

Main Idea: In Galatians 6:7-10, we learn that there is a promise of a harvest. This is an important promise to remember during times of suffering, and it involves three elements.

- I. The promise of a harvest involves a certainty (7).
 - A. We're prone to miss it.
 - B. God's honor requires it.
 - C. We cannot escape it.
 1. There is an inevitable connection between sowing and reaping.
 2. What we sow, we will eventually reap.
- II. The promise of a harvest involves consequences (8).
 - A. If a person sows to his flesh, he will reap corruption.
 1. We're sowing to the flesh when we do what's natural.
 2. We're sowing to the flesh when we choose to please ourselves.
 - B. If a person sows to the Spirit, he will reap eternal life.
 1. We're sowing to the Spirit when we do what the Spirit desires.
 2. We're sowing to the Spirit when we choose to please Christ.
- III. The promise of a harvest involves daily personal choices (9-10).
 - A. We must not stop working for the harvest (9).
 1. This is true in our personal development.
 2. This is true when we see a brother caught in sin.
 3. This is true in evangelism.
 4. This is true in missions.
 - B. We must make the most of our windows of opportunity.
 1. We must do good to all people.
 2. We must do good especially to our forever family.

Make It Personal: How does the Lord want me to put this promise into practice this week?

For this Labor Day weekend message, let's talk about the harvest. The Lord has given us His *promise of a harvest*, and you'll find it in Galatians 6:7-10.

When we're suffering, we find ourselves asking, "Can anything good come out of this?" And the answer is yes, and the reason we know it's yes is because of the promise we're about to consider. In Galatians 6:7-10, God's Word extends to us the *promise of a harvest*, and this important promise involves three elements. First, there's a *certainty*. Second, there are some built in *consequences*. And third, there are some daily personal *choices* that face us in light of this promise.

I. The promise of a harvest involves a certainty (7).

Notice verse 7, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." There's the law of the harvest. It's a certainty, a fixed principle established by God. A man reaps what he sows. Literally, whatever a man is sowing, this also he will reap.

We learn three things about this fixed law from verse 7.

A. We're prone to miss it. "Do not be deceived," says Paul. Why would he say that? Because that's our tendency. We're prone to miss the obvious.

Paul wrote this letter to some churches in Galatia, that's Asia Minor or present day Turkey, who were in fact missing it. He had personally led them to faith in Christ, just a few years prior, but after he left some men starting undermining the gospel of grace he had preached. And the church members started believing the false gospel they were hearing.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached at WBC on 11/18/12 in the "Promises to Live By in the Crucible of Suffering" series.

He began his letter by saying in 1:6-7, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

Apparently some small group leaders were tampering with the truth. They called themselves Christians, but these Judaizers, as they’re known, were telling the church that it’s not enough to believe in Jesus. You need Jesus *plus* your own obedience to Jewish Law if you want to be saved and brought into God’s family. No, says Paul in 2:16. “We know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.”

In chapters 1-2 Paul defends his exclusive gospel by explaining where he got it. *It’s not something man made up*, he says in 1:11. *I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ*, he emphasizes in 1:12.

Friends, you cannot improve on what Jesus did and said. “I have been crucified with Christ,” says Paul in 2:20, “and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Jesus died for me, in my place, for my sins, to make me right with God, says Paul. How could I ever improve on that? Why would I think that I needed to add my sin-tainted obedience to Christ’s perfect obedience?

In chapters 3-4 Paul gives a careful defense of the doctrine of justification, and gives illustrations to support it. In chapter 5 he gives the implications of this doctrine, that it produces freedom from sin, that it leads to a beautiful dependency upon God the Holy Spirit who produces the fruit of Christlikeness in us, something the law could never produce.

Finally, in chapter 6 he talks about what should happen if a church member isn’t experiencing this freedom or fruit. “You who are spiritual should restore him gently,” says Paul in 6:1.

You say, “But can’t that get messy? I mean, what if my sinning brother doesn’t want my help? Why should I take the risk?” Here’s why, says Paul in 6:2. “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

“But maybe I should just leave my sinning brother alone. I mean, I’m a sinner too. Is sin really that big a deal? After all, I thought Paul just said that Christ took care of our sins. So I don’t need to do anything about it, do I?”

