



## The harvesting parent & teacher

*Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.*

Ecclesiastes 11:1

Think of a farmer in biblical times preparing the soil and sowing his seed after spring rains. This was hard work, and the seed all seemed to disappear. But give it time. Imagine now the same farmer in the fall, viewing his rich harvest. With what pleasure he sees the fruit of all his hard work now stored in his barn.

What would you think of a farmer who tries to harvest his crops the same day that he sows the seed? Or the farmer who digs up his seed a week later to see if it is sprouting? Or the farmer who cannot sleep at night from worry because he does not see harvestable crops one month after sowing his seed? How foolish such behavior would be!

As parents and teachers, we can also be foolish. We can become discouraged if we do not see immediate fruits upon sowing the seed of God's Word. We can also dig deep in our children's or students' lives to see if the seed is sprouting. We can also doubt and become anxious if we do not see immediate mature fruits in the lives of our children and students.

Is it wrong then to be concerned if I do not see saving fruits in the lives of my children? Is it wrong to plead that God would convert my students if I only see sinful and worldly words and actions in their lives? Of course not. We must be concerned about these most important matters. We must pray and work, however, in a way that permits God to be God in our lives and keeps us in the position of His servants. We have a natural tendency to reverse these roles. We like to see the fruits at the time, in the way, and according to the measure that we want. When this does not happen, we can grow doubtful, discouraged, and despairing. We start to think that all our efforts as a parent or teacher have been worthless.

A mother with young children thinks, "What's the use? I talk to my children about how God wants us to be kind to each other. I teach them that selfishness is sin. I discipline them when they grab something from their brother or sister and refuse to share. I discipline so much that sometimes I think that all I do is discipline! But nothing helps. My children still are just as selfish. Sometimes I get so discouraged. My every effort seems so fruitless!"

A high school teacher reasons, "Why continue? I speak with my students about God's law and the consequences of going our own way and breaking God's commandments. I teach them about the great value of being brought up under the truths of God's Word. I discipline them when they speak or act in ways that clearly contradict the Bible. But nothing helps. If anything I think they glorify the lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and pride of life even more than before and they despise their religious 'birthright.' They want to be more like the world and do not value a Christian lifestyle. Sometimes I get so discouraged. Why bother?"

Such thinking confuses roles. Who is God and who is the servant? Think it through with me. Why are they becoming so discouraged? Is it not because they think that they should be able to produce certain changes and behaviors in the lives of their children and students – that they know when these changes should happen and how they should present themselves? So when they realize that they cannot change the hearts of their children and students, and that change is not happening when and how they think it should, they become discouraged. But are the resulting changes and fruits God's work? Has not He promised that He will bless His Word, that it shall not

return unto Him void, but that it will prosper (Isa. 55:10-11)? Paul and Apollos can only plant; it is God alone who can give the increase (1 Cor. 3:6).

The consequence of this thinking is that it often discourages parents and teachers from diligently doing that which is their duty to do: to sow the seed, to teach and to live God's Word by example.

Allow the loving rebuke and wonderful promise contained in this text to instruct you. You are called to "*cast thy bread upon the waters.*" By God's grace, pray, teach, and live God's Word as faithfully as you can. This is your responsibility. But let God be God. Trust that He will cause it to take root, grow, and bring forth fruit – but, perhaps not for many days. It will happen, but in God's time and in God's way. This is His promise. What a burden of anxiety can roll from our shoulders when we understand what is our responsibility and what is God's promise! God does not hold us responsible to convert our children. That is His work.

One day, you will also look back in amazement at the harvest safely gathered in the heavenly barns, despite how poorly you have "*cast the bread upon the waters.*" Then you will see how richly God fulfilled His promise in this verse, "*and thou shalt find it after many days.*" There is no "maybe" in these words: "*Thou shalt find it.*"

*Are you a harvesting parent, a gleaning teacher?*

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