

“Soul Cultivation: A Chrysalis Community”

Responsive Reading, “Abundance!”¹

What do you associate with the word, “chrysalis”? I suspect that most of us think of a butterfly chrysalis and the metamorphosis associated with caterpillars and butterflies. So, given that association, what do you think might be meant by “A Chrysalis Community”?

At last night’s campfire, we looked up at the heavens and reminded ourselves that while we are citizens of the United States, an earthly country, our primary citizenship is elsewhere. As a hymn-writer put it at the end of the first World War:

And there’s another country, I’ve heard of long ago.
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know.
We may not count her armies, we may not see her King.
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering.
And soul by soul and silently, her shining bounds increase.
And her ways are ways of gentleness and all her paths are peace.²

Our Presbyterian friends begin their *Westminster Shorter Catechism* with the question, “What is the chief end of mankind?” To which the answer is, “**The chief end of mankind is to love God and to enjoy God forever!**”

As this suggests, and as I’ve pointed out many times, God’s first purpose in our lives is to so redeem and transform our character that we are ready, willing, and eager to spend eternity with God in the New Creation. God’s second purpose in our lives is to join our lives together in a community of faith, a fabric of redeemed relationships, that only God can build—the Kingdom of God. And as these two goals become realized in our lives, we discover, day by day and year by year, what it means to “live and love more abundantly,” which is the theme of this retreat.

As I pondered this meditation, I decided to examine those things in the Bible that are associated with “abundance.” Using Bible software,³ I quickly discovered ten things that the Bible says are abundant. I’ve put them more or less in the order in which we experience them:

1. God’s gift of abundant, faithful LOVE
2. God’s gift of abundant REDEMPTION
3. God’s gift of abundant GRACE
4. God’s gift of abundant LIFE
5. God’s gift of abundant SPIRIT
6. God’s gift of abundant PEACE
7. God’s gift of abundant JOY
8. God’s gift of abundant COMPASSION
9. God’s gift of abundant HARVEST
10. God’s gift of abundant REWARD

I’m going to give a few examples of each from Scripture, and then make a few “so what” reflections

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on October 1, 2017, on retreat at Skycroft Conference Center.

² Cecil Spring-Rice, “I Vow to Thee, My Country,” 1918.

³ I use WORDsearch, www.wordsearchbible.com

1. Abundant, faithful LOVE (God IS Love)

- *I enter your house by the abundance of your faithful **LOVE**; I bow down toward your holy temple in reverential awe of you (Psalm 5:7).*
- *But as for me, LORD, my prayer to you is for a time of favor. In your abundant, faithful **LOVE**, God, answer me with your sure salvation (Psalm 69:13).*
- *I will make known the LORD's faithful love and the LORD's praiseworthy acts, because of all the LORD has done for us—even the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, which he did for them based on his compassion and the abundance of his faithful **LOVE** (Isaiah 63:7).*

2. Abundant REDEMPTION (Jesus is our Redeemer)

- *Israel, put your hope in the LORD. For there is faithful love with the LORD, and with him is **REDEMPTION** in abundance (Psalm 130:7).*
- *Now this is what the LORD says—the one who created you, Jacob, and the one who formed you, Israel—“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1).*
- *For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb (1 Peter 1:18-19).*

3. Abundant GRACE (6x in OT; 125x in NT;

“Grace is what God is like and peace is what happens when you experience it.”)

- *For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of **GRACE** and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! (Romans 5:17).*
- *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:2).*
- *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).*

4. Abundant LIFE (God's Life . . . in US)

- *A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have **LIFE** and have it in abundance (John 10:10).*
- *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and that life was the light of men (John 1:1-4).*

5. Abundant SPIRIT (God's Presence IN us)

- *But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared . . . He poured out his **SPIRIT** on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior so that, having been justified by his grace, we may become heirs with the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7).*

- *If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him (Romans 8:9).*

6. Abundant PEACE (God's Effect in us)

- *Abundant PEACE belongs to those who love your instruction; nothing makes them stumble (Psalm 119:165).*
- *Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don't let your heart be troubled or fearful (John 14:27).*

7. Abundant JOY (God's Purpose in us)

- *You reveal the path of life to me; in your presence is abundant JOY; at your right hand are eternal pleasures (Psalm 16:11).*
- *Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross [that Joy was/is YOU], despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1b-2).*
- *I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete (John 15:11).*
- *For the joyful heart, it is festival always (Proverbs 15:15).*

