

Taking the Time to Love

By GINA SUTPHIN

As a gardener, I'm aware of how many things are necessary for success when you "put your hand to the plow." Some of my knowledge was gained by growing up next door to my great grandfather's farm, and some through the countless hours of summertime chores helping tend our family garden. However, much of what I now know and practice came through the study of scientific information. Data. Facts and figures compiled by those who have firsthand experience with events that point to the truth.

Nature so closely mimics our everyday lives. I find the more I pay attention to it and apply it to life, the more I grow on a personal level. But sometimes we just get side tracked. We lose our focus on the specifics due to surrounding circumstances. We forget the things we know and then wonder why our lives and relationships aren't growing.

Last fall a gardener friend gave me some seeds she'd gathered from her native wild flower beds. Many of these seeds need to go through cold stratification. This is a process in which the seed must endure a specific number of days in winter temperatures before it can begin to grow. Being busy, I got behind schedule and forgot to plant the seeds in time to ensure enough cold days before spring. Since nature could no longer provide what they needed, I put them in my refrigerator. This would keep them at a consistent temperature long enough to trigger germination when planted.

As I watched the calendar fly by, planting day arrived in the middle of many other things needing my attention. Hastily, I forced in time to work in the flowerbed. I ripped out weeds and even pulled up some beneficial plants. I didn't have time to transplant them to another location. I prepared the soil and calculated the growing areas for each seed based on the color pattern I wanted to create. I hurriedly got the seeds in the ground and hustled on to my other tasks. I even felt a little irritated towards an activity I normally enjoy very much.

Every day after that, I ran toward the deadlines I was facing, until I finally reached the finish and allowed myself to collapse and rest. I ventured out into the yard where I could be free to just wander with no looming pressure to dash off to responsibilities. And there was my little flowerbed. Just dirt and some straggling weeds. Not even a hint of a seedling starting to grow.

Confused and disappointed, I couldn't understand what went wrong. Did I not give them enough days in the cold? Had I not chosen the location correctly for the amount of sun they needed? Nothing made sense because none of my seeds grew, even though I planted more than one variety. Over the next few days I wandered past, shaking my head at the investment of time and work that yielded no result.

Then one day I stopped. I wanted to really look at that empty bed with frustration. And it dawned on me. I never took the time from my busyness to water the seeds! The most basic of all needs—water—had been neglected in my overly scheduled days. Not only had my efforts been lost but also the effort of my gardener friend who had given me the seeds in the first place.

As I stood there staring at the dirt, again I realized how much nature is like life. When I am worn down and tired, I forget to love. I forget to offer a kind word instead of a critical thought. How many times have I looked at someone and thought: Why won't you grow? You've been placed at the right depth and location for where you are at in life. And I have even spent my own precious time ripping out your weeds! And yet there they stay, withering because they are drought stricken from lack of love.

When we allow ourselves to become overloaded with the tasks of life, we lose track of the most basic things we know to do. Things that should be second nature, that maybe we've known since childhood. Things we've spent our time and devotion studying, like the words of people who had firsthand experience with events that point to the Truth. Plants need water. People need love.

This summer, that bed will most likely stay bare. I water it daily in hopes that a few seeds have survived my harsh treatment. Even if any did, they will surely never reach the potential they originally held. At least not this season, or the next.

I have to live with the consequences of my actions, both in gardening and in life. Some seeds and relationships can be saved but may take a great deal more nurturing to see them flourish. Sometimes you are just left with patches of dry dirt and weeds when all that was needed was a little water, a little love.

I won't feel the joy of my flowerbed overflowing with blooms this year, but now I will remember to reflect on the basics. If I can do that, there will be many more opportunities in life for the seeds I plant to blossom.

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Questions for Digging Deeper

1. As a camp counselor, your focus and attention is directed towards many different things. Schedules, other staff, activities, the campers, etc. By what standard can you determine their importance?

2. As a follow-up to the previous question, what would you say your primary reason for being at camp is?

2. How do you think Jesus prioritized His ministry on Earth? (Back up your answer with Scripture!)

3. If you've been a camp counselor during previous years, can you recall a time where you made the *wrong choice* and missed a chance to display the love of God at camp?

4. If you've never been a camp counselor before, what steps might you take in order to prevent a wrong choice when it comes to loving those around you?

5. Once you've determined what things should take up your greatest focus, how are you going to hold yourself accountable at camp? Or, how might you refocus yourself if you get off track?

6. What examples do you find in Scripture of God's people taking the time to love? (Hint: A man named Paul had a lot to show AND tell on the issue!)

Please take some time to pray about this in order to prepare your heart. At camp, in the business and the bustle, it'll be easy to lose focus on the people around you. You'll be tempted to look inwards, to your own needs, instead of looking towards the needs of others. But oh, it's so incredibly heartbreaking to look back on a week of camp and regret opportunities missed. **We want you to be alert and ready for all opportunities that might come your way.** Praise the Lord that we have His Love constantly flowing inside our hearts!