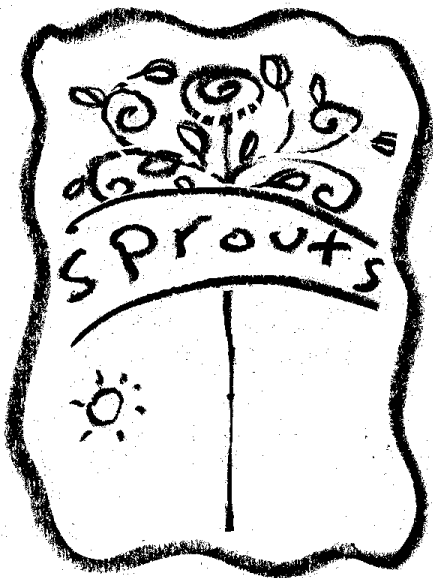


Cultivating Sprouts

Edie Harris

A Growing Guide
for Planting &
Nurturing Sprouts

July 2000



To witness to Jesus Christ in the world and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit

In the last issue of Sprouts I wrote about a “Two for One,” claiming that intercessory prayer was both an Act of Kindness (Compassion) and an Act of Devotion. In this issue I’d like to be even more “radical.” While it is helpful to divide our discipleship living into categories, our spiritual lives really cannot be separated so easily. We are all of one piece in our relationship with God and in the way we live out that relationship.

Works of Faith and Caring (piety and mercy) are just a convenient way to help make sure we get it right and get it all done. They allow accountable disciples to claim two acts in one. After all, Jesus said the most important commandment was loving God and loving neighbor. Our loving response to God’s love and grace encompasses our relationship with all of life, all of creation. In and through nature, we glimpse God’s presence. The patterns and wonders of nature seem to demonstrate God’s power and grace.

All of creation speaks of the omnipresent Creator. We cannot love God without loving our neighbor; neither can we love God without loving all of God’s creation. We work for the preservation of all of God’s creation out of our love for God and our interconnectedness with all of “God-created” creation. As Christians, we are environmentalists, not just altruistically, or because we need oil or wood, or because some animals are “cute.” Keith Warner, in the September 1998 *Earth Letter*, calls us to emulate St. Francis, who didn’t seek to be a steward of God’s creation but to live in it as an integral part of creation. He “saw no separation between loving the Creator and loving all Creation.”

Our relationship with nature should entail values of respect, humility, and honor, rather than the utilitarianism and exploitation often present when we focus on stewardship and the Genesis 1:28 command to “fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion.” When we work with children in the area of nature and environmental concerns (whether as acts of kindness or of justice), we should help them experience creation as sacred. Anne Mize in a May *Earth Letter* article entitled, “Children, God, and Nature,” suggests ways to help foster the spiritual life of children. She strongly emphasizes the need for children to be in touch with nature. She believes that children’s spirituality is more “sensual” and mystic than that of adults who have frequently grown up into a more jaded and isolated view of creation. Children, perhaps more readily than adults, can integrate their nature experiences as acts of worship and devotion that will proceed smoothly into acts of kindness and justice.

As we work with children in Sprouts and other ministries, we need to help them form a holistic spirituality. We cannot live whole lives without realizing that God created and continues to care for all of creation—human and otherwise. We must encourage children to be open to the presence of God in everything and everyone around them; to be open to the mystery and wonder of God’s grace and love in all of God’s creation; and to respond to God’s yearning to be in relationship with them as they live out their discipleship.

Earth Letter, which features excellent articles about nature and Christian spirituality, is published by Earth Ministry, 1305 NE 47th St., Seattle, WA 98105, www.earthministry.org.

Let's Create a Sprouts Network
Exciting things are happening at the General Board of Discipleship. Steve Manskar is now a full-time staffperson wholly devoted to working with accountable discipleship ministries.

Shari McCourt presented Sprouts at the regional event in Wilmington, DE, in April, and I will be at the event in Durham, NC, in November. One of our focuses is on discovering churches with covenant discipleship groups of any age group. We need to be in connection with other churches doing Sprouts! And we need to help each other begin Sprouts ministries. If you are doing Sprouts (or any form of accountable discipleship) in your church, let Steve Manskar know: tollfree 877/899-2780, Ext. 1765, or smanskar@gbod.org.

Edie Harris writes the Sprouts articles for CDQ and co-authored Sprouts: Nurturing Children through Covenant Discipleship (Discipleship Resources).

It Only Takes a Moment

Grace Bradford

Seems like it took so long to make prayer a regular part of my day. It took so long to learn to bless and forgive my enemies and to read the Bible daily—to really read, digest, and internalize what I read. I'm glad I joined a CD group when I did, for it is helping me make devotion, worship, compassion, and justice a part of my daily *thinking*, even when it is not a part of my daily *doing*.

But it only takes a moment to fall back into old habits, to rationalize not spending time with God, to neglect to show compassion or to speak out for justice. It's a journey. You can't do it in a day, a week, or a year.

I'm human, I tell myself, prone to backslide. Random

thoughts lead me into temptation without my even realizing it. It's also the news media—so much bad news, and it's all revealed to me first thing in the morning.

I start my morning off in prayer, but now I'm focusing on the news—political intrigue, car accidents, rioting. Suddenly I'm agreeing with the naysayers: "What's this world coming to?" It only takes a moment to go from peace, love, and joy to doubt, fear, and disappointment.

It's the people around me, I say, who get me off track. I can be having a wonderful conversation with a group of friends and somebody tells a bit of gossip about another. Shall I change the subject, walk away, say something good about the person, pray for the change of conversation, or listen first to the story, and even offer a tidbit of additional information that I have?

In the morning I ask God to help me contribute something good to the universe, but later I'm about to add to the destruction. "Help me, Father," I say to myself. Saying those words gives me the peace and reassurance that God is in charge, providing me with the strength to avoid giving in to the temptation of negative thoughts, words, and actions.

Praying does that—helps us gain strength, feel good, and know that we have to do the right thing with and for all humankind. That's why I need to pray all during the day for anybody and everybody. Everybody is a child of God and everybody needs blessings. I leave it to God to decide what kind.

Paul told us to "pray without ceasing." Prayers, short and long, formal and informal, as well as memorized passages of scripture, texts of hymns, and gospel songs, poems learned back in the first grade—all are excellent substitutes for random thought

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moments. Even the prayers we know so well we don't even have to think about them . . . here's where they fit in. The good thoughts, the creative images, the idle moments appreciating the beauty of nature become prayers in themselves and pour into God's universe a portion of good that is needed in the world.

I can't change the TV morning news. I can't stop the flow of evil in the world. But each day I can pour out more and more deliberate good into the little stream of life that surrounds me, knowing that all of it will flow into that big river of universal love. For the sake of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, I can do this, one moment at a time.

Grace Bradford is editor of Covenant Discipleship Quarterly and author of Guide for Class Leaders (Discipleship Resources, 1999).