plant will most likely die (especially some of the finicky ones like Orchids- I learned that lesson when I over watered my college roommates Orchid while she was on a trip, sorry Kate).

I think there can be a huge temptation to do both. To be over planters and over waterers.

Paul realized what the Corinthian church was able to handle and adjusted accordingly. He understood the type of soil he was up against, and he read the little plastic instructions tab and did not over plant his seeds.

In chapter 3 verse 2 Paul says, "I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it." This shows us the importance of understanding our audience. Every family member, stranger, co-worker, or friend is different. Just like a cactus and a lily and a tomato plant are all very different. We must take time to get to know and seek guidance in our seed planting in people just as we would in our real planting.

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Thinking again about the Paraguay trip, the team was trained on how to interact respectfully and appropriately with the indigenous people groups they ministered to. Some of those indigenous groups had been wounded in the past because of some overly zealous planters who did not take the time to understand the culture and approach it properly.

We also can easily become over waterers. We can see a seed start to take root and put the hose on full blast.

Often it is really easy to end up doing this with our children. We of course desire so much for them to become faith filled followers of Christ that we can try and control what is ultimately out of our control.

We can think that every part of our children's lives need to be managed by us and that we are the authors of their spiritual development. We forget to twist that nozzle off sometimes and remember that God makes the seeds grow.

> God will place our children in situations that will challenge them and maybe make them lose a couple of leaves.
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> God's spirit will speak to them and fill them with His good fruit.
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> God will reveal His beauty and in return their beauty as they learn to find their identity in Him and fully embrace what it means to be created in the image of God.

The hard thing is that all that might not happen on the schedule we want it too. Some trees don't bear fruit for years after being planted, but over watering may cause them to never bear fruit.

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Paul goes on to say, "so neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow". He is continuing to push the Corinthians to put their faith not in man, but in God.

Jewish and Gentile converts alike would certainly have trouble fully grasping this concept. Former Jews were used to following a rabbi, and former gentiles may not have been used to following anything.

Paul speaks to the reality of the condition of the Corinthian church, and continues to point them away from the world, humanity, and human leadership, toward God.

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Verses 8-9 say "The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building."

Although Paul is attributing the growth to God, he is affirming that the planting and the watering are still necessary steps. He and Apollos did and must continue to follow the Lord's guidance and in that they will be rewarded. I am sure Paul was not assuming he would receive a cash reward, but the treasures in heaven type, the well done good and faithful servant.

What a scary, yet beautiful thought. To be coworkers with God. To be invited into his work, to be given a job. We get to work in God's field.

Taking this statement to heart can truly change our perspective on life. *Everywhere* we go is God's field.

The jealous and arguing Corinthian church.

Our jealous and arguing family.

The job we only go to so we can keep the lights on.

The long line at the DMV.

The 6th day of teen camp.

Indigenous communities in Paraguay.

Being homebound because of illness.

Finals week.

The drive thru window at McDonalds.

The job we love where we work with broken people who need us to point toward God as the author and sustainer of life.

West Jessamine Middle School.

At home with siblings.

Baseball practice.

Retirement.

The coffee shop.

Everywhere.

But we cannot forget, the best co-workers talk to each other so that they are on the same page. And that is what God wants from us.

As someone somewhere once said and then put it on a poster in every elementary school - there is no "I" in "team".

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I will do my best to not overwater you with this message, but I do want us to take a moment to reflect on the flip side. On the places where we may be like the Corinthians.

Where we may be looking toward human and worldly answers, guidance, and meaning. What places in our lives do we need to be reminded that God is the one that does the growing?

There have surely been times in my own life where I have forgotten that God is the ultimate gardener. Like the Corinthian church members, I have chosen to seek human answers for spiritual things. Paul says later in Chapter 3, "Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight."

It is so easy these days to "google" the answers to our questions. And sometimes that is appropriate, but how often do we seek the opinion of others and the internet before we go to the Lord and His word.

If any of you are like me, as soon as something feels off in our bodies we hop right to the internet to self-diagnose. But do we first take time to meditate on God's promises of bringing healing and restoration?

> We are often quick to vent our problems to each other or on Facebook, but do we first cast our burdens on the one who bore the cross?
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> Does our self-esteem and validation come from others' approval or our work, or our looks, or our personality? Or does it come from the creator who made us in HIS image and likeness?
>
> As parents are we comparing ourselves to other families or looking to the internet for parenting tips and tricks? Or are we first reading God's Word that is filled with guidance for raising a family?

And in all of these things and more, are we praying and seeking the great gardener to shine just the right amount of sun on us so that we grow into who He wants us to be? Bearing His fruit and inspiring others to plant themselves in His garden?

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A few weeks ago at Common Threads, Marcia Burgess read us this story. It is called The Trellis and the Seed with a subtitle "a book of encouragement for all ages". I would love to read the whole book to you … I would actually love for Marcia to read the book to you because she did it so beautifully … but for the sake of time I will give you a glimpse.

A woman is given a single seed, yet she buys a large Trellis for that small seed. The seed is confused as to why the woman would buy this (what seems) giant trellis for its small self. And does not believe when the woman tells it, it will become something beautiful.

When the seed was finally planted in the ground it noticed how dark and cold it was, but the earth tells the seed "don't worry, God has planned something beautiful for you".

The seed soon sprouts out of the ground, faced with the tall trellis it is expected to climb.

Soon without even realizing the tiny sprout became a vine and began the climb up the Trellis, unable to do anything other than what it was made to do.

Eventually the vine reached the top and was sturdy with many leaves, but was saddened that it did not bloom like the other flowers of the garden. The earth spoke again "wait, God's timing for you is different."

One night, as the moon shone, the woman who planted the seed emerged from her house overjoyed with what that tiny seed had become. For it was a moonflower, which only bloomed at night, but with beautiful and sweet-smelling ivory blossoms.

Do we trust that God has something beautiful for us? Do we trust in his timing? Or do we stare at the trellis He has placed before us in disbelief that He will get us to the top?

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Today we come to the Lord's table. As you come and remember the sacrifice that Christ made on the cross, take some time to think and pray about these things.

Are you allowing God to be the one that grows others? And are you allowing God to be the one that grows you? We know especially as we remember God's sacrifice of love on the cross and the power that rose Jesus from that dark cold grave that He is best qualified for the task.

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Closing Prayer:

Lord, we bow our heads before you today, thankful that you invite us to work with you in your garden. And thankful that you give us just what we need to help us grow. Would you shine your face upon us today? And bless us as we come to the table to remember your sacrifice and love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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