

INTRODUCTION

Last week we started our examination of God's Law of the Harvest: You Pick What you Plant. If you plant selfish seeds according to your sinful nature, you'll reap of bumper crop of misery. But if you plant seeds of the Spirit, you'll experience a bumper crop of blessings.

The time was October 1941. The place was Harrow's School in Northwest London. Adolph Hitler had conquered Europe, and now had Britain in his sights. There had been constant bombing and much of London lay in ruins. The U.S. hadn't entered the war yet, because this was exactly 40 days before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Prime Minister Winston Churchill, a Harrow alumnus, arrived to give a speech. There is a myth that he only spoke a few words and sat down, but his speech actually lasted about four minutes—still short by today's standard for politicians! But even with bombed-out buildings surrounding them and the Nazi threat still looming, Churchill spoke these words that will never be forgotten. "Never give in; never give in; never, never, never—in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy." And he ended his short speech with words that aren't as famous, but are still profound. "These are not dark days; these are great days—the greatest days our country has ever lived; and we must all thank God that we have been allowed, each of us according to our stations, to play a part in making these days memorable in the history of our race." (Speech given at Harrow School, October 29, 1941)

I think the Apostle Paul was basically saying the same thing. He wrote that, when it comes to planting good seeds, we should "Never give up...never, never, never."

Galatians 6:7-10. "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

We're going to learn today that there is great value in persistence. The Bible says we will reap a harvest if you do not give up. Do you have a never-say-die kind of attitude? You've probably heard of the frog in the kettle, but T.C. Hamlet wrote a little poem about two frogs that fell in a can of cream. One gave up and drowned, but the other one was more persistent.

Two frogs fell in a can of cream,
Or so I've heard it told;
The sides of the can were shiny and steep,
The cream was deep and cold.

"Oh, what's the use?" Croaked Number 1.
"It's fate; no help's around.
Goodbye, my friends! Goodbye, sad world!"
And weeping still, he drowned.

But Number 2, of sterner stuff,
Frog paddled in surprise,
And while he wiped his creamy face
He dried his creamy eyes.

"I'll swim awhile, at least" he said
Or so I've heard he said;
It really wouldn't help the world
If one more frog were dead.

An hour or two he kicked and swam,
Not once stopped to mutter,
But kicked and kicked and swam and kicked,
Then hopped out on the butter!"

T.C. Hamlet

(kids, if you churn up cream, it turns to solid butter)

Let's notice three truths from this passage:

I. GOOD DEEDS ARE THE GOOD SEEDS WE PLANT

Paul wrote, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people." When I was in the Boy Scouts as a kid, I was anxious to win as many merit badges as I could. Today, Scouts can earn more than 100 different merit badges. That reminds me of a cartoon I saw once of a Boy Scout who showed up with a black eye. "What happened to you?" He said, "I helped a little old lady across the street." The Scoutmaster said, "I don't understand." The kid said, "Well, she didn't want to go."

Boy Scouts earn merit badges by doing good things, but you can't earn salvation by good works. However, when you are truly saved, you will be constantly doing good things for other people. The Bible makes it clear we aren't saved BY good deeds, but we are saved to DO good deeds. Ephesians 2:10 says "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works." James writes that faith without works is dead.

The Bible says, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people." That just means we should be looking for opportunities to do good works. So, this week, I challenge you to plant as many good seeds of good deeds as you can. Here are some practical suggestions: Volunteer your time for a ministry or non-profit; When you're in line at the store with a lot of items, offer to let a person behind you with only a few items to go ahead of you. Hold the door for someone to enter a restaurant or store. Bake cookies and deliver them to people who need a friend. Donate a bag of dog food or cat food to the local animal shelter. Visit an elderly person in a nursing home. The list is endless. See how creative you can be in performing acts of goodness to others.

Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) If you are doing good deeds in the proper way and with the proper motive, then God is the one who will be getting the glory. The way you give God the glory is by simply saying, "I'm doing this in the name of Jesus."