8. Abundant COMPASSION (God's Touch on us)

- *Answer me, LORD, for your faithful love is good. In keeping with your abundant compassion, turn to me. . . . Be gracious to me, God, according to your faithful love; according to your abundant COMPASSION, blot out my rebellion (Psalm 69:16, 51:1).*
- *The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love. . . . He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our iniquities (Psalm 103:8, 10).*
- *When he went ashore, he saw a large crowd and had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then he began to teach them many things (Mark 6:34).*
- *But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him (Luke 15:20).*

9. Abundant HARVEST (God's Kingdom through us)

- *The HARVEST is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest (Luke 10:2).*
- *Now the one who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will also provide and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your righteousness (2 Corinthians 9:10).*

10. Abundant REWARD (God's Gift to us)

- *The precepts of the LORD are right, making the heart glad . . . in addition, your servant is warned by them, and in keeping them there is an abundant REWARD (Psalm 19:8a, 11).*
- *But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will*

reward you. . . . But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:3-4, 6).

- *Love your enemies, do what is good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High. For he is gracious to the ungrateful and evil. Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful (Luke 6:35-36).*
- *“Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy!” (Matthew 25:21).*

So what are we to do with these abundant blessings of Love, Redemption, Grace, Life, Spirit, Peace, Joy, Compassion, Harvest, and Reward? I’ve called this sermon “Soul Cultivation: A Chrysalis Community,” but there’s more to our journey than simply this. We are in fact in a “chrysalis” stage in this earthly life, being transformed into glory we cannot now imagine . . . but we do not experience this transformation by ourselves.

Remember that God’s two purposes in this world are our personal redemption and transformation, coupled with the creation of a “new humanity,” the Redeemed Society of the Kingdom of God, currently known as “the Church.” One danger we face in life is regarding our lives as “zero-sum.” As you probably know, “zero-sum” means, among other things, that your increase means my decrease, and vice versa. If we live in this way, we will fail to encourage one another toward the spiritual growth God intends for us.

Zero-sum is a way of experiencing life that is scarcity-based, not abundance-based; and as we’ve just seen, “Abundance is God’s Middle Name.” Jesus told us that His purpose is for us to “produce much fruit” (John 15:5), which has to do with introducing other persons to Him so that the Kingdom grows. One of the key places where Jesus made this point is in the parable we often call “The Parable of the Sower”; but this is really more accurately called “The Parable of the Soils”:

*¹³ Then he said to them: "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand all of the parables? ¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ **Some are like the word sown on the path.** When they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word sown in them. ¹⁶ And others are like **seed sown on rocky ground.** When they hear the word, immediately they receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But they have no root; they are short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, they immediately fall away. ¹⁸ Others are like **seed sown among thorns**; these are the ones who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²⁰ **And those like seed sown on good ground** hear the word, welcome it, and produce fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundred times what was sown" (Mark 4:13-20).*

That parable caused me to ponder the matter of “abundance” as it might relate to “soul cultivation” in a “Seedbed Society.” What practical things do we need to do in order to live and love abundantly? It occurred to me that answers might be found in considering what ordinary seed needs in order to grow and to produce a harvest. While I’m no farmer, here are some things that occur to me. I’ll use the diagram as an outline, and will note spiritual components for each part of the diagram, followed by suggestions about how to nurture that component in our personal lives:

SEED: *You have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God (1 Peter 1:23).*

Prescription:

1. Practice spiritual disciplines that create space for God.
2. Befriend silence and solitude so as to make a home for God within.



SUNLIGHT: *“I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).*

Prescription:

1. Be still. Rest. Observe Sabbath.
2. Let God love you.

WATER: *“Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water spring up in him for eternal life” (John 4:13-14).*

Prescription:

1. Learn to delight in conversation with God.
2. If the eternal God tells you something, **write it down!**

NOURISHMENT: *Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that you may grow up into your salvation, if you have tasted that the Lord is good (1 Peter 2:2-3). Solid food is for the mature—for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14).*

Prescription:

1. Read the Bible with your mind and with your heart.
2. Learn from wise spiritual literature, both new and old.

PRUNING: *“Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit” (John 15:2).*

Prescription:

1. If the eternal God tells you not to do something or to stop doing it, **stop**.
2. If the eternal God tells you to do something, **do it**.

