

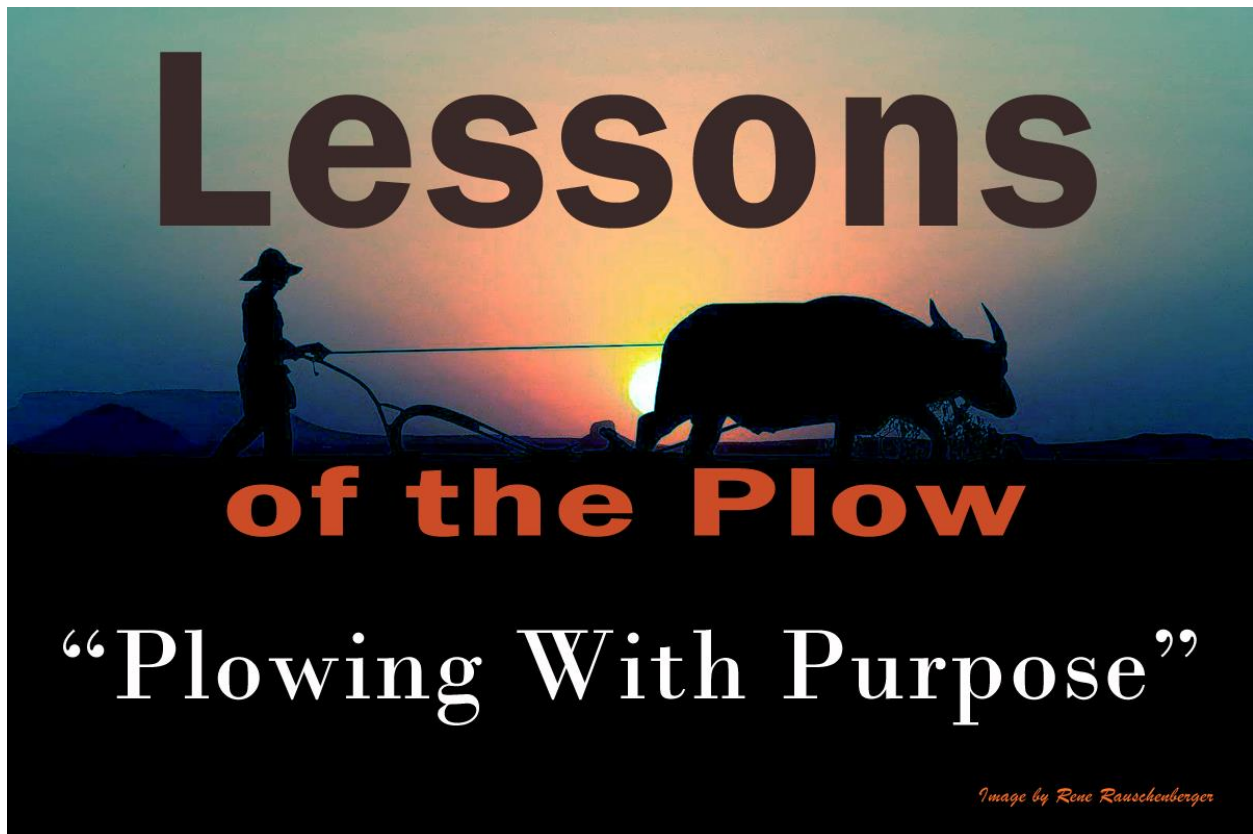
September 25

“Plowing with Purpose”

Isaiah 28:24

**When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually?  
Does he keep on breaking up and working the soil?**

At some point we have to stop plowing and start planting.



Special Music: “Who I’m Meant To Be”

Anthem Lights

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVb80JEQGIQ>

## **THE FARMER**

Taking a worn handkerchief from his back pocket, Travis wiped the sweat and dust from his forehead and out of his eyes. Where the sweat and dust had found each other in the crossing crevasses of his face, dark mud had formed making him look older than he actually was. He removed his straw hat with a certain degree of reverence and then turned off the tractor. Resting his forearms on the steering wheel, he sat in the hard metal seat watching the sun go down behind the mountains. It was his favorite moment when he was plowing. The rays of the sun were yellow, moving to orange, and finally red, casting long shadows across the field. The sod had been turned in neat rows and was ready for planting. His work for the day was done and God had rewarded him with a glorious sunset, one to rival any of those in the past.

