

Joseph Mattera: 7 Traits of the Sown Life

Paul said he was a “drink offering.” This meant that he offered his very life, spirit, soul, and body, to the Lord and to His church as a “living sacrifice” (Num. 15:4-10; 2 Tim. 4:6; Rom. 12:1-2).

He also said he not only “spent” but “was spent” for the gospel (2 Cor. 12:15). When you spend, you donate discretionary resources. When you are spent, you give everything you have, even your life.

“The rich man is not one who is in possession of much, but one who gives much” (*The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom on the Statues: Or, To the People of Antioch,*).

When a person is only partially committed to Christ, he is “half baked”. It’s like a half baked cake or something that is lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, like the Laodicean church (Hos. 7:8, Rev. 3:14-16). Jesus expects His disciples to count the cost and forsake all to follow Him (Luke 14:23-35).

The following are seven signs you are living the sown life:

1. You fully surrender to the will of God every day without hesitation. Every morning we need to start the day with a blank slate in our hearts, fully submissive to the Lord. We should echo the words of Jesus when He told the Father, “Not My will but Your will be done” (Matt. 26:39).

When we start the day with that submissive attitude, we allow Him the opportunity to fill us with His Spirit. Consequently, by waiting upon Him and practicing the spiritual disciplines (private or corporate prayer, worship, bible meditation, fellowship with other believers), it is easier to abide in His presence throughout the day and set the Lord before us (Ps.

16:8).

live a life of peace that arises out of fully resolving to live for Christ. When we acknowledge and submit to Christ in all our ways, we are at peace because we can trust that He's directing our paths (Prov. 3:5-7). By submitting to Him daily, we cast our cares upon the Lord and resist our anxious thoughts by prayer and supplication (Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Peter 5:6).

take up your cross daily. While this is not a popular preaching theme in contemporary hyper-grace churches (who believe the gospels fall under the category of the Old Testament and do not apply to the church), taking up our cross is still a command for the church. Paul the apostle, reconfirmed that this is still relevant to the church when he said he was crucified with Christ, and it was no longer he who lives but Christ who lives in him (Gal. 2:19-20). The historical cross was the gory method in which Jesus and thousands of others were put to death during the Roman empire (Matt. 27:37).

Jesus, anticipating His future execution, admonished His disciples to take up their cross. He explained what this meant when He said that if someone wants to preserve or protect his life, he will lose it. However, if someone loses his life (which means fully surrendering to God), he will find it (Mark 8:34-38). Hence, the cross has been used as a powerful symbol to refer to a person's absolute surrender to God by crucifying ones self-will and sinful desires (Gal. 5:24).

"Whatever was done in the crucifixion of Christ, His burial, His resurrection on the third day, His ascension into heaven, His being seated at the Father's right hand—all these things were done thus, that they might not only signify their mystical meanings, but also serve as a model for the Christian life which we lead here on the earth" (Augustine, 354-430; Enchiridion, 53).

live beyond the measure of your natural abilities. God was angry at His people in the first covenant because they limited Him (Ps. 78:41). One way we limit God is by disobeying Him when He requires us to do something beyond our natural abilities or resources (when Israel refused to conquer the promised land because they saw giants in the land—Numbers 13). When we surrender to God, we live a life of faith that fully trusts Him, which often requires us to live beyond the limits of our natural, rational world (Prov. 3:5-6).

count not your life as dear to yourself. The apostle Paul said he was able to finish his divine assignment commensurate to his willingness not to count his life as dear to himself (Acts 20:22-24). This is due to not drawing back because of difficult circumstances, tests, trials, challenges and inconveniences. Unfortunately, many Christians retreat from ministry and from serving Christ when things get difficult. It's often because their love of self exceeds their love for God.

life is a witness, not merely your words. Jesus told His disciples that the purpose of the coming power of the Spirit was so that they would be His witnesses (Acts 1:8-9). Thus, we should not separate our life from our words and beliefs in the Christian faith. When we are fully sown into the Lord, we become a living epistle, and people will be able to follow our life, not just our words (2 Cor. 3:2-3, 2 Tim. 3:10-14).

7. You bear much fruit. Jesus told us that those who continually abide in Him would bear much fruit since they are recipients of His life and virtue (John 15:1-7). Hence, one of the signs of a life entirely devoted to Him, the sown life, is the power, life and ministry of Christ working through a person. In this context, fruit refers to both the fruits of the Spirit (the character of Christ shown in Galatians 5:22-23) and the works of the ministry of Christ (John 14:12).

In conclusion, I pray that all of us will be fully sewn into

the kingdom of God and not merely give God the leftovers of our discretionary time, talent and treasures. {eoa}

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