

BLOG – MAY 17, 2013

Deep and Wide — An Adventure in Gardening

Discussion

Today was my day to get all the chores done in the garden before the weather gets too hot. My primary objective was to plant a new lilac bush in the backyard. Having spent the time surveying and locating the perfect spot so that the plant would receive all the right light and shade, I began the process of digging a proper hole.

One of the basics you learn early in gardening is that if you want a plant to develop a strong root system, you have to dig a proper hole — deep and wide; and you need to prepare the hole with the right mix of top soil and other organic matter. Doing these things provides the best growth environment for the new plant, and it provides the gardener with a higher probability of growing a strong and healthy plant.

My adventure began in the middle of a hot Virginia afternoon as I began to dig the hole, deep and wide. Anyone who lives in Virginia knows that the soil here is mostly hard, red, clay—unforgiving clay I might add. Making the adventure even more challenging is that the clay is loaded with rocks of all shapes and sizes. The more I dug, the harder it got; each shovelful of hard clay exposed more rocks. The more I picked and pulled at the rocks, the more I discovered harder and larger rocks underneath, until I found myself staring at the unearthed top of a huge rock. My attempts to avoid or work around obstacles had netted me nothing but a lot of sweat and spent energy.

Taking a moment to get the sweat out of my eyes, I thought about finding a completely different location for the plant in order to avoid all the large and stubborn rocks. But I quickly realized that any other location would be less than ideal with respect to the esthetics of the yard. Furthermore, it was quite likely that any new location would have the same hard clay and rocky soil as the one that I had started with. Resolving to succeed, I pressed ahead with more determination and threw myself fully into the task—finally succeeding in getting the really big rock at the bottom loose and out of the hole. Victory was finally mine!

Having done a quick victory dance, I realized that my task wasn't complete until I filled in the hole with the proper mix of new soil and plant food. Once that was completed, I put the new plant in place and watered it for the first time. I have every confidence that it will grow well under these conditions; and I will maintain a gardener's vigil over it, providing the necessary pruning, weather protection, and water as it grows.

It was in the middle of this afternoon's small adventure that God opened my eyes to a whole world of truths around this small planting exercise. You see, I have been reading Andy Stanley's book "Deep and Wide", and as you can imagine if you have read that book, the parallels between it and planting a new tree are remarkable.

Everything I did, from surveying the landscape to find the perfect spot, to digging a hole deep and wide enough to provide the right growth environment, and then filling that space with the proper top soil, organic matter, plant food and water are all steps that we take when we plant anything new.

Just as with my planting today, you need to identify the perfect spot to plant, and when you dig the hole, it needs to be deep and wide; or whatever you are planting will have little hope of growing. And just as with plants, you will find considerable resistance along the way: small rocks, big rocks, really large rocks, and some tough soil. It takes hard work, determination, and a solid knowledge about planting in order to validate your commitment to planting the plant in that location.

There are other parallels as well, e.g., we do not always get to enjoy what we have planted. In the future, others will probably enjoy it more you or the person that planted it did. For example, thirty years ago, Sherrie and I lived in Colorado; and during our first year in our new home, we took the time to plant a small tree, a house-warming gift from my mother, in the front yard. Today, that "little" tree is a twenty-five foot tall beautiful blue spruce that shades the entire front yard. We enjoyed planting it, but for the past twenty years, others have enjoyed its benefits. The same is true for our work in the Kingdom—planting so that others can harvest and benefit from our work.

Planting is hard work—you get frustrated, and you face resistance at every level as the hole gets deeper and wider. Then, once it is planted, the weather, animals and disease all threaten it. It takes commitment, diligence and a lot of sweat and tears, but what a celebration when all your efforts are ultimately rewarded with a beautiful and thriving plant!

I am encouraged and excited by the vision that our church, Southview, has been blessed with regarding reaching the unchurched; many others here are as well. The Lord has given us a great spot of land to plant His church on. And even though it is full of rocks and hard clay as well, not to mention the warm Virginia climate, God has nevertheless placed us right in the middle of a very fertile field. How exciting, and what an awesome responsibility to think that God has entrusted this to us—how totally awesome is that?!

So, the next time that you are struggling, or when the work seems too hard—just step back, wipe the sweat out of your eyes, and thank God for the both the opportunity and the struggle. Then jump back in, with the knowledge that there is nothing you can imagine that could be more exciting than being a gardener for God!

In Christ,

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