



THE PATH TO MATURITY

BY BECKY COMBEE

My husband Wayne was raised on a small farm, and to this day, his love of gardening is evident in our yard. In the spring, the blooms of red amaryllis lilies, which once belonged to my mother, adorn our flowerbeds with an array of begonias, geraniums, iris, and blood lilies. It is a sight to behold. You can never doubt the creative hand of God when you look out on such a beautiful display.

We nurture this array of flowers all year long, and it is a tremendous amount of work. Some bulbs must be replanted, some replaced, and of course, new bulbs and seeds are added every year. In addition, there is weeding, watering, and fertilizing to do. There is always a lot of work, but if it is not done, we will miss the pageant of shapes and colors. I cannot imagine a year without the deep red of the amaryllis, the shades of lavender from the iris, and the orange tones of the begonias. There are also whites, pinks, and corals infused into this great bouquet of color.

God's Word is an eternal seed!¹ **Just as we carefully tend our natural garden, we must care for the seed of God's Word.** It must be planted in our spirit. The apostle Paul cautions us to be no longer children, but to grow up in Christ.² Certainly, we cannot grow and mature in God without the seed of His Word working mightily in us. We must read and mediate on God's promises daily, so that the precious seed of His word fills our heart.

I PLANTED A SEED

BY SUZANNE D. WILLIAMS

*And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth . . . **it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs . . .** (Mk 4:30-32)*

I plant seeds in my garden, expecting them to become so much more than they appear to be. Rolling them around in my palm, they don't look like much, and, in fact, are easy to lose hold of. The wind or a sudden movement sometimes tosses one onto the ground amongst other tiny particles where it's gone forever. But if I can just hang on long enough to place it where I want it to grow, I will, one day, reap abundant things.

There's a process to planting. My grandfather was a farmer, and long before he dropped the seed in the ground, he prepared the soil to receive it. He would take into account the land's ability to retain moisture. In low spots, he'd make great hills and plant the seeds on top. He would also consider the type of seed. Was he planting tomatoes or green beans or corn?

Different seeds have different requirements. You can plant beans close together, but corn needs space. Knowledge was involved. He had to know how deep to plant the seed. Most of my flower seeds only need to be barely covered. I'll dust them

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When Jesus taught the parable of the sower to His disciples, He categorized four types of people who hear the Word of God. When we study this parable as recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke, we note that only one of these four hearers matured and produced fruit. There is no doubt that it was his relationship to the Word that caused this hearer to mature. Together, these three gospels record that he received, understood, and kept the Word he was hearing. Doesn't that explain the path to maturity?

In contrast, the first hearer walked on the seed of God's Word. This level of **DISINTEREST** prevented his growth in God. The second hearer gladly received the Word of God, but retreated when persecution arose. He was not rooted and grounded in God's Word so he was easily **DISCONNECTED** from its life and power. The third

hearer was **DISTRACTED** by riches and pleasure. Although he had begun to mature and bear fruit, he became unfruitful.

When we disconnect our lives from the Word of God whether by disinterest, antagonism, or worldly priorities, we alienate ourselves from the bounty of God's blessings. We must then ride out the storms of life under our own power – a tragic mistake. Life will always present challenges, but only by the power of God's Word and Spirit can we overcome.

As a mature Christian, we are able to stand through every difficulty. Although the world will not rescue us, and ignorance sometimes holds us captive, we have learned one thing—GOD IS FOR US. Therefore, with the apostle Paul, we boldly declare, "If God is with us, no one can defeat us."³ With this promise in our heart, we are assured of victory. We reach for full growth in Christ with our great God on our side!



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with soil and think to myself how flimsy it seems. Birds, rain, any number of things can disturb the seed before it has a chance to sprout.

And that's the most important part. **The biggest portion of growing things is in the waiting.** On the surface, nothing looks different. I know I put the seed there. I know I've watered it, and the sun has done its job. But most of the "becoming" is up to the seed itself.

Faith says, "I planted the seed. I believe it will sprout." Faith protects the seed, fencing the area from foot traffic or pets. Sprouts, when they finally emerge are fragile, their tiny roots holding them upright in the barest amount of soil. They have potential to become something great, but to get there, I must keep tending the garden.

*We do not want you to become lazy, but to be like those **who believe and are patient**, and so receive what God has promised. (Heb 6:12 GNT)*

Different plants need different types of fertilizer and varying amounts of water and sunlight. A citrus tree has different requirements from cabbage plants. All of them need patience.

Faith alone, my ability to plant the seed, to know what will make it grow to its best, isn't enough. There's that waiting again.

Some years, one thing grows better than another. I like the change. I like the challenge, late summer looking back and feeling accomplishment that my efforts brought me happiness. After all, that is the goal, that whatever we face, God brings it to success – if we'll believe and stand in faith over the seeds in our hearts. If we'll cultivate the garden, we'll have a harvest when the time is right.⁴

There's no instant growth. I can buy potted plants, already at a certain height. They still need time to put down roots and establish themselves. They will still require the right amount of water and fertilizer. Weeds will still sprout around them if I don't take the time to pull them out. But if I do, if I simply obey God's Word, then that flower I long to see will, one day, be in full bloom.

That's the way it works. God is faithful to keep His promise, every time. As long as I believe and act, patiently waiting, then what I've planted will become great things, and someone will see the photos and say, "How did you do that?"

Well, let me tell you ... I planted a seed.

¹1Pe 1:23 ²Eph 4:14-15 ³Rm 8:31 NCV ⁴Mk 4:28-29