



WHAT'S GROWING?

BY KARL DELAGRANGE

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My wife and I and our two little daughters are currently in the process of moving from our home in urban Michigan to the home where I spent my high school years in rural Ohio--a house with lots of land attached and huge opportunities for avid gardeners like my wife and me.

While living in Michigan, we were able to purchase the empty lot next to our house and use the land as a training ground in growing all manner of edible plants. It was an amazing opportunity to meet people in our neighborhood. Passersby would often stop and ask, "What's growing?" I found myself spending so much time talking that it would sometimes delay me from getting my lettuce in before the sun set. This experience has also been the start of a growing fascination with the world of regenerative agriculture, where farmers look at the process of producing food holistically.

As I think about the move, my mind has been running through all the possibilities the land could afford us as well as the effort and cost of each enterprise. That naturally starts to become a bit overwhelming, so I try to scale back my expectations and focus strategically on how to best spend my time and resources. I know that building healthy soil is always a great place to start. Experience has also taught me that taking on more than I can manage will allow weeds free reign. This causes me to restrain myself when looking through seed catalogs and to really think about what I want to grow.

Recently, I was reading in James and was struck by a gardening metaphor. It felt like an epiphany. Maybe God wanted to use what I had been learning about gardening to convict and instruct me about certain habits in my own life. What caught my attention was this: "Let our gardener, God, landscape you with the Word, making a salvation-garden of your life" (James 1:21 MSG). The picture was clear and beautiful: God is the one who gardens our lives! He tends

the soil. He plants the seed of his Word. He grows us into a garden that is both productive and beautiful--healthy, vibrant, and full of life. I long to be a "garden" like this! But this was just the beginning of my trip down the rabbit-hole of biblical gardening metaphors.

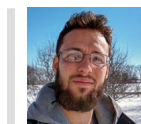
Jesus, in the Parable of the Sower, compares good soil to "one who hears the word and understands it" (Matthew 13:23 ESV) or "those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart" (Luke 8:15 ESV). So in other words,



if our hearts contain good soil, when seeds (the true Word of God) "fall" on us, we hold tight to them! We embrace them fully and also nurture a soul environment in which they can grow and flourish--producing the "salvation-garden" I read about in James. But here's the thing: there are lots of different kinds of seeds that love to grow in the soil of our hearts. Any time you have bare soil, stuff is going to grow. If you clear the land, weeds are opportunistic and they'll grow in any soil

they have available. That's why in the world of regenerative agriculture, it's so important to make sure that soil is always covered--even if it's only with a mulch or cover crop.

What are "weeds" in our lives? For me, I begin to see weeds of fear, lust, and dejection grow in my heart when I spend too much time devouring the media via news, Facebook, and YouTube. Especially in these troublesome times, the only way to combat these weeds of destruction is by centering our time and affections on the One who desires to make us "like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither" (Psalm 1:3 ESV).



Karl grew up in Ecuador and recently served in Flint, Michigan. He and his wife Allison are settling into life in Hicksville, Ohio where they help with the family bakery. They have two young daughters.



Plant for the Harvest

BY PHIL MAUST



A new growing season is fast approaching. Last year's harvest is completed and the winter has come, and is going. While fields and gardens are now dead and desolate, an opportunity is coming to plant another crop—to prepare the soil and plant the seed.

However, the planting is not the goal, nor the purpose. Instead, the planting is in anticipation of the harvest. Without the harvest, what is the purpose of planting? And yet, the farmer can do everything right in preparing the soil and planting the seed, and still experience a crop failure. The weather is out of his control. Maybe too cold and wet, or perhaps too hot and dry.

For the past several years, CMC has been focusing on the mission of "Mature and Multiply." Intentional plans have emerged to encourage and facilitate church planting and growth. There is a vision of a coming harvest, and the vision has been growing. We have been seeing the start of the harvest.

We will likely be forced to face some issues we would really prefer not to address.

Yet a certain resistance, or reluctance, seems to be among us sometimes. Yes, I have experienced some within myself. Growth and change are sometimes uncomfortable. It can be quite costly in money, time, work and comfort. We will likely be forced to face some issues we would really prefer not to address. I recall, perhaps 30 years ago in a Sunday School class, a statement was made by one who was thankful that Maple Glen Mennonite Church had never had to deal with the issue of divorce. A comment was made by another that he hopes the time comes when we have to face it. Not from within, but if the church is effective it will come, since it is all around us. In today's society, divorce seems quite small compared to some other issues.