He quietly realized, even though he had turned the tractor off, he was still holding the clutch down with his left foot. Slowly he raised his boot and felt the blood rush back into his leg. His skin tingled and there was a noticeable weakness in his muscles. He just didn't have the strength he used to have.

"I've sure have been doing this a long time, Lord, and I sure do appreciate you being by my side every time I plow. I hate to admit it, Lord, but I'm tired. Still, I will keep plowing as long as you keep gas in my tank and keep giving me sunsets like this one."

He stepped from the tractor and walked over to the newly plowed field. Reaching down, he filled his hands with the black earth and raised it to his nose.

There was nothing on earth that could compare to the scent of freshly turned sod. Fall was on the horizon and the trees had already started to turn. The old oak was getting yellow in its leaves, and it reminded him of when he had first helped his grandfather plow this very field. It was just before his eighth birthday. Sitting in his grandfather's lap, he had imitated every motion his grandpa had gone through; push the clutch, set the transmission to first gear, drop the plow, fix his eyes on the old oak, and slowly lift the clutch and begin to plow. The sun was hot, but his grandpa had given him a new floppy straw hat to wear. Sweat had run down his face and stung his eyes. He was exhausted even though he was only going through the motions with his grandfather. Two years later, he was plowing this field without his grandfather's help. Looking today at that grand old oak tree reminded him of all the things his grandpa had taught him.

“Focus your eyes on the oak, boy. Focus your eyes on the Oak. Don't take your eyes off that oak. That oak is your friend and your guide.”

Travis' dad had died when he was two, but he knew that his dad had plowed this same field and that his dad had told him the very same thing. “Never take your eyes off that old oak.”

When Travis was ten, sitting in church with his mom and his grandfather, he had heard the minister say, “Always keep your eyes on Jesus. Jesus is our lamp post, our guide, our rock, and our salvation. As long as we keep our eyes on Jesus, we cannot get lost, and our lives will always point to truth.”

When they had returned home, Travis had looked up at his grandfather and said, “Jesus is like our old oak, the one we use when plowing, isn’t he Grandpa?”

“Indeed, he is, boy. Indeed, he is,” Travis’ grandfather had said in a gravelly voice. Goodness, he missed his grandfather’s voice.

Coming out of his reverie, Travis watched as the last blood orange rays of the sun dipped behind the mountain. He had set the blades of the plow for winter wheat. In a few days he would hitch the planter to the tractor and start planting seed. The winter wheat would give him enough feed for the livestock through the cold months ahead. There would probably be enough to sell to other farmers as well. He even planned on gleaning some for thrashing and milling into flour for Margaret, his wife.

For a minute, he drifted back into his reverie. When had he learned how to set the plow so that he could plant winter wheat? Somehow, he knew that the plow had to be set just right so that he could plant the seed in a way that would provide a greater yield when he harvested. But how did he know how to do that? It was almost instinctual to him after all these years.

Aww... His grandfather had taught him. That was the only possible answer. Grandpa had taught him everything he knew about farming. Even as the world changed around him, as technology progressed, as new implements and fertilizers became available, the basics always stayed the same. The basics that never changed. “Always set your plow with anticipation of what you are intending to plant. Always maintain your tools. Always remember that plowing is

**intentional with an intentional crop. Always plow with a purpose. And most of all, keep your eye fixed on the old oak tree. Plowing is useless if you do not include Jesus in your plans.”**

**He had never forgotten that. “Plow with purpose.” Travis took one last look as the silhouette of the mountain, gave a sigh, and climbed back on his tractor. “This was a good day’s work,” he said to himself. Giving a little grin and tipping his hat to the oak, he said a short prayer of thanks, “Thank you, Jesus, for plowing with me today and keeping me straight.” With that, he wiped his face again with handkerchief, placed his hat back on his head, and restarted the engine. With a dark puff from the exhaust, the vibration of the engine sent a weak shiver through every bone in his body. He pointed the tractor toward the barn knowing Margaret would have dinner waiting. Today had been a good day for plowing.**

