

Harvesting the Fruit of the Seeds of Promise

Paging through a botanical magazine last winter, I found myself marveling at the beautiful flowering trees and exotic plants pictured inside. In a moment of sheer inspiration, I decided it would be awesome to have more in my yard than one scruffy pine tree surrounded by a few faded wood chips. Whether impetus or impetuous, this surge of enthusiasm compelled me to order the “Jasmine flowering tree” so exquisitely displayed on page 5.

I was jazzed. In fact, I couldn’t wait to get my plant.

Weeks after I had placed the order, however, my excitement was beginning to wane. “Where’s my tree?” I wondered. “Spring will be over next week, and I still don’t have an award-winning landscape!”

Finally, a package from California arrived. Staring blankly at the way-too-small parcel, I decided it must be the invoice or perhaps the all-important stakes needed to support my new tree. As I opened the little brown box, I simultaneously surveyed the area around me, looking to see where the rest of my delivery was hiding.

After carefully unveiling the mysterious arrival, I stared motionless into the shallow carton. Finally, in disbelief and agitation, I drew out a package of tiny, unimpressive seeds.

My initial excitement quickly dissipated. “You’ve got to be kidding me,” I moaned. “They actually expect me to plant these dead flakes?” I simply could not imagine that I would have to WORK to obtain this tree.

Suddenly I came to a sobering realization: That’s how many people would like to go through life—wanting results without

doing the work, expecting a harvest without planting the seeds. Unfortunately, in God's kingdom, it doesn't work that way. In fact, most of what God accomplishes on Earth today starts in seed form.

When God wanted to send a deliverer to save mankind, He sent a seed and placed it in a plain human package. No wonder those who had so long awaited the coming of the Messiah were less than impressed to see an ordinary baby instead of a king.

And what about the teachings of this infant grown to full stature? He taught that the kingdom of God was like a seed which, when planted, would grow gradually: *"first the blade, then the head, then the full seed in the head"* (Mark 4:28b).

In other words, Jesus told us the dealings of God would almost always involve a maturing process. God gives us seedlings of promise that must be nurtured and cared for until they can stand tall like an oak tree.

So many times we get discouraged when we don't see quick results from our labors. We may even become so frustrated that we are tempted to stop and quit. But God's Word helps us remember this principle: The plantings of the Lord begin in seed form.

In Old Testament times, when Zerubbabel was rebuilding the temple, people laughed and scoffed as they compared the fledgling work to the majesty of the original built by Solomon. But through a messenger the Lord sent reassurance: "Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin" (Zech. 4:10, NLT).

Right now, you may have a beautiful picture in your heart of what you long for. You may even have dared to ask God for great things and sensed His promise of success.

But when you opened your hands to receive, all you found were seeds—small, unimpressive conceptions. Don't be discouraged!

Remember that seeds contain life and hold within them the very essence of your promise. If you plant them in good soil and invest yourself in their nurture and development, they will grow and bloom forth with fruit.

Today, hear the Holy Spirit whisper to you, "Do not despise these small beginnings, for I rejoice to see the work begin." Plant your faith, my friend, and watch and see what God will do.

Prayer Power for the Week of December 4, 2016

As we enter the last month of the year in anticipation of Christmas and the beginning of a New Year after that, thank the Lord that each day is an opportunity to sow and nurture seeds of faith toward your God-given dreams. Set your sights on fulfilling His plan for you and ask Him to lead you step-by-step to accomplish His goals for your life. Embrace the coming year with anticipation for the future and continue to pray for the healing of our nation and a refocusing on what's important for the future of our children. Remember the persecuted church, our allies and those suffering loss in this season and ask the Lord to show you how you can best serve Him in blessing others (Gal. 6:9-10; 1 Cor. 15:58). {eoa}