To which Paul responds in 6:7, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”

Notice that first clause. *Do not be deceived*. We tend to do this, to kid ourselves, to refuse to face reality. A man who says he loves Jesus misses church more often than he comes, but tells himself, “It’s not that big a deal. I’m okay with God.” *Do not be deceived*. A woman who says she loves Jesus refuses to forgive a sister who offended her, but insists, “It’s just a little thing. God understands.” Indeed, He does. *Do not be deceived*.

We see this command all over Scripture. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 6:9, “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? *Do not be deceived*.” It’s in 1 Corinthians 15:33 (ESV), “*Do not be deceived*: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’” And in Ephesians 5:6, “*Let no one deceive you* with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.”

Friends, this promise we’re considering appears in the context of how to deal with a brother or sister in Christ who is caught in a sin. And the first thing we must see about this certain principle is how prone we are to miss it.

B. God's honor requires it. "God cannot be mocked." Interesting verb, *mykterizo*, derived from the Greek word *mykter*, the word for "nose." It literally means "to turn up one's nose." Our verse makes it clear that's something you cannot do with God. You cannot turn up your nose at Him and what He says. Why not? He's the Creator and King of the universe, and His honor demands it.

God cannot be mocked. Oh, He's patient and longsuffering, too, which is why He often delays His just treatment of those who turn up their nose at His Word. But the time is coming when the planting of such seeds will produce a harvest.

When it comes to this promise, beloved, we're prone to miss it, and God's honor requires it, and thirdly...

C. We cannot escape it. "A man reaps what he sows." I want you to take note of two things.

1. *There is an inevitable connection between sowing and reaping.* Ever plant a garden? You depend on this connection and you know that it holds true every time and without exception. If you drop a kernel of corn in the ground, you're not going to get a watermelon. If you sow corn, you'll reap corn. Put bean seeds in the ground, and what grows? Not cucumbers, but beans.

There's an inevitable connection here, and it works in other areas of life, too. You'll see it in athletics, and music, and school work, and in parenting. While there are variables, you get out of something what you put into it. Or to put it simply...

2. *What we sow, we will eventually reap.* If you want to be a good basketball player, you must spend time in the gym. Hours watching Sports Center won't cut it. Want to play the piano well? It takes hours working the scales. To be a good student? You've got to go to class and do the homework. Parenting? You can't sacrifice your kids on the altar of your career. What we sow, we will eventually reap.

You'll find this law of the harvest all over the Bible. Job 4:8 puts it this way, "Those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it." Proverbs 11:18 says, "The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward." Hosea 8:7 says, "'They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.'" And in Hosea 10:12, "Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you."

What we sow, we eventually reap. We cannot escape the connection. Listen to Romans 2:6–10: "God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

Case in point? The rich man and Lazarus. Listen to what Abraham told the wicked rich man after he died. This is Luke 16:25, "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.'"

You reap what you sow. The tragic reality is that hell will be filled with people, like this rich man, who were convinced they were the exception to this law. This man didn't go to hell because he was rich, but because he refused to take heed to the message of God's Word. And so many people are going through life working, eating, playing, but refusing to give attention to the condition of their soul. And forever they will reap what they planted.

John Stott remarks, “Many people are deceived concerning this inexorable law of seed-time and harvest. They sow their seeds thoughtlessly, nonchalantly, and blind themselves to the fact that the seeds they sow will inevitably produce a corresponding harvest. Or they sow seed of one kind and expect to reap a harvest of another. They imagine that somehow they can get away with it. But this is impossible.”²

So there’s element one. The promise of a harvest involves a certainty. *A man reaps what he sows.*

II. The promise of a harvest involves consequences (8).

We see the consequences in verse 8, “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.”

You’ll notice that Paul identifies two distinct people doing two distinct kinds of sowing and experiencing two distinct consequences. Notice the first.

A. If a person sows to his flesh, he will reap corruption. The NIV uses the expression “sinful nature,” whereas the ESV and the KJV and the NASB use the term “flesh.” It’s the Greek word *sarx*, and sometimes *sarx* refers to a person’s material flesh or body (as in John 1:14, “The Word became flesh;” see also James 5:3). At other times *sarx* is used, not in a physical sense, but a moral sense. For instance, in Galatians 5:16 Paul says, “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the *sinful nature* (the *flesh*).” And in Galatians 5:19, “The acts of the *sinful nature* [ESV ‘the works of the flesh’] are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, etc.”