The point of all this in terms of horticulture is to produce an abundant harvest, and that’s the point in the spiritual life, too: ²⁰*And those like seed sown on good ground hear the word, welcome it, and **produce fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundred times what was sown**” (Mark 4:13-20).*

There are many ways to assess spiritual maturity, to see how we’re doing as “a Seedbed Society.” We’ve recently spent two months considering “the Fruit of the Spirit,” which is one very

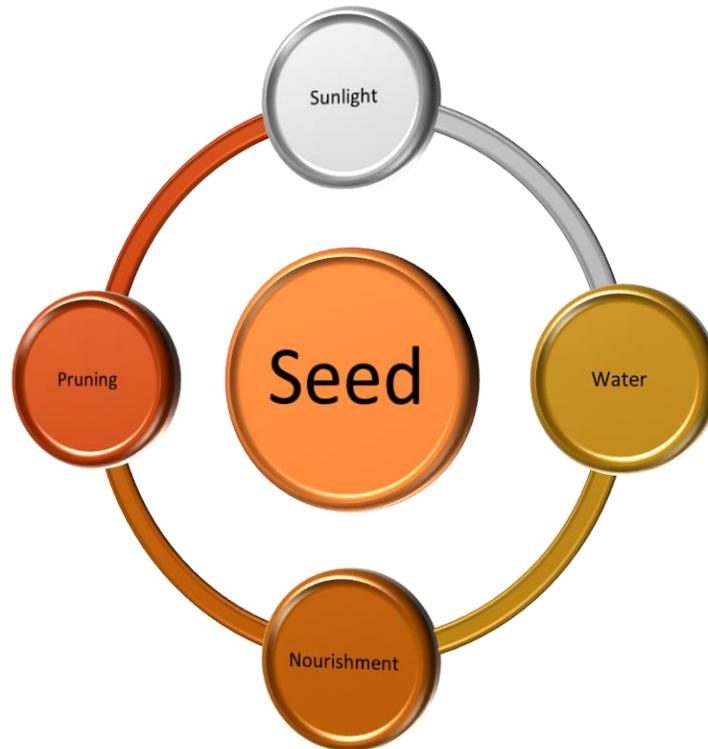
good test for maturity.⁴ Another resource for self-examination is the “Seven-Stage Approach to Soul Cultivation” which is attached to this sermon.

However you choose to evaluate the state of your spiritual maturity, remember that God’s invitation is always to “**Come in farther. Come up higher. Come closer.**” May that be the trajectory of your spiritual journey, and mine, not just on this retreat weekend, but so long as God grants us life on this earth.

Amen, and Amen.

⁴ Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Soul Cultivation



1. **SEED** (1 Peter 1:23):
 - Practice spiritual disciplines that create space for God.
 - Befriend silence and solitude so as to make a home for God within.
2. **SUNLIGHT** (John 8:12):
 - Be still. Rest. Observe Sabbath.
 - Let God love you.
3. **WATER** (John 4:13-14):
 - Learn to delight in conversation with God.
 - If the eternal God tells you something, **write it down!**
4. **NOURISHMENT** (1 Peter 2:2-3; Hebrews 5:14):
 - Read the Bible with your mind and with your heart.
 - Learn from wise spiritual literature, both new and old.
5. **PRUNING** (John 15:2):
 - If the eternal God tells you not to do something or to stop doing it, **stop.**
 - If the eternal God tells you to do something, **do it.**