II. BEWARE OF COMPASSION FATIGUE

Paul wrote, "Let us not become weary in doing good." I think he included that warning because he knew it is a draining experience to serve others. There is a field of psychosocial research that examines the stress of compassion fatigue. There's a book entitled *Treating Compassion Fatigue*. People who work in the medical field, especially nurses, are susceptible to compassion fatigue. Taking care of others, including children, can make us weary.

Suzy called her friend and asked how she was doing. The voice on the other end said, "Terrible! My head is killing me, the house is a mess, and the kids are driving me crazy." Suzy, full of compassion said, "Listen, go lie down and rest. I'm coming right over and I'll fix lunch for you. I'll watch the kids while you take a nap...by the way how is Sam?" The voice said, "Sam? My husband's name is John, not Sam." Suzy said, "I'm so sorry, I must have dialed the wrong number." There was a pause and the voice said, "Are you still coming over?"

There's a lot of talk about ministerial burnout, but emotional burnout can occur in any life. If you're responsible for caring for aging family members you might be a candidate for compassion fatigue. Some people give and give and serve and serve, and they wake up one morning and they realize they have lost the joy of serving. They're tired.

Jesus is our model for serving others. The writer of Hebrews invites us to, "Consider him [Jesus] who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:3) It doesn't say Jesus enjoyed opposition: He endured it. There is the real possibility that Christian workers can grow weary and lose heart. That's why we need to keep our eyes on Jesus, and depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit to serve.

There's an episode from the life of Jesus that illustrates how caring for others can be a draining experience. In Luke 8, Jesus is walking through a crowd and there's a sick woman there who had suffered with a blood disorder for twelve years. She had such faith; she believed if she could just touch the hem of Jesus' robe she would be healed. As she desperately grabbed His robe, Jesus stopped and said, "Who touched me?" The big fisherman, Simon Peter, was like a bodyguard in the crowd. He said, "Lord, there's people everywhere, all of them are pressing against you." Jesus said, "I felt healing power flow out of my body." The word is sometimes translated "virtue." Jesus said, "I felt virtue drain out of my body." Of course, Jesus knew who had touched Him; He just wanted to give her the opportunity to make a public profession of her faith, which she did. But I'm fascinated by Jesus' statement about goodness flowing out of His body. Even for Jesus, compassion was an exhausting experience. Think about all the miracles Jesus performed, did you ever think these miracles drained Him? No wonder we see that Jesus was often tired. He was so exhausted on one occasion He was sound asleep on a small boat in the middle of the storm. So, as we serve the Lord by serving others, beware of the reality of

compassion fatigue. Don't allow yourself to grow weary. Takes some time to rest and be spiritually and emotionally refreshed.

III. PERSISTENCE IS THE KEY TO A GOOD HARVEST

There's also a great promise in this passage: "At the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

Green Bay Packers Coach Vince Lombardi used to say: "Quitters never win; and winners never quit." For sure, quitters will never win, but those who persevere don't always win. I've known football teams that never gave up, but they still lost the game on the scoreboard. I love the attitude that John Oakley Childs once told me about Texas A&M. He said A&M has never lost a game in any sport. They were outscored in some games when the clock ran out, but they were never beaten. That's persistence! Now that they're in the SEC, we really need to pray for A&M. Of course, legendary coach Knute Rockne once said, "I've found that prayers work best when you have big players."

There are three areas where I want to challenge you to never give up.

A. Don't quit when you're praying!

In Luke 11, Jesus tells an amazing parable about prayer. There was a man who had a guest arrive at his house unexpectedly around midnight. The code of hospitality in the Middle East required that this man offer food to his guest. But he didn't have any food in the house. He couldn't run over to the all-night Whataburger and get some grub. So he goes to his neighbor's house and begins to knock on his door. "Wake up! Is anybody home? I need three loaves of bread!"