I had an uncle who was a preacher in the Texas Panhandle and I loved him very much. It was a small, rural church sitting a couple of miles outside of town. He knew his congregants well. Most of them were farmers and ranchers. He learned their ways so that he could better serve them. I remember walking in an okra field at one point when I was about fourteen. The okra was just about ready for harvest. "I want to show you something, Walt," he said to me. We walked a little farther into the field and he pulled a random head of okra from a vine. He then took out his pocketknife. Looking close at the okra stem, he made a cut. He then held the cut end of the okra up to me and asked me what I saw. Clear as day, the cut end of that okra stem spelled out GOD. He then went on to inform me that any piece of okra cut at that same point will spell GOD. I cannot tell you the secret. I can't get it to work. He obviously knew something that he wasn't sharing with me. But even if he had, it would not have been the point. It would have cheapened the message and turned it into some kind of slight-of-hand. He passed away before telling me the secret and I am kind of glad that he took the secret with him.

You see, the message of God is simple, but never cheap. Plowing with purpose will cost you everything that you are. While I was distracted by the novelty of the okra, I wasn't thinking about the farmer who got up early, plowed the field, planted the seed, and watered the plants, all so my dear, precious uncle could show me a trick. No, the greater miracle was all around me. Rows and rows of okra that would find their way to kitchen tables everywhere. That okra field was a testament to the faith and dedication of a farmer who chose to

purposely grow okra in order to feed people. I was so busy cutting okra stems trying to replicate my uncle's prestidigitation and finding the word God in the okra stem, that I lost sight of the fact that God was all around me preparing that field for harvest. Both the farmer and God were about to reap the harvest that came from hard work and nurturing that field throughout its season.

What does it mean to "Plow With Purpose?" Does it mean that when we put our hand to the plow, we are working to further God's Kingdom? Does it mean that we are fulfilling a predefined intention? Does it mean focusing on the job at hand and excluding anything that might prevent us from bringing the intent to completion? Purpose can vary from one person to the next. While one person might plant seeds of love, another might plant seeds of sedition. Not all plowing is of God.

Job tells us in Chapter 4, verse 8:

**"According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity**

**And those who sow trouble harvest it."**

Where have we set our plow? What's the plan for harvest time? If we don't know, we may as well take the tractor back to the barn. With that same thought, are we setting our plow so that we can plant mercy, love, and grace? If we plant mercy, love and grace and then nourish them, then we will reap mercy, love and grace. But if we plow iniquity and nourish iniquity, what are we going to be reaping come harvest time? Iniquity reaps iniquity. Pain reaps pain. Anger reaps anger. We cannot plow iniquity and expect to reap mercy. We cannot

**gather the materials to build a dining table and expect to end up with a rocking chair. We can't buy the ingredients to make a cake and expect a roast chicken to come out of the oven. Why, why, why do we plant sorrow, hate, despair, and malice expecting to harvest joy, grace, mercy, and peace? Too often, we want to live one way, but expect to reap a harvest of something else.**

**Think back to our farmer. What happens if he can't make up his mind about what he wants to harvest knowing that his time is running out. In desperation, he makes a quick, non-deliberative decision and starts plowing for, let's say, beans. But he gets to the end of his plowing and realizes that he doesn't like growing beans, so he resets his plow for corn, and he plows the field again. But then he remembers that his soil is not very conducive to growing corn, so he resets his plow to potatoes. Then his plowing window runs out even though he hates growing potatoes, so he lets the field go fallow until the next planting season and the process starts all over again. The farmer is never short of work, but he never harvests anything either.**

**If we are ever going to have a harvest, we have to stop plowing at some point and start planting. If we take the time to sit down with Jesus and talk about what He thinks we need to plant, we avoid a lot of that indecisiveness. Please don't misunderstand. God doesn't get angry with us when we start over, re-engage, rethink our plans, especially if we include Him in those discussions. But if our ultimate goal is to move the Kingdom of God forward, if we want to harvest the blessings that God has waiting for us, we have to make up our minds and focus on what God needs and wants from us. When we figure out what God**



wants by taking the time to converse with Him through prayer, we don't wind up with an over-plowed, fallow field unfit for planting. It is beyond sad when we look around us with nothing to harvest and have to admit to God that we never did get around to planting anything because we were too busy trying to make up our minds.