Commenting on the use of “flesh” in 5:16, Wuest says, “The word *flesh* refers here to the totally depraved nature of the person, the power of which is broken when the believer is saved. Therefore, the lusts of the flesh refer to the evil desires, impulses, and passions that are constantly arising from the evil nature as smoke rises from a chimney. The evil nature is not eradicated. Its power over the believer is broken, and the believer need not obey it. But it is there, constantly attempting to control the believer as it did before salvation wrought its work in his being.”³

So the first person sows to the flesh. But it’s not just to the flesh in the abstract, but to *his own* flesh. There’s a personal pronoun here. Is that significant? Yes. It indicates this...

1. *We’re sowing to the flesh when we do what’s natural.* Natural to us. It takes no effort to do what’s *natural*, that is, what flows out of our *nature*. That’s why Paul referred to these as “the works of the flesh” in 5:19. Hatred, discord, jealousy, envy. You don’t need anybody to teach you how to do those things. They’re *natural* to a sinner, even a redeemed sinner. I’ll put it another way...

2. *We’re sowing to the flesh when we choose to please ourselves.* You’ll notice the little preposition “to.” The ESV says, “The one who sows *to* his own flesh,” and “the one who sows *to* the Spirit.” The NIV says “to please.” It’s the Greek preposition *eis*, often translated “into.” But here it’s not so much “into,” as in dropping seed *into* the ground, as “with a view to.” In other words, when we sow to the flesh, the only thing we have in view is *our flesh*, that is, *ourselves*.

It’s somewhat lengthy, but I want to read a helpful explanation of what this looks like. This comes from the book, *Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament*:

² John Stott, *Galatians*, p. 166.

³ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English reader* (Ga 5:16). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

“Sowing with a view to the evil nature [‘flesh’] refers to the act of a person choosing those courses of conduct that will gratify the cravings of the totally depraved nature. In this context, these words refer to the Galatians who in following the teachings of the Judaizers, catered to the desires of the evil nature. All false systems of religion are so adjusted that they appeal to the fallen nature of man, satisfying his religious instinct for worship, while at the same time allowing him to go on in his sin. The teachings of the Judaizers catered to the fallen natures of the Galatians in that they made no demand for the necessity of regeneration nor for faith in an atoning sacrifice that paid for sin. In addition to that, their teachings stressed a salvation-by-works religion, which glorifies man, not God, and which allows him to go on in his sin while seeking to buy the favor of God by his so-called good works.”⁴

That’s what it means to sow *to the flesh*. We do that when we *do what’s natural* and when we *choose to please ourselves*.

And what’s the consequence of doing that? It leads, says Paul, *to corruption*. The NIV says *destruction*. It’s the Greek *phthora*, and it carries the idea of moral decay or deterioration. We find the same word in 2 Peter 2:19, where Peter says this about apostate teachers, “They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of **depravity** [*phthora*]*—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.*”⁵

Last week I started reading Andre Agassi’s biography, *Open*. Agassi was a great tennis player in the 90s and into the 2000s. But I was shocked when he confessed that he hated tennis. The reason he played tennis was because his dad, a moody former Golden Gloves fighter, forced him to play, and forced him to practice, and forced him to become a champion. And he succeeded. Agassi became the winner of eight grand slams and the number one player in the world. But it didn’t make Andre happy. And so he married a celebrity, and the marriage ended in divorce. And he developed a drug problem, and struggled with deep insecurities.

That’s a vivid illustration of what *sowing to the flesh* looks like and what it produces. We’re sowing to the flesh when we do things motivated by our desire to please ourselves, and what it produces is deterioration in the things that matter most.⁶

Thankfully, we see another set of consequences in this verse.

B. If a person sows to the Spirit, he will reap eternal life. “The Spirit” refers to God the Holy Spirit. Sowing “to” the Spirit, again, means that we sow *with a view to* the Holy Spirit. In other words...

