

Planters, Precipitants, Pruners, Pickers, and Performers?

Jesus and the New Testament writers often used agricultural illustrations to teach lessons of duty and reward: the Sower in Matthew 13:3ff; the Vine and Branches in John 15:1-8; and the Hard-Working and Patient Farmer in 2Timothy 2:6 and James 5:7 serve as just a few examples. The agrarian-based society of the time of Jesus' earthly ministry provided fertile fields for planting the *seed* through these kinds of analogies. But we probably need to consider more closely some of the **specific jobs** included in these illustrations, and what they should mean to us...

Planters. The *seed* is the word of God, Luke 8:11. When it was *planted* in our hearts, if they were the *good soil* (honest and soft), it *germinated* and *gestated* long enough to break through into an obedient Christian. This fledging plant was then *watered*, and if it stayed relatively free of the disease of sin for a while, it grew into a mature plant. Now, what does a *mature* plant do? It *bears fruit* of course! It may produce copious amounts of *foliage* and *flowers* while still growing, but mature plants *bear fruit*, John 15:8. Why is this so important for us to understand? *Flowers* and *foliage* are pretty to look at, but what's inside the *fruit*? More seed! It's called the parable of "*the sower*" (cf. Matthew 13:18) rather than *the soils* for a reason- we're supposed to be *sowers* or *planters* rather than *soil-testers*! How did the *seed* get *beside the road*, *in the rocky ground*, and *among the thorns*? The *sower* sowed it in those places too because he was *sower* rather than a *soil-tester*! Folks, we'll never enjoy a *harvest* if we content ourselves with just lazily eating the *seed*- it has to also be sown. Are you a *planter*?

Precipitants. For *seed* to germinate and grow into a mature *plant*, somebody has to water it. Paul made this clear in 1Corinthians 3:6, "*I planted, Apollos watered....*" Apollos was the *precipitant* (the *agent* that provides *precipitation*). This doesn't mean that Apollos provided the Corinthians water baptism (cf. Acts 18:1-11), but it does mean that Apollos provided the continuing *nutrition* needed for these young Christian *plants* to grow toward maturity. Every Christian needs to grow (cf. 2Peter 3:18), and thus needs *precipitation*. More mature *precipitants* can and should be great assets to them by providing continuing education in, and continuing edification with, the word of God. Barnabas was evidently also a great *waterer*, Acts 4:36! Are you a *precipitant*?

Pruners. In John 15:1-8, Jesus presents a word-picture of not only who *He* is, but also of *our* necessary relationship to Him and what it entails. He is *the vine*, and we are *the branches*. To *bear fruit*, the *branch* must first be on *the vine*, or attached to Him, v.4. However, we must also be aware that: 1) *branches* that are **unproductive** are *taken away/removed* from Him, v.2a; and, 2) those that are **productive** get *pruned* so they can bear even more fruit, v.2b. For those less acquainted with agriculture and horticulture, *pruning* does not mean to throw dried plums. Instead, it means to *cut off* or *cut back* parts for better shaping, strength, and productivity. This *pruning* occurs when we are *reproved*, *rebuked*, and *admonished* with the word, 2Timothy 3:16. The word of God is the *pruning instrument* (cf. Hebrews 4:12), but it usually requires someone proficient to wield it to achieve the full and greatest effect. Thus, we *admonish one another* with and through the word, as God commanded, to be more productive. Are you willing to *prune*?

Pickers. Jesus told His disciples, "*Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest?'* Behold, I say to you, *lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that are white for harvest,*" John 4:35. The point is that there was an *immediate need* for *reapers*. We're mixing metaphors- *reapers* are for grain, but *fruit* has *pickers*, but in either case, the kingdom still has an urgent need for *pickers*! These are NOT pluckers of stringed instruments, but *harvesters* of souls in which the *seed* has been *planted*, and have been well *precipitated* (watered) to the point of being *harvested* for the Lord. Are a *picker*?

But what isn't mentioned in the text is **Performers**. *Planters*, *precipitators*, *pruners*, and *pickers* are using the Word of God as *seed*, *life-giving water*, a *pruning hook*, and the *reaping instrument* of souls. But *performers* use it, to the degree that they do so at all, as a *tool for self-promotion*. And yet, *performing* is all some want to do- sing or dance or whatever puts them in the spotlight. The *vineyard of the Lord* doesn't need *performers*. If it did the New Testament would include instructions for solos, praise dancing, plays and dramatic presentations. But it does need those willing to *plant* the seed, *water*, *prune*, and *harvest*.

Let's be *planters*, *precipitants*, *pruners*, and *pickers* instead of *performers*! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)