

What are your plans for reaping a harvest? (June 26, 2016)

Leroy's sister Sandra is an inspiration to me. Over the 24 years that Leroy and I have been married, I have watched Sandra plan for retirement from the mill where she had been employed for many years. While working at the mill, she started a home business by growing flowers, drying them and decoration wreaths she made from vines that grew on her property. She also painted pictures to sell and then broadened the business by duplicating her pictures on card stock and selling them at flea markets. After she retired she planted various varieties of berries on her property and began making jams to sell. She now has a thriving business and though she is in her 70's, she has a full time job at her home business and recently she planted fruit trees and has plans to expand. Along with these projects, she finds time to make baby items from yarn and cloth that she sells along with her jams, cards, paintings etc. and teaches an exercise class too. She is very ambitious and she utilizes her time to the max with her multiple interests.

We visited her this past week and it amazes me the energy that she has and it got me to thinking about how Christians should be planning their life's work to increase their investments in the work of the Lord. In order to be an effective influence in the lives of others, a person has to adequately prepare to reap a harvest for the Lord's kingdom.

A person must first understand the plan of salvation. In Ephesians chapter 2:3-10, we learn some important truths that will help us understand the truth of God's word.

First, we know that we are all born in sin and have a carnal nature that is against God, the Father. But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace you are saved). He has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus that in ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. It is his purpose to use us to do good works here on earth.

God saved us so we could labor in his vineyards and be productive. He didn't choose us so that we could be passive and content with knowing that we have eternal life, but to show others the way so we can share our faith and be a soul winner for His glory.

Proverbs 11:30 calls a soul winner "wise".

David was a man after God's heart yet he failed the Lord when he committed adultery with Uriah's wife. After he was confronted by the prophet, David repented of his sins and he wrote Psalm 51. In this Psalm, he takes full responsibility for his poor choices and asks God to forgive him and to wash and cleanse him thoroughly from his iniquity. He

acknowledges that his sin was always before him. He realized that he has sinned against God and he understood that he was born with a sin nature even from his mother's womb. He states that God desires truth in the inner man and he asked the Lord to give him wisdom. He asked the Lord to create in him a clean heart and to renew a right spirit within him. He pleads with the Lord to restore the joy of his salvation and asked that the Holy Spirit not to be taken away from him. In verse 13, he states that only then will he be able to teach transgressors God's ways and sinners shall be converted to the Lord.

God is pleased with godly sorrow for that brings repentance. See also 2 Corinthians 7:10. There are people who try to minister to others but they are not walking in truth themselves. You can't lead others if you are not living a godly life.

Many people don't understand the steps that lead to yielding to temptation. In James 1:13, it tells us that when we are tempted to sin, we are not to say that God tempted us for He doesn't tempt people to do evil and He cannot be tempted with evil. We are tempted when we yield to our own desires that drag us off and trap us. Our desires make us sin and when sin is finished with us, it results in death.

A person who falls into sin and tries to cover it up only deceives himself. A person who professes to be living a holy life yet hangs on to the carnal lusts of the flesh is unproductive in the Lord's kingdom. You must be filled with the Spirit in order to be a light to those who walk in darkness. The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians "Follow me even as I also am of Christ". You can't feed others from an empty basket! You must possess the truth, walk in the truth before you can share the truth with others.

Matthew 28:19 says to go therefor and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. God uses those who obey Him to make disciples for the kingdom of God. You will reproduce yourself. Others will mimic your character whether it is for good or evil.

~~In the book of James, we read that every good and perfect gift comes down from the~~ Father who created all the lights in the heavens. He is always the same and never makes dark shadows by changing. He wanted us to be his own special people so he sent the true message to give us new birth. Have you experienced a "new birth"?

A changed heart that is filled with the joy of the Lord has great potential to lead others to Christ. Nothing is impossible with God. In John 4, Jesus went through Samaria and sat down by Jacob's well. He sent his disciples into the city to buy food and He waited for a certain woman to come to draw water. She came to the well with a sinful heart for she had been married 5 times and was now living with a man who was not her husband. When Jesus offered her living water and explained to her the benefits of accepting him as the Messiah, she gladly accepted and the next thing she did was to drop her water pots,

run into the city and proclaimed that she had found the Messiah for He had told her everything she ever done. She asked them, "Is not this the Christ?" They came back with her, listened to Jesus, believed that He was the Messiah and asked Him to tarry there for a while. Jesus stayed two days and many believed on the sayings of Jesus. Jesus spoke about the fact that the fields were ripe for harvest and even at that time the harvest workers were receiving their reward by gathering a harvest that brought eternal life. See John 4:36. Then everyone who planted the seed and everyone who harvests the crop will celebrate together. So the saying proves true. Some plant the seed, and others harvest the crop. Jesus told them that he was sending them to harvest crops in fields where others have done all the hard work. The Apostle Paul said "One sows, another waters and God gives the increase." 1 Corinthians 3:6&7.

A person who focuses his thoughts and his efforts on studying the Scriptures, ~~fellowshipping with other believers and spending time in prayer,~~ will grow strong in the Lord. He will not go back to the old life for there will not be any attraction there for him. See 2 Timothy 2:15 and Acts 2:42. The early Christians spent time learning from the apostles and they bonded as family to one another. They also broke bread and prayed together. Satan loses power over a person who is faithful in doing these things. When a person sets the Bible aside and fills his life with worldly endeavors neglecting spiritual food and fellowship with God and other believers, it weakens him and Satan moves in to tempt the person so he can reclaim him. A spiritually weak person will not have a vision for winning souls to Christ.

In John 6:66, Jesus taught that He is the Bread of Life. Many of his disciples heard him and decided that his teaching was too hard for them to understand so they stopped following him. Jesus told them that they would not be able to come to Him unless His Father drew them to Him. They were offended and turned their backs on Him. Then Jesus asked his twelve disciples if they were going to turn away also. Simon Peter answered, "Lord, there is no one else that we can go to! Your words give eternal life. We have faith in you and we are sure that you are God's Holy One!"

You will never be effective in the work of the Lord without being convinced that you know the truth of who Jesus is. Paul said, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day."

(2 Timothy 1:12)

In Romans 8:37-38, Paul proclaims that in everything we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. He was persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Are you persuaded that Jesus is the Son of God? Have you closed the door to the past and are now focusing on the goal of imitating Christ in the future? Do you treasure the relationship that you have with Jesus Christ and his church? The attitude that you have towards the kingdom of God will determine the effort that you put into investing in eternal rewards. Jesus promised to return to earth and bring His rewards with Him.