

## Gardening Farming and Living Faithfully

My mother planted a huge garden each year, producing almost enough potatoes, vegetables, and fruit for a large family to last the entire year. I grew up tending that garden (often unwillingly), pulling weeds, picking potato bugs, digging potatoes, picking beans and pulling more weeds. If I were to plant a garden today, I probably could grow a pretty decent crop of vegetables and potatoes. I do a tiny bit of gardening from time to time, but I have never asked my children to spend much time weeding and picking beans. Understandably, they know far less about gardening than I do.

A few days ago I talked with a farmer about his hired hand. He is a good fellow, the farmer told me, but he doesn't know anything about farming. He must be taught everything, from driving the tractor to feeding the animals to watching for problems in the barn and feedlot. It will take time for him to be an independent and productive employee, this farmer said. We can understand why. Someone who grows up on the farm learns from the time they are just a couple of years old. They watch how things are done, and they don't really have to be taught. They seem to have a natural inclination to know how to farm. I grew up on a farm but because I didn't farm, my children don't have the same inherent knowledge that I have.

It is easy, very easy, for us to lose information and ability in just one or two generations. Once that information is lost, it takes a lot of effort to relearn it. My grandchildren might become good gardeners, but they will have to learn everything from scratch. We can be thankful for the Internet which is quite helpful as a teaching tool. Of course, everyone thinks they are a professional after watching a couple of YouTube videos, but when they put their hand to it, whatever it is that they think they can do turns out to be a lot harder than it seems when we watch a video. If we do not pass on how to do things to the next generation, they will have to learn the hard way.

In my university years, one of my professors addressed these kinds of scenarios by distinguishing between what is taught and what is caught. If a child grows up on a farm, what they learn is caught. If, however, they did not have the opportunity, they must be taught.

This is the same with being a Christian. I had the privilege of growing up in a home where Jesus Christ was central to all of life and where my parents sought to live godly lives. I observed them, and I caught what it was to be a follower of Jesus Christ. I still had to learn, but living as a Christian seems to be almost natural to me. I grew up in an environment where Jesus Christ was honoured.

How long would it take for that inherent knowledge to be lost? Only one generation. If my wife and I had decided that we were not going to live for the Lord, our children would know nothing about what following Jesus means. That would put them at a distinct disadvantage, for instead of "catching" what it means to follow Jesus, they would have to learn by someone teaching them. This is not impossible, of course, but it is more work, a lot more work. It is sad when parents, though making the claim to be Christians themselves, do not model what it is to follow Jesus Christ to their children. Like my children who will have

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to learn how to garden by watching YouTube and reading books, children of parents who do not daily follow Jesus Christ will have to learn the hard way what it means to have a Christian lifestyle.

When Jesus began his ministry, he called 12 men to follow him, and these men became known as his disciples. A disciple is one who learns, but most of their learning is not from a textbook or lecture. Jesus, as their rabbi/teacher, modelled what it meant to live faithfully. The disciples spent weeks and even months with him, watching him interact with others, listening to his conversations, observing him at mealtimes and in the marketplace. Yes, rabbis in those days did spend time teaching, but often that teaching rose out of the events of the day. Over time, a disciple/learner would begin to pattern his life after his rabbi/teacher so that the life of faithfulness would seem to be an inherent quality that he had always possessed.

In our Reformed theology, we teach that God creates covenant communities in which we grow together to become more adept at living for Jesus. While education is important, what is more important is that the covenant community, the church family, models what it is to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Children, new Christians, but also those who have lived in a Christian community all their lives, learn the lifestyle that is expected of a Christian, provided, of course that the community of believers is living according to the ways of Christ. Just as growing up on a farm gives an aspiring farmer makes farming seem like an inherent ability and just as having a mother who forces her children to weed the garden makes it seem like the ability to grow vegetables is something someone is born with, so belonging to the covenant community makes it seem like being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ is something that people know how to do without much learning.

There is a trend today where we see quite a number of people saying that they can be Christians without belonging to a church or without maintaining some of the basic Christian practices in the home. It is possible to be a farmer without having grown up on a farm. It is possible to grow vegetables without learning it firsthand. It is possible, but it is a lot harder. It is possible to be a Christian without having others who will model for us what it is to follow Christ, but it is a lot harder. Let's continue to create environments where we and our children can grow together in the practice of our faith, and let's make the most of the communities God has provided.

Pastor Gary