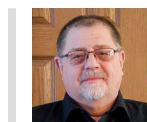
In Matthew 13, Jesus gave the Parable of the Sower. Seed was sown in the field, some fell where it grew but did not produce a crop and some grew and produced 30, 60 or even

100 times an increase. In the Great Commission we are commanded to go and teach (spread the seed to) all nations. A number of translations say to "make disciples." In Acts 1, Jesus said to start at home (Jerusalem) and expand to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Let each of us start this new season with a determination to help our fellow beggars find the Bread of Life.

Jesus' intent was for all Christians to be disciple-makers. Too many times we have relegated this task primarily to a few. While it may be an effective practice to have a few "full-time disciple-makers," Jesus did not intend for this to be carried out fully by mercenaries, but by every one of us who has experienced the new birth and has the Holy Spirit. Max Jones, a chaplain in the Florida prison system, defined witnessing as, "One beggar telling another beggar where to find bread." Face it, every one of us was a sinful beggar, starving spiritually. Let each of us start this new season with a determination to help our fellow beggars find the Bread of Life.

A good seed, when planted in the ground will grow and multiply. Let us sow the seed of God's love and nurture the fruits thereof to maturity. Let us depend on the Holy Spirit to prepare the soil and supply the sun and the rain. There will be no harvest without the planting. Make plans for the harvest, but don't wait to plant until the combine is greased. In other words, plan for the future, but also work today.



Phil has served 26 years as a chaplain in the Pennsylvania prison system. He and his wife Cindy attend Maple Glen Mennonite Church in Grantsville, Maryland. Together they have served 41 years in prison and jail ministry.



Understanding Biblical Prophecy

BY MATT SHOWALTER

God spoke to me at the Toronto Airport Vineyard.

I write those words with some trepidation since I have wrestled to hear God's voice over the years. Nevertheless, that moment in Toronto is a time I will never forget. I was 19 and wanted to experience the power of the Holy Spirit in my life. It was the mid '90's and the "holy laughter" of the Toronto Blessing was making headlines, not just in the church press. (Check out the Wikipedia page on the Toronto Blessing!) Toronto wasn't too far from central Ohio so I hopped in the car with a friend, and we headed to Canada for the weekend.

I remember walking into the service with expectation. I wanted to laugh, cry, feel something, feel anything. The band was playing, and I joined in with the worship. At that moment I felt like the Lord said to me, "Matt, what are you doing here?" I tried to explain to him that I wanted to experience him and his presence in new and fresh ways. But all I kept hearing was, "What are you doing here?" The epiphany that I received at Toronto was not a special time of laughter in God's presence. It was a deep-seated realization that God could touch me wherever I may be. I did not have to go to Toronto to be blessed!

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But how does God speak to us? I said that God spoke to me, but in saying that, I realize that I am treading on controversial territory. On the one side, we have the John MacArthurs of the church who call us to be wary of our Charismatic impulses. Cessationists like MacArthur emphasize the idea that God has spoken to us through Scripture, and we should not be expecting further revelation.

On the other side, we have the Pentecostal camp who long for new and fresh words from the Holy Spirit. I'll admit, if pushed to pick a side, I come down on the Pentecostal end of things, but I've also wrestled with this notion of hearing God's voice. He may have spoken through the prophets, but how does he speak to us today?

I believe that part of the answer lies in why God spoke to the prophets. We tend to think about prophecy as future oriented knowledge. In Amos 3:7 we are told that, "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets." But it is in the previous chapter we see why God is revealing his plans. In this case, his plans involved judgment:

For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed (Amos 2:6b-7a NIV).

Yes, the Lord reveals his plans to the prophets, but the reason prophecy is given is not primarily to tell people about what is going to happen. If that were the case, prophecy would be nothing more than a sanctified tarot card reading. "If only I knew which horse to bet on in tomorrow's race, then I could really make money!"

No, the purpose of this prophecy of Amos is to tell Israel what is, and what their response to that reality needs to be.