Finally, from inside a sleepy voice answered, "Go away. I was asleep and all my family is asleep. Go away! I'm not giving you anything at this time of night." 99% of people would have given up at that point and gone back home and said to the guest, "I'm sorry. I tried. I don't have any food, and my neighbor won't give me any." But Jesus said the man didn't quit. Instead he started pounding louder on the door and he started yelling a little louder. "I'm not leaving! I need you to give me three loaves of bread." Again, the neighbor said, "I told you I'm not getting up; now go home now before I call the cops!" But this man didn't quit. He didn't give up. He pounded louder and said, "I'm not giving up. If I have to stand here all night, I'll do it. Now, give me three loaves of bread!" Can't you imagine the neighbors getting up and looking out their windows? And finally the sleeping man crawled out of bed, opened the door and threw three loaves of bread at his neighbor. He said, "Listen, I'm not giving you this because you're my neighbor or my friend. I'm giving you bread because you're about to drive me crazy!"

I'm not making this up. Listen to what Jesus said: "I tell you, although he will not get up and supply him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his shameless persistence and insistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs." (Luke 11:8, Amplified Bible)

Then in the next verse Jesus said, "Ask and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking. Knock

and keep on knocking." Whenever you pray, just remember the acrostic PUSH: Pray Until Something Happens.

B. Don't quit when you encounter difficulties!

People sometimes talk about bulldog tenacity. Winston Churchill, who was somewhat of a bulldog himself, said the reason a bulldog's nose points backwards is so he can continue to hold onto his prey even when he's bleeding. He's not going to let go of his goal.

Persistence means you never give up, even when you fail. Churchill said in another speech: "Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm." Life is full of failures. There will be plenty of times when you fall, but failure isn't final unless you refuse to get up again.

During the 1988 Summer Olympics in Mexico, John Stephen Akhwari was running the Marathon event for Tanzania. Midway through the race his legs began to cramp because of the altitude. He stumbled and fell to the ground. He cut his leg and dislocated his hip. But rather than quitting, he continued to hobble toward the stadium and the finish line. The winners had already finished the marathon almost two hours earlier, but Akhwari refused to give up. When he entered the stadium it was mostly empty and the sun had set. The few people in the crowd cheered for him as he hobbled across the finish line. When a reporter asked him why he didn't quit he said, "My country didn't send me 5,000 miles to start the marathon, they sent me 5,000 miles to finish the marathon."

In the Christian life, it's not how you start the race, but whether or not you FINISH the race.

Whenever you face obstacles and difficulties ask yourself the question we read in Romans 8:31, "What, then, shall we say in response to this? [This obstacle, this difficulty] If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) There are plenty who will try to be against us, but none are bigger and stronger than our God!

C. Don't quit when you're involved in a great cause!

Whenever you're involved in the great cause of the Kingdom of God, there will be plenty of critics and detractors. God called Nehemiah to return to the ruined city of Jerusalem in order to rebuild the walls. Some of his critics used ridicule to shame him. They said, "You're no builder! If a fox walked on that wall, it would fall down!" Nehemiah ignored them. Then they used intimidation. They said, "We're going to come and attack you when you least expect it." So Nehemiah gave all of his workers a sword. Then they tried manipulation. They wanted to engage him in dialogue to delay his work. I love his reply. Nehemiah said to his critics, "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:3)

He kept on doing what God called Him to do. That's persistence. He was going to complete the task God gave Him to do.

Mother Teresa, who worked among the poor in Calcutta, India, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. When she was asked at the award ceremony how people could promote world peace she said, "Go home and love your family." Although she lived for almost twenty years longer, she never accepted another prize or reward. She said accepting prizes interfered with her work and that her job was serving the poor, not accepting prizes.

You and I are involved in the great cause in the history of the world: Spreading the kingdom of God in the earth. Don't get distracted! Don't quit! Don't ever give up!