SPIRITUAL DESIRES AND THEIR ACCOMPANYING DISCIPLINES ¹

	Spiritual Discipline	Spiritual Desire
1.	Accountability Partner	To give a regular and honest account of my choices, priorities and temptations to a godly and wise companion who points me to Christ
2.	Bible Study	To know what the Bible says and how it intersects with my life
3.	Breath Prayer	To pray a simple, intimate prayer of heartfelt desire before God
4.	Care of the Earth	To honor the Creator by loving, nurturing and stewarding His creation
5.	Celebration	To take joyful, passionate pleasure in God and the radically glorious nature of God's people, Word, world and purposes
6.	Centering Prayer	To quiet the heart and rest in God alone
7.	Chastity	To revere God by receiving and honoring my body and the bodies of others with purity of thought and action
8.	Community	To express and reflect the self-donating love of the Trinity by investing in and journeying with others
9.	Compassion	To become the healing presence of Christ to others
10.	Confession & Self-Examination	To surrender my weaknesses and faults to the forgiving love of Christ and intentionally desire and embrace practices that lead to transformation
11.	Contemplation	To wake up to the presence of God in all things
12.	Contemplative Prayer	To develop an open, restful receptivity to the Trinity that enables me to always be with God just as I am
13.	Control of the Tongue	To turn the destructive way I use words into authentic, loving and healing speech
14.	Conversational Prayer	To talk naturally and unselfconsciously to God in prayer times with others
15.	Covenant Group	To enter into authentic, confidential and healing relationships with a committed group of fellow pilgrims
16.	Detachment	To nurture the spirit of trust that is attached to God alone
17.	Devotional Reading	To prayerfully encounter and surrender to the Living God through attending to Scripture
18.	Discernment	To delight in and recognize the voice and will of God
19.	Discipling	To be in a relationship where I am encouraged or where I encourage another to become an apprentice of Jesus
20.	Examen	To notice both God and my God-given desires throughout the day
21.	Fasting	To let go of an appetite in order to seek God on matters of deep concern for others, myself and the world
22.	Fixed-Hour Prayer	To stop my work and pray throughout the day
23.	Gratitude	To be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's prompting to live with a grateful heart, cognizant of God's work in my life and my abundant resources

¹ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downer's Grove: IVP Books, 2005), pp. 11-13.

24.	Holy Communion	To be nourished by Christ, tasting the sweet depths of redemption
25.	Hospitality	To be a safe person who offers others the grace, shelter and presence of Jesus
26.	Humility	To become like Jesus and His willingness to choose the hidden way of love rather than the way of power
27.	Inner-Healing Prayer	To assist the emotionally broken and wounded as they seek God for the healing that only He can give
28.	Intercessory Prayer	To turn my concerns and worries into prayer; to enter God's heart for the world and then pray from there
29.	Journaling	To be alert to my life to writing and reflecting on God's presence and activity in, around and through me
30.	Justice	To love others by seeking their good, protection, gain and fair treatment
31.	Labyrinth Prayer	To make a quiet, listening pilgrimage to God
32.	Liturgical Prayer	To open myself to God through established patterns or traditions of written prayers and reading
33.	Meditation	To more deeply gaze on God in his works and words
34.	Memorization	To carry the life-shaping words of God in me at all times and in all places
35.	Mentoring	To accompany and encourage others to grow to their God-given potential
36.	Practicing the Presence	To develop a continual openness and awareness of Christ's presence living in me
37.	Prayer of Recollection	To rest in God, allowing Him to calm and heal my fragmented and distracted self
38.	Prayer Partners	To share the journey of prayer with a trusted companion
39.	Praying Scripture	To allow God to shape my prayer life through the words of Scripture
40.	Prayer Walking	To align myself, while walking in particular places with Christ and His intercession for the Kingdom to come
41.	Rest	To honor God and my human limitations through restful rhythms
42.	Retreat	To make space in my life for God alone
43.	Rule for Life	To live a sane and holy rhythm that reflects a deep love for God and respect for how He has made me
44.	Sabbath	To set apart one day a week for rest and worship of God
45.	Secrecy	To follow the simple and often hidden Way of Christ
46.	Self-Care	To value myself as my heavenly father values me
47.	Service	To reflect the helping, caring and sharing love of God in the world
48.	Silence	To free myself from the addiction to and distraction of noise so I can be totally present to the Lord; to open myself to God in the place beyond words
49.	Simplicity	To un-complicate and untangle my life so I can focus on what really matters
50.	Slowing	To curb my addiction to busyness, hurry and workaholism; to learn to savor the moment
51.	Small Group	To make my spiritual journey with a community of trusted friends
52.	Solitude	To leave people behind and enter into time alone with God

