



*It can be a powerful friend that will work for you,
or a dangerous enemy that will work against you.*

A Very Important Ingredient

by Elmo Stoll

*Godly insights on what happens when we don't allow for one of the "primary ingredients"
in our witnessing, child raising, and other aspects of the Christian life*

*Few of you will find the following
story easy to believe:*

Adam Smith was determined to be a farmer, and now, as he finished planting the field in potatoes, a great hope swelled within him. Maybe he would be a successful potato farmer. He had tried so many crops before, and each time he ended in failure. He had tried growing wheat, but ended up reaping not a grain. Next he had planted corn. Again a total crop failure. Now this year he had done his research well, and he decided he would try potatoes. It required more of an investment for seed, but if he had a good crop, maybe he could make up for the losses of the previous years.

That night Adam hardly slept. Part of the night, he was kept awake by his excitement and hope at the prospect of all the potatoes he would harvest. They were selling at such a good price, and if they yielded as well as the books said... The rest of the time he couldn't sleep for worry and dread when he remembered previous attempts at farming. What if, after all, this turned out the same, and he would have just another loss.

Very early the next morning, Adam raced to the potato field. The nearer he got, the stronger became the feelings of conflict between eagerness and dread. At the spot just before the field came into sight, he almost stopped and turned back, so strong was the conflict. But he had to know the truth, so he rounded the bend. Alas, his heart sank. There was the potato field just exactly as he had left

it the evening before. Not a single plant had grown. Sadly he returned to the barn. He might as well get the plow ready and plow down the field after breakfast. He would have to admit that he simply was not a farmer—nothing grew for him. Nothing ever even came up.

I warned you at the beginning that you would not find the story easy to believe. Of course no farmer would be as foolish as I have pictured Adam—to expect an instant harvest when seeds are sown. Every farmer knows that the most potent ingredient in growing a crop is *time*. It simply takes a certain amount of time for a crop to grow.

The Bible makes a comparison between the farmer sowing seed and a man proclaiming the message of the gospel. The words of the Good News are like good seed. Yet, many times we are like Adam Smith. We sow the seed one day, and by the next day we expect to reap a bountiful harvest. Or even the same day! We forget the important ingredient: the passage of time.

This same thing is true in many areas of our lives. I have seen parents come to recognize that they have been neglecting their children. Maybe something has now happened to convict them that they have been lax in discipline or that they have not been spending the time with their children that they needed to. And they resolve to do better, and, indeed, do better. But a week later they became discouraged because they do not yet see the results they desired, or hoped for. In such times, they need to remember the farmer sowing seed. Some crops cannot

be grown overnight, or even in a week. We may not see any results at all immediately. And when we do finally see some results, they may be so little that it is hardly noticeable.

But a good farmer is not alarmed that seedlings, when they first peep through the soil, are hardly noticeable. And he is not alarmed that he won't be able to see a detectable difference from one day to the next. He has the confidence that if he sows good seeds, keeps the weeds down, and applies the needed nutrients, God will see to it that he gets a harvest.

The same is true in a marriage relationship. A husband and wife may need to make changes in their behavior toward each other. But in addition to those changes, they may need to add that very important ingredient—time. Some miracles in life simply do not happen overnight. But they can happen!

The simple element of time can be a powerful ally to help us when we sow seeds of truth and virtue. But the reverse is also true. Too many times we underestimate the power of time to produce evil. The Bible warns us to stay away from associates that are ungodly. But the danger seems to be overstated when we meet and talk briefly with an ungodly person. We may even work with him a

week or two, and be confident that we are not being influenced by him. But in very small ways, hardly perceptible, we are being influenced by him. And, given enough time, we will become more like him.

The Apostle Paul recognized the damage time can do, when it is added to some seed of wrong. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," he warned. Well, what is so wrong about letting the sun go down when we are angry? The passage of time. Anger is bad enough, but if time is added to it, it will turn into a grudge, and bitterness and resentment will poison our souls. In many cases, this will make reconciliation very difficult. Many a feud, many a quarrel, if left to go on over a period of time, becomes deep-rooted. What might have been forgiven and forgotten easily—if apologies had been sincerely made when the offence first occurred (before the sun set)—instead become deep roots of bitterness, by which many are defiled.

May God grant us all a new grasp of the importance of time. It can be a powerful friend that will work for you, or a dangerous enemy that will work against you. So when you sow a seed, for good or ill, do not forget to take into account what the passage of time may do with it. □