One of my favorite stories about persistence is about the kid from West Texas who bought a book on wrestling. His high school was so small he played on their six-man football team. They didn't have a wrestling program, so he asked one of the assistant football coaches if he would enter him in some of the wrestling meets. This kid turned out to be an amazing wrestler. He wasn't necessarily strong or fast, but he had one great quality: He had the tenacity of a bulldog. He wouldn't give up or quit, and he simply wore out his opponents. He went undefeated and ended up in the state championship for his weight. He was facing a two-time state champion who was so good he had been offered college scholarships. The little kid met the state champ on the mat, and before he knew it he was twisted up and pinned. It looked like he was going to lose. The coach, who had developed a fondness for the kid turned his back because he couldn't bear to see him lose for the first time. The coach heard the crowd roar and when he turned back around, his kid had reversed the state champ and was on top and won the match. The kid came running across the mat and said, "Coach, I won!" The coach said, "Yeah, I see you did. But how did you win? The last time I looked at you, you were on bottom about to lose." The kid said, "Coach, he was good. He had me twisted like a pretzel on the mat, I couldn't move. But you know me coach; I wasn't going to quit. I opened my eyes and in front of my face I saw a big toe. I don't know if it's against the rules or not, but I leaned my head down and bit the fire out that big toe... and coach, it's amazing what you can do when you bite your own toe!"

CONCLUSION

God has a word for you today and that word is *don't quit!* Don't ever quit praying; don't ever quit, even when you face of difficulty; don't quit because you're involved in a great cause.

I've always been fascinated with the U.S. Space program. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration has launched hundreds of satellites, including the latest Mars Curiosity Rover that landed last month. But in the history of NASA there is one satellite in a category of its own—Pioneer 10. Pioneer 10 is famous is because it persevered—it never quit. It was launched in 1972 and was programmed for a 21-month mission to explore Jupiter. It was the first man-made object to pass through the asteroid belt on the other side of Mars, where some of the asteroids are as large as Alaska. It flew by Jupiter in December 1973 and sent back some amazing pictures. But rather than powering down as expected, Pioneer 10 kept going, continuing to fly toward the edge of the solar system. It passed all the other planets in our solar system. Eleven years after its launch, it passed Pluto, six billion miles from the sun. Instead of lasting 21 months, it kept transmitting for 30 years with a tiny 8-watt transmitter that uses as much energy as a nightlight. The last transmission received was in 2003. NASA officials say it is still transmitting; we just don't have receivers strong enough to receive the transmission. It has left

our solar system and is boldly going where no manmade object has gone before. It's on a projected path to a red star named Aldebaran and the current speed it should arrive there in 2 million years. In case there is intelligent life in that system, NASA scientists wisely attached a gold plaque to the satellite that has a diagram of our solar system, and a picture of a man standing next to a woman. It is the little satellite that refused to quit. It just keeps going and going and going, like the Energizer bunny!

God wants us to be like that satellite. You may think you only have an 8-watt life, but God can use you. The only people God can't use are those who quit. So whatever you face, don't quit. Don't every stop performing good deeds in the name of Jesus until He calls you home. You will reap a harvest if you do not give up.

There have been times in my ministry when I've been tempted to give up or give in. But there's a poem by an unknown author I memorized years ago. I can't tell you how many times I've quoted it to myself: I want to give up, but I won't give up. / There are battles to fight by day and by night. / For God and for right, / And I'll never give up.

I want to give up, but I won't give up.
I'm weary it's true, and worried and blue,
And worn through and through,
But I'll never give up.

I want to give up, but I won't give up.
What? Lay down in the field,
And surrender my shield?
NO, I'll never yield.

I want to give up, but I won't give up.
May this be my song midst legions of wrong
Oh, God, keep me strong,
That I'll never give up!

OUTLINE

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"As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people."

"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."
Matthew 5:16

II. BEWARE OF COMPASSION FATIGUE

"Let us not become weary in doing good."

"Consider him [Jesus] who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." *Hebrews 12:3*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes