

Scripture lesson: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 NIV 2011

1 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ.

2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? 4 For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?

5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. 9 For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

God makes it grow 1 Corinthians 3:6-7

Begin with Video: God makes it grow www.youtube.com/watch?v=bS8YMofbsxY&t=30s

God makes it grow. Have you ever wondered about how God works out his plan for the world? How does God work in the world? How is God going to change our city, transform our community, grow our church? How does God make it grow?

The shocking revelation of Scripture is that he does it through people like you and me. We are his servants, doing his bidding. We wait on him for his instructions and then we do what he tells us. We move at his command. When we work then he works.

This is as true today as it was in the early church. In the passage we read earlier in 1 Corinthians 3, Paul says “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.” Both planting and watering are vitally important. If Paul had not planted the seed, then Apollos could not have watered them. And if Paul had planted and Apollos had failed to water, then the seeds would have died. Both planting and watering are essential, but they are both useless unless God gives the growth. We can plant and we can water, but we cannot cause something to grow. Only God can do that. But the amazing thing is that he invites us to help him in this greatest of all endeavours.

The Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli once wrote: “You are a tool in the hands of God. He demands your service, not your rest. Yet, how fortunate you are that he lets you take part in his work.”

There are many ways that God lets us take part in his work. Sometimes it is by speaking and sometimes it is by being. Sometimes it is by what we say, sometimes it is by who we are. Sometimes it is with Christ-like words and sometimes it is through Christ-like character.

Peter preached a powerful sermon on the day of Pentecost and about three thousand people came to faith in Christ that day. That is one way to plant. Years later he wrote a letter and in that letter he describes another way to plant. 1 Peter 3:1-2 Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

For those of you who have a hard time with the word submit some paraphrases try to give us a sense of what submission means:

1 Peter 3:1-2 Be good wives to your husbands, responsive to their needs. There are husbands who, indifferent as they are to any words about God, will be captivated by your life of holy beauty. The Message

1 Peter 3:1 -2 Wives, fit in with your husbands' plans; for then if they refuse to listen when you talk to them about the Lord, they will be won by your respectful, pure behaviour. Your godly lives will speak to them better than any words. The Living Bible

Paul describes the influence we have on the people in the world around us in his second letter to the Corinthian church: 2 Cor. 2:14-17 "But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God."

A friend of mine once had a Volkswagen diesel car and for a time he put old cooking oil and fat from restaurants into his fuel tank. Everywhere he went he spread the aroma of a chip truck. So it is with Christ. Everywhere we go we spread the aroma of Christ. Think of it! Through us God spreads in every place we go the fragrance that comes from knowing him.

Coming back to the passage in 1 Corinthians 3:5-9, here Paul is giving us a proper understanding of what it means to serve God.

Service to God is not confined only to the apostles, or only to a select group of professional clergy. All followers of Christ are invited to work for God, everyone without exception. All are given gifts by the Spirit. All are expected to have a ministry, a service that God uses. It does not have to be Sunday morning in the official meetings of the church. It is usually out in the world, in the classroom, in the workplace, in the hospital or daycare, in your neighbourhood, anywhere you are, there is your place of service.

When Paul says we are servants, he means all of us. Each one of us. Servant of Christ is the highest rank possible in the church, and everybody has that rank as soon as they enter the church. Therefore, there is no need for competition or rivalry, trying to rise up to a better position. There is no higher or better position than that of a servant. It is our greatest privilege to be a servant of Christ.

Sometimes this is a hard lesson for us to learn. The disciples had been with Jesus for about three years. They had heard him preach and teach, they had watched him perform miracles,

they had witnessed his humility, his patience, his power, his compassion, but still they didn't get it. They were competing with one another, constantly striving to get ahead of the others. Two of them even tried to get help from their mother. Matthew 20:20-28 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him. "What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The one who wants to be great must be a servant. Jesus could not have made it any clearer than that. The matter was settled. Yet less than two weeks later, when Jesus and his disciples were gathered together in the upper room for their final Passover meal together, the issue came up again.

Luke describes it in Luke 22:24-27 A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that.

Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

The Apostle John describes something that Jesus said and did that night to drive home this lesson. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (John 13:3-5, 12-17))

How do you think of yourself when you come to church? What is your reason for coming here this morning? Is it to be served? Do you think that the purpose of our being together is in order that you might receive a blessing? Why do you try to stay connected to Christ? Is it so that he will take better care of you, keep you out of trouble, help you with your financial problems, take away your aches and pains? Do you try to stick close to Jesus so that he will make life easier for you? Instead of thinking of yourself as a servant, do you think of yourself primarily as someone who needs to be served?

Paul is telling us that this attitude will bring nothing but trouble in the church; it creates divisions and factions. It sets people one against the other, one trying to climb above the other.

The church cannot grow when its members all want to be served and few want to commit themselves to service. The church will grow as we come to see each other as servants of Christ, serving him and one another as God gives the opportunity. Are we in competition with one another? "No," says Paul, "we should be cooperating with one another. I planted the seed, says Paul, Apollos watered; but God has been making it grow." The one who plants and the one who waters are dependent upon the work of each other and they are both totally dependent upon God.

1 Cor 3:8-9 The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building." This emphasis on working together and serving together is vital for the growth of the church.

One of the glories of the church is that we are all different. Churches that try to turn out people that all look alike, dress alike, carry the same kind of notebook, speak with the same kind of heavenly language, use the same translation of the Bible, are missing what God has in mind, because we are all designed to be different, yet working together and needing one another. The evangelist plants the seed, the Sunday School teacher waters the seed. Which is more important, Bible teaching or evangelizing? Paul's answer is: "Neither!" God can do away with both of those. The important thing is not what either can do, but what God alone can do -- take that truth and change lives with it. Evangelists cannot do that. Bible teachers cannot do that.

They can plant and they can water but only God can make it grow.

Only God opens the mind, changes the heart, and makes people become more like Jesus. God, and only God, can do it all. It is not the people who are important, it is God who works through the people that makes the difference.

But if God does it all, why does he bother with us? It is because he wants to give us an extraordinary privilege. We are God's servants, God's co-workers, working together with God. Isn't that amazing? Nothing is more important in all of life than that. Think of the privilege of working together with God. He allows us to share in what he is doing. He invites us to become a part of his wonderful work.

One mother writes: The day was hot and the lawn showed definite signs of needing yet another mowing. So, as the afternoon began to cool off, I got the lawn mower ready and began the process. Back and forth, back and forth, mowing one strip after another. As I passed the porch, my young son waved at me. The next time by, he was out waiting for me. As I stopped, he stepped in front of me, put his hands on the mower handle and began to try and push it along.

Watching him struggle so seriously, while not making any measurable progress, I chuckled and stepped forward to place my hands next to his. I arched my body over his short one, and walked with my legs on either side of him. It was a difficult position for pushing a lawn mower, but slowly we began to weave our way through the grass.

The cool afternoon breeze brushed by as my son looked up at me and smiled, "I'm a big helper, right Mom?"

"Of course," I replied, fully realizing the lawn-mowing project had just lengthened and the finished results would leave some long blades still standing. It would not be perfect nor done as well as if I had done it myself.

As I think back to this long-past incident, it reminds me of my relationship with God. How many times have I wanted to help when I'm sure God could much more easily do it by Himself?

Yet, this is how the Kingdom of God is built. We are called to push the mowers while God stands and pushes with us. God could easily do all the work without our help. After all, God created us and is in control of the universe! But God doesn't do it that way. His plan is different. We are to continue as co-labourers with Him, weaving across our communities, maybe leaving blades of grass and imperfections, while God guides our paths and actions.

Why? Because as Christians we are called to serve and minister to one another! And only we can do the particular ministry for which God created us. We are not called to be perfect; we are not even called to be successful. We are called to be faithful in ministry, to be co-workers with God in our families, in our communities and in our world.

When we serve in whatever capacity we have been given and cheerfully carry out whatever task God has assigned, then God will give the growth. If God is calling you to plant, plant. If God has gifted you at watering, water. If he has placed a hoe in your hands, hoe with all your might, and sing a song of rejoicing as you do it, because you know that you are working for and with the Lord and God who will make it grow.