53.	Spiritual Direction	To give caring attention to my relationship with God, accompanied by the prayerful presence of someone who helps me listen well to God
54.	Spiritual Friendship	To develop a friendship that encourages and challenges me to love God with all my heart, soul, strength and mind
55.	Stewardship	To live as a steward of God's resources in all areas of life to me: to live out of the awareness that nothing I have is my own
56.	Submission	To have Jesus as the Master of my life and absolutely every way
57.	Teachability	To remain a lifelong learner who is continually open to the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit
58.	Truth Telling	To live an authentically truthful life
59.	Unity	To live in harmony with Christ's desire for the church to be one; to be a bridge-builder and peacemaker in the Body of Christ
60.	Unplugging	To be fully present to and uninterrupted in my interactions with God and others
61.	Witness	To reveal the life-changing love of Jesus to others
62.	Worship	To honor and adore the Trinity as the supreme treasure of life



Abundance!

Leader: *I enter your house by the abundance of your faithful LOVE;
I bow down toward your holy temple in reverential awe of you (Psalm 5:7).*

People: ***But as for me, LORD, my prayer to you is for a time of favor.
In your abundant, faithful LOVE, God, answer me with your
sure salvation (Psalm 69:13).***

Leader: *I will make known the LORD's faithful love and the LORD's praiseworthy acts,
because of all the LORD has done for us—even the many good things he has done
for the house of Israel, which he did for them based on his compassion and
the abundance of his faithful LOVE (Isaiah 63:7).*

People: ***Israel, put your hope in the LORD. For there is faithful love
with the LORD, and with him is REDEMPTION in abundance
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and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!
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so that, having been justified by his grace, we may become heirs with the hope
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People: ***The precepts of the LORD are right, making the heart glad . . .
in addition, your servant is warned by them, and in keeping them
there is an abundant REWARD (Psalm 19:8a, 11).***

Together: The Word of God for the People of God.
Thanks be to God!

A 7-Stage Approach to Spiritual Growth



STAGE 1: EXPLORING CHRIST

- I believe that God exists.
- I'm not yet sure I want to become involved with a congregation.
- I'm still evaluating Christianity's core beliefs.
- I'm still thinking about whether or not to commit my life to Christ.
- My relationship with God is rather like that of a somewhat distant acquaintance.

STAGE 2: First Transition

- I believe nothing I do or have done can earn my salvation.
- I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- I pray from time to time to seek God's guidance for my life.
- I reflect on Scripture from time to time for meaning in my life.
- I serve in a church ministry of some sort at least once a month.
- My relationship with God is rather like that of a friend with whom I occasionally have lunch.

STAGE 3: GROWING IN CHRIST

- I experience God's presence at home and at work as well as at church.
- I have a personal relationship with God.
- While God is concerned about what I do, God is especially concerned about the condition of my spirit.

STAGE 4: Second Transition

- I believe that God is actively involved in my life.
- I pray daily to seek God's guidance for my life.
- I reflect on Scripture frequently for meaning in my life.
- I am a tither (I give 10% or more of my income to the church).
- I have six or more meaningful spiritual conversations with non-Christians every year.
- My relationship with God is rather like that of a friend with whom I talk frequently about issues of daily life.

STAGE 5: CLOSE TO CHRIST

- I'm learning what it means to "pray without ceasing."
- Jesus is "in the car" with me, but He's not in the driver's seat.
- Jesus is present with me wherever I go.
- My faith is a deeply personal and significant force that is relevant to my every waking moment.

STAGE 6: Third Transition

- Every hour of my day is holy.
- I desire for Jesus to be first in my life, to be in the driver's seat.
- I exist to know, to love, and to serve God.
- I look forward to my frequent practice of spiritual disciplines.
- I reflect on Scripture daily for meaning in my life.
- My relationship with God is rather like that of a friend with whom I fully share my life.
- The Bible has decisive authority over what I say and do.

STAGE 7: CHRIST-CENTERED

- I am as fully surrendered to God's will in my life as I know how to be.
- I am passionate about my relationship with Christ.
- I am willing to risk everything that's important in my life for Jesus Christ.
- Jesus is in the driver's seat in my life.

These questions come from ***MOVE: What 1,000 Churches REVEAL about Spiritual Growth***, by Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson (Zondervan/Willow Creek Resources, 2011).

The general idea is that increasing spiritual maturity will result in agreement (and stronger agreement) with more and more items until the final stage is reached.

It's important to remember that no matter where you may be today, God's call is always to ***"Come nearer! Come in farther! Come up higher!"***