1. *We’re sowing to the Spirit when we do, not what **we** desire, but what the **Spirit** desires.* And how do we know what the Spirit desires? By studying what the Spirit has revealed, the Scriptures. This isn’t a call to a mystical life, but a biblical life. Or we could put it this way...

2. *We’re sowing to the Spirit when we choose to please Christ.* Or as the little jingle puts it, “Just two choices on the shelf, pleasing Christ or pleasing self.”⁷ That

⁴ Wuest, K. S. (1997). Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English reader (Ga 6:8). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

⁵ We find the same word in 2 Peter 1:4. Notice the connection between God’s **promises** and escaping **corruption**. “Through these he has given us his very great and precious **promises**, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the **corruption** in the world caused by evil desires.”

⁶ In our present age, people like to justify themselves by blaming externals, but this verse won’t allow that. As John Stott observes, “We are not helpless victims of our nature, temperament, and environment. On the contrary, what we become depends largely on how we behave; our character is shaped by our conduct.” p. 169.

⁷ I first heard Mark Dutton use a variation of this in a Biblical Counseling training video.

sort of sums it up. Sowing to the Spirit—that's pleasing Christ. Sowing to the flesh—that's pleasing self.

This has huge implications for the nitty-gritty details of our lives. The books we read, the television programs we watch, the friends we choose, the music we select. When we make these choices, we are sowing seeds, and we're either sowing to the satisfaction of the flesh or sowing to the satisfaction of God the Holy Spirit.

We just saw that sowing to the flesh produces moral corruption. What happens if we sow to the Spirit? Paul says this kind of sowing reaps *eternal life*. Is he saying we *earn* eternal life by the sowing we do? No, for two reasons. One, he specifically says this eternal life is *from the Spirit*. And two, the reason Paul wrote Galatians was to make it clear that eternal life comes through faith in Christ alone plus nothing. But true faith never stands alone. It leads to a life that pleases the Spirit, and the Spirit gives the one with true faith the quality and quantity of life that's truly life, *eternal life*.

So there are the first two elements of this amazing promise. One, God's promise of a harvest involves a *certainty*—whatever you sow, that's what you reap. Two, two sets of consequences—you can either sow to please the flesh, and if you do, you'll experience corruption; or you can sow to please the Spirit, and if you do, you'll experience life that's really life. Not surprisingly, according to the third element...

III. The promise of a harvest involves daily personal choices (9-10).

We see these choices in verses 9-10. There's something we must choose *not* to do—that's verse 9. And something we must choose to do—that's verse 10. Notice verse 9, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Let me put it this way...

A. We must not stop working for the harvest (9). How do we work for the harvest? By *doing good*, says Paul. What will keep us from doing good? If we *become weary*, says Paul. The word *enkakeo* means "to become discouraged, to lose enthusiasm, to lose heart." 2 Thessalonians 3:13 says, "And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right." In 2 Corinthians 4:1 Paul says, "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart." And in verse 16, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

Friends, the law of the harvest is at work, but in order for us to benefit from this law, this promise, we must not become weary and give up. By the way, keep this in mind about sowing and reaping. It takes *time*. You don't reap a harvest the same day you drop the seed in the ground. So if we want to experience a God-pleasing harvest, we must do our part—the sowing—and wait on the Lord to do His part—produce the harvest. As Paul testified, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow (1 Cor 3:6)."

So we must be patient. We must not become weary and give up. The harvest will come. We have God's guarantee. This is true in several areas. Let's talk about four.

1. This is true in our personal development. We see this in the context of this promise. As we saw earlier, back in 5:16 Paul wrote, "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." In 5:19-21 he identifies the works of the flesh are, and in 5:22-23 the fruit of the Spirit. And then this conclusion in verse 25, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

So the law of the harvest has tremendous implications for our personal growth and development. If you feed the flesh, you won't grow in Christlikeness. If you cooperate with the Holy Spirit, you will. It's the promise of a harvest. *We will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

Are you living in light of this promise in your personal development? Are you taking steps to *do good*, to do those things that will result in growth in Christlikeness. Like Bible study, prayer, Scripture memorization, church involvement, for starters, but also, by refusing to shift into a serve-me-mode when trials come.

This is critical. How should we respond when life gets hard? We find out in Hebrews 12:7-11, “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it **produces a harvest of righteousness and peace** for those who have been trained by it.”