But how does that all translate into reality? It really takes on many forms, but it is an ongoing process throughout our lives. God made us all farmers, farmers with a purpose. We may decide that God wants us to be doctors, so we have to decide when to start plowing the field in preparation for our education. God may tell us that we are gifted mechanics, so we have to look for opportunities to gain the skills necessary to become mechanics. We have to plow the field in search of a place to work around other mechanics, maybe take on an apprenticeship. We might find out in our conversations with God that He would like for us to be writers. We have to plow the fields in our lives to prepare us to learn and plant seeds to become successful writers. God may tell us that we need to home school our children. We have to plow the fields in preparation for doing that. We can't expect a great harvest from these activities if we are unwilling to spend the time in plowing and preparation.

I am in no way saying that a person won't be successful without making plans, without plowing the field. What I am saying is that if we want to reap the greatest harvest for the glory of God, He expects us to engage in the time and activity of preparing the soil of our lives to receive the seeds in such a way that

they will have the greatest chance of producing the blessings, skills, and harvest that God has in mind for us.

Ultimately, we all want to give God our best. But we can't give Him our best if we don't prepare in advance in order to harvest our best. Do we really want to stand before God and bring him a half-finished life just because we refused to listen and prepare ourselves for lives of service in the capacity He has set aside for us? If He has given us the skillset to succeed, and then spoken into our lives with opportunity and resources, are we going to present those opportunities and resources back to Him, rather than the harvest that He has prepared for us? That's a lot like saying, "Here God. I've got all these bags of seed. Rather than give you a portion of the harvest, I'm just going to skip the plowing and planting (It's way too much work), and I'm just going give the seed directly to you to do with what you want. You are probably a better farmer than me anyway." Do we believe that God finds this acceptable? Isn't that a lot like the "Parable of the Talents," where the servant that was give the least, just buried them to return them to his master when he returned? Do we take what God has given to us and hide it away rather taking the time to plow our fields so that crop flourishes into something that God can be proud of and find use for?

Every time we plow a field in our lives, we take a risk. Every time we plow a field, we are praying for the resources to produce the harvest. Farming is a risky business. Always has been. If you want to be a farmer, it is an all-in proposition, nothing held back. Go big or go home. And it is very much the same with our Christian lives. Too often, we approach plowing in our lives with trepidation,

wondering if God is really going to do His part. But that isn't God's problem. That is our problem.

Many years ago, I sang in a choir at a church that I dearly love. But our choir director chose a piece of music for one Sunday that just drove me bananas. It had a catchy tune and demanded a lot of energy. It was fun to sing. I had no problem with that. But the name of the song was, "God Has Never Failed Me, Yet." The "God Has Never Failed Me" words didn't bother me. They lifted me. But I truly hated singing that "Yet" word. It was as if we were anticipating the possibility that God might, at some point, let us down. But God doesn't let anyone down... ever. To do so would break trust, break faith. And once trust is broken, it is extremely difficult to earn back. And God knows that.

God expects for us to trust Him. And for that reason, "Yet" is never a part of the equation. We trust Him with our lives. We trust Him with our dreams. We trust Him with our expectations. We trust him with our families and our finances. If that bond of trust is broken, it is on our end, not God's. And all of us fall short at some point. And when we fall short, our blessings fall short as well. We don't plow with full conviction, holding back some of our seed in case something goes wrong. That isn't how God does things. God's blessings flow when we dedicate all that we are and all that we have to His purpose.

That is why we need to plow with purpose. We need to give it everything we got. We need plow believing that God knows exactly what He is doing and that His harvest, His purpose, will be revealed.

**This week, I want us all to think about that field that each of us sees before us. The tractor is warmed up. The sun is peaking out over the mountain. God has let us know that it is time to plow. What are we prepared to do? Are we going to go all in and plow that field that God has set before us? Or are we going to say “It’s too cold. It’s too wet. I’m not sure if I have the money for the seed. I’m just not ready to make this kind of commitment.” Maybe we just want to sit on the tractor until harvest time without moving from the spot. The choice is ours. God will love us either way. But if we want to enjoy the harvest of blessings that God has in store for us, there is only one answer. We have to plow with purpose, God’s purpose.**

**God bless you all,**

**AMEN**

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