

Cultivate or Reap?

Everybody likes to reap.

Hardly anybody likes to spend the time it takes to cultivate.

Consider these reasons:

- Reaping is productive and shows instant results.
- Reaping is the end result—the payoff. It is always pleasant and gratifying.
- Reaping has the connotation of an ingathering, a return on investment; it is a recompense, or a pleasant result as in reaping a large profit.
- The word carries the meaning of “obtaining” or “winning.”
 - It seems like every week we hear someone say, “If I win the lottery, here’s what I will do with the money.”
 - The success of many advertising ventures begins with a letter or email to someone saying, “You are an instant winner!”
 - One of the most successful Internet scams in history begins with a story of millions of dollars in a foreign bank account and how a person can get rich quick with very little effort.

The problem with this line of thinking that it is nearly impossible to reap without first sowing and cultivating. Cultivating is just plain old hard work. There are always barriers, fences and obstacles. There is the time factor because it takes time to prepare the soil, buy the seed, plant it, water it, and weed it. This is true whether we are planting seeds in the ground, or launching a new venture in business or ministry.

The word “cultivate” carries the connotation of heavy words like the following:

- Prepare
- Work
- Labor
- Plant
- Grow
- Plow
- Promote
- Improve
- Produce
- Develop
- Devote

What does all of this mean to the Christian church? It means that if we want to reap, we are going to have to cultivate. We are going to have to accept the task of understanding the unchurched and learn how to reach them. We will have to do what George Barna says in one of his latest books, *Grow Your Church from the Outside*. He says, “We take the first step toward

truly preparing to reach the unchurched when we come models of faithfulness, obedience, holiness and righteousness.”

It has been well said that the church is the “local branch office” of God’s kingdom. It is the working agency of the kingdom. As such it exists for a twofold purpose: (1) to demonstrate the kingdom and (2) to spread it through obedience to His commands. Our job as individual believers is to join the church in accomplishing these two goals. Think of some of the metaphors used by our Lord Jesus. He used images like salt, light, keys, water, and fire. Each of these items has something in common: each figure represents some kind of penetration. The purpose of salt is to penetrate the meat and preserve it; the function of light is to penetrate the darkness; keys penetrate the lock, water penetrates the hard crust of the earth, and fire continues to consume unless contained.

These figures make the goal of the church very clear. In effect, they were used to lead up the last recorded words of Jesus which were words of commission. He gave us the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19,20 and His very last words before the ascension in Acts 1:8, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” There is no question about it—we are to spread the kingdom! But *how*?

We spread the kingdom by witness, by proclamation of the good news. The Great Commission and evangelism are like handmaidens—they are inseparable. Evangelism involves preparing, training, equipping. It is not so much an event, but a process. This effort takes time and commitment to show that we really care about nonbelievers. This process takes time because it involves building relationships with the unchurched community. Since our current generation is so caught up in “experiential” and “hands-on involvement” they will respond better to God’s love if they can see it in action. In the “Google world” of the 21st century, it may not be a “Billy Graham” type of landscape with mass revivals in big stadiums. But revival is still a reality! It will show up in our postmodern world through individual believers when they connect with the commission to “go into all the world.” As one church leader recently said, “If we are going to turn the corner for revival in our present day, it is going to be through marketplace ministry.”

We may not see a lot of “reaping” at first because this process involves a lot of “cultivating.” In all probability, it will happen because believers have built personal relationships with unbelievers. They will minister with a goal of being the good news in action and sharing it verbally. It will be a slow but powerful process of people coming to Christ one by one—or, as someone said, “won by one.”

We want to proclaim a timeless message to a new generation: Jesus is the Way! We’ve heard that all of our lives, but think again about this amazing claim. Only Jesus really knows the Father and He says if we want to know God personally we have to come to Him because He is the only way to God—not Buddha, not Confucius, not New Age, not Mormons, not the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Only through Jesus do we have the right relationship.

We have to start somewhere, but where? There are so many plans, formulas, and programs. Consider these dilemmas:

- There are so many kinds of evangelism.
 - Do we go with confrontational, relational, inquiry, evidential, prescriptive, testimonial, or lifestyle evangelism?
- Where and when do we go?
- Who goes?
- What do we say?
- How do we begin?
- There are so many challenges associated with presenting the gospel to every person.
 - There are gated communities, high-rise apartments, and wealthy suburbs that present a challenge that must be overcome.
 - There are the millions who are trapped in the inner cities, mostly without hope, who must be reached with the gospel.

A good soulwinner must sort out and meet these challenges and dilemmas one by one and be confident in their witnessing. The best way is to become a knowledgeable soulwinner.

Here are some ideas of how you can become a confident soul winner and overcome the problem of fear.

1. **Be sure you understand clearly the meaning of salvation.** What a wonderful thing to be a Christian and yet how sad it is that so many of God's people are not enjoying it to its fullest. It can be difficult to tell others about the Lord unless you are confident about the content of what you are sharing with them. Many fearful soulwinners are nothing more than people who have never really been taught the scriptural truths concerning the fullness of salvation. Salvation is simple and yet the price of salvation and that which transpires at salvation are complex and manifold. Remember, knowledge brings confidence, so understanding and knowing what it truly means to be saved can increase one's confidence.
2. **Know your plan.** The plan of salvation is a very vital part of soul winning. The person who is going to have confidence in sharing that plan must know it well enough to where they are not afraid to share it with others with whom they come in contact. The more you know something the easier it is to explain it to someone else. The soulwinner ought to know the Roman's Road so well that they never have to think about the basic plan but rather simply can adjust it to the need of the person to whom they are speaking. We ought

to be sure we know exactly how to draw a person to trust the Lord and put their faith in Him not to just simply repeat a prayer. Oftentimes we get the person the gospel, but we fail to win them to Christ because we lose confidence and the reason that we lose confidence is because we don't know what to do well enough to do it properly.

3. **Know your approach.** When witnessing we should know what we are going to do to approach an individual in order to give them the gospel. Be prepared as to how to begin a conversation and practice repeatedly until you know your approach well enough to gain confidence in using it.
4. **Know your prospects.** One of the greatest ways to be an effective soulwinner is to try to spend time getting to know the convert well. The better you get to know them the easier it will be for you to witness to them. One method to use is to plan your visits in advance. By getting the names and the addresses of people in advance, you can begin praying for them and become acquainted with them. You will feel like you already know them when you go to visit them. The better you know them, the more confidence you will have when you speak to them.
5. **Know yourself.** God has given to each of us a unique personality and unique experiences in life to develop that personality. All of us have unique personalities; some are more aggressive, while others are quieter. Either of these can be used effectively as we go soulwinning. Rather than fearing ourselves, we can allow the Lord to use us to lead others to Christ.
6. **Know the Lord.** Soulwinning is simply introducing someone to our Lord, and if we know Him well, we will have the confidence in presenting Him to others who do not know Him at all. Make certain that you are walking with God on a daily basis and you will be so much more able to share His Gospel with others.
7. **Know your purpose.** Perhaps the most important way to be confident is to know exactly what you are trying to accomplish. You are trying to lead a person to believe upon Christ and to put their total faith and trust in Him for eternal life. A person without a clear knowledge of their purpose will be a person who lacks confidence and will be filled with fears.

We must not only present a clear gospel witness but follow up with discipleship so that people understand what it means to live out their faith. Not everyone will be saved, but we must make sure that every person is given the opportunity to accept Christ.