This idea rings true as I look at the church today. No matter where we come out on the Cessationist-Pentecostal spectrum, we need to remember that the prophet's call is focused on how we live in the present. In the context of telling us what needs to be, we do get hints as to what will be, but it would be wrong for us to get hung up on the "what is to come." The only reason we are being told "what is to come" is so that it will affect our inclinations, our habits, our rituals, our deeds, our works, our attitudes.

Prophecy should affect the way that we live now as Kingdom citizens. As we seek to hear God's voice, let us not forget why he so often spoke to the prophets, and why he so often speaks to us. I had to go to Toronto to realize that God could speak to me anywhere, but since then it has been a lifetime of listening carefully to discern how I should then live. In the here. In the now.



Matt Showalter is Dean of Students at Rosedale Bible College. As an ordained CMC minister, he serves on the leadership team at Agape Community Fellowship in Hilliard, Ohio. He and his wife Colleen have five children.



To Honor and Glorify the King

BY MADALYN SCHRADER



Celebrating Four RI Workers

Rosedale International (RI) recently celebrated four significant personnel milestones. Within the past year, Kevin, Sheryl, and Tom reached twenty years of service with RI, and Candice reached fifteen. Join us as we honor their work and look toward their futures with the agency!



Kevin's service with RI began in 1993 on a Summer Witness in Mission team to Russia. Since then, Kevin has served in several roles, including graphic designer, worker to Spain, and Short-Term Programs

Director. He is currently RI's Mediterranean Regional Director.

Kevin remembers his time as Short-Term Programs Director fondly, and considers his family's time in Spain to be emotionally and spiritually defining. In every role, Kevin has learned the importance of living with eternal perspective. "Everything we do and say is to honor and glorify the King. We live for the day when we'll stumble across the finish line and into his arms."

While Kevin hopes to return to the field himself one day, he is grateful to support and encourage RI workers as Regional Director. He has a passion to see the Great Commission fulfilled, and is excited by RI's vision to take the gospel into the world. "Someday every nation, tongue, and people group will have heard that Jesus is King. It's special to be part of an agency that works towards that."



Sheryl has spent her years with RI in Ecuador. Since 1985, she has served the country as a nurse, a teacher, and now an advocate and provider for at-risk children.

Through her efforts, the Shekinah Foundation, a home for young victims of neglect and abuse, was founded. Sheryl moved to the States in 2002 for an extended break, but returned to Ecuador in 2015 to continue her work at the Foundation.

A highlight of Sheryl's work in Ecuador has been nurturing spiritual growth in others. It's a joy for her to watch the Foundation's children—seven of whom were recently baptized—grow and change as they learn about Jesus. "Seeing the transformations in their lives has been a blessing."

As she looks toward the future, Sheryl is excited to continue nourishing the spiritual growth of her twenty-nine wards with regular Bible study and verse memorization. She has also enjoyed becoming a mother and grandmother with the adoption of a teen girl and her daughter.

Tom and Candice first served with RI in 1996 as part of a REACH team to Ecuador. A few years later, Tom joined RI as Director of Communications. During that time, the couple felt called to Thailand, and moved their young family there in 2006. They have served as long-term workers and leaders of the work in Bangkok ever since.

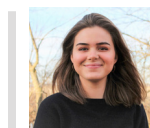


Over the years, they've taken on more leadership: Tom serves as Asia Regional Director, and Candice worked as Staff Writer before taking responsibility for Member Care in the region.

As Tom and Candice look back on their service, they see many moments of God's provision. Tom is grateful for the relationships their family has built over the years in the office and on the field. Candice feels blessed to have raised their three children in a new culture. "In all the change, God's faithfulness stands out to me. He's always provided, and we've always felt secure in him."

As they look towards the future, Tom plans to continue teaching, and Candice feels fulfilled by her work with refugees. They will also step into a new stage of life as their daughter begins college in the States. Due to COVID-19, travel plans are tentative, and Tom and Candice welcome your prayers as they make decisions.

Rosedale International is grateful to Kevin, Sheryl, Tom, and Candice for their years of dedication and service. Their work to serve others and further the gospel has been invaluable to many across the globe. Please join us in celebrating and lifting them up in prayer as they continue their work for the Kingdom.



Madalyn lives in Rosedale, Ohio. She recently graduated from Grace College & Seminary and serves as Media Coordinator at Rosedale International.