We must not give in to our fleshly desires, one of which is to retreat and hide. Listen to John Stott again, “To ‘sow to the flesh’ is to pander to it, to cosset, cuddle and stroke it, instead of crucifying it. The seeds we sow are largely thoughts and deeds. Every time we allow our mind to harbor a grudge, nurse a grievance, entertain an impure fantasy, or wallow in self-pity, we are sowing to the flesh. Every time we linger in bad company whose insidious influence we know we cannot resist, every time we lie in bed when we ought to be up and praying, every time we read pornographic literature, every time we take a risk which strains our self-control, we are sowing, sowing, sowing to the flesh. Some Christians sow to the flesh every day and wonder why they do not reap holiness. Holiness is a *harvest*; whether we reap it or not depends almost entirely on what and where we sow.”⁸

2. *This is true when we see a brother caught in sin.* That’s the immediate context of our promise, Galatians 6:1, the command to go after a brother caught in a sin. When Paul says, “Let us not become weary in doing good,” that’s the good he’s talking about. Is that easy to do? No. But if we do it, there will be a harvest. Perhaps we’ll see our brother restored. For sure we’ll grow to become more like Christ, the ultimate restorer of people caught in sin.

3. *This is true in evangelism.* In Mark 4 Jesus talked about the promise of a harvest when He said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come (Mark 4:26-29).”

Why should we befriend our unsaved neighbors? Why should we invite them into our homes, and love them, and look for ways to put gospel seeds into their hearts? Because we have a promise from God, the promise of a harvest. In John 4 Jesus said, “Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest... Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true (John 4:34-38).”

4. *This is true in missions.* In Matthew 9 we hear these familiar words of Jesus, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field (Matt 9:37-38).”

Missions exists because there are people we’ll never see who need to know there is a Savior. That’s why we send missionaries to the world.

⁸ John Stott, p. 170.

But there's a cost involved. There's a need for people willing to go. And there's a need for people who are willing to support those who go, with prayer and encouragement and accountability, and with finances.

So the harvest promise involves daily choices. We've just seen what we must *not* do, from verse 9. Now let's look at the positive in verse 10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." I'll put it this way. In order to live in light of this harvest promise...

B. We must make the most of our windows of opportunity. "As we have opportunity," says Paul. The Greek word is *kairos*, and it refers to a "period of time, an occasion, a window of opportunity."

I was sitting in my study late one Thursday afternoon when two men knocked on my door and said they needed food. A window of opportunity. The next day, which was Friday, I was trying to finish my sermon when the phone rang, and on the other end was a man who told me his marriage was in trouble. In both situations my flesh said, "You've got an agenda, and these are interruptions." But the Spirit reminded me (I was working on this message—how could I miss it!), these aren't interruptions. These are windows of opportunity. And in both situations I had the privilege to see God work.

Friends, the Lord opens windows of opportunity like that every day in your life and mine. When He does that, how should we respond? Paul says...

1. *We must do good to all people.* Or as Jesus said, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." To all people. But Paul takes it a step further...

2. *We must do good especially to our forever family.* Not your biological family, although that's good. Your *forever* family. Literally, "the household of faith."⁹ I hope you love your family, but this verse calls on us to cherish and do good to the people we're going to spend eternity with. Do that, and you'll reap a wonderful harvest. You have God's promise.

I want you to put your pen away and put your notes down and close your Bibles. I want us to think now about a very simple, straightforward question as we close. We've just been reminded of an important promise that God gave us in His Word, the *promise of a harvest*. We've seen the certainty of it, and pondered the consequences of it, and considered some choices involved in it. Now it's time to get very personal. Here's the question...

How does the Lord want me to put this promise into practice this week? What does He want you to do specifically? Ask Him. Perhaps there's a neighbor who needs Christ you've given up on, and He wants you to do some sowing this week. Or maybe He's put a sister on your heart whose caught in sin, and He wants you to do some rescue work. Or maybe He's convicting you about a habit in your life, and He's saying, "No more feeding the flesh. It's time to start pleasing the Spirit." Whatever it is, I invite you to put into practice the promise of a harvest. Whatever a man sows, that will he reap.

⁹ Ephesians 2:19 says, "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household."