

Ch. 1

THE END

*You are God's field...
1 Corinthians 3:9*

With an early afternoon sun slapping hard on the back of his neck, the Farmer walks across the field he's purchased. As he walks, he runs a pocketknife across the end of a pencil, sharpening it bit by bit.

Every acre, the farmer pauses, lifts his hat, wipes the sweat from his forehead with the back of his forearm, and looks out at the field. He scratches the stubble on his jaw, squints an eye, and thinks.

Any bystander would wonder what in the world this farmer was doing, because who would ever think much—if anything—of this field? The rocks, the weeds, the stumps, the barrenness scream out, "This place isn't worth the thought."

But the farmer is, indeed, thinking about that field.

He's not just thinking, though. He's imagining. He's dreaming. He's wondering.

When a thought crosses his mind, he pulls an old envelope out of his back pocket and jots something down on the back of it with his pencil. He smiles and nods at what he's written, then puts the envelope back into his pocket and continues whittling the pencil tip as he walks further across the field.

He pushes through thickets, steps over rocks, crosses a grove of half-burned, lightning-struck trees, and clamors up and down ditches and dry creek beds.

As the day goes on and the sun burns hotter, the farmer's energy only increases. So does the look of wonderment on his face and the pace of his steps.

Finally, just as the sun is starting to give up and fall toward the horizon, the farmer completes his rounds.

He marches across the field to the barn. There, he stops and puts the envelope up against the barn door so he can get a good look at it in the fading light.

From his scrawl, he quietly reads aloud to himself a list—

Corn.

Wheat.

Cotton.

Potatoes.

Apples.

Roses—white, pink, yellow.

His list goes on and as he reads each item, he taps his pencil against the name of each crop as if to say, "Yes. Indeed."

When he's reached the end of the list, he turns back toward the field and looks out.

With his physical eyes, he doesn't see those crops. But in his mind's eye, he sees every one growing up out of rich, thick soil, bursting with flower and fruit. It's hard for the farmer to separate out reality: what's currently out in the field or what he's envisioning.

To him, it doesn't matter though. What he sees is a beautiful sight.

It's a familiar one, too. This isn't the first field the farmer has taken on. He's done this time after time after time.

But to the farmer, each field is entirely different.

Each has its own unique make up and challenges.

And each also has its own unique set of possibilities.

To the outsider, this field may seem like any other, untended, run-of-the-mill, plot of land.

To the farmer, each are as singular as snowflakes.

To him, this field is different.

And it's that specialness that makes the farmer delight in the field.

He's not just delighting in what the field could grow, though. He's just plain delighting in the field itself.

That delight is what drives him—drives him to turn the field into something more than it currently is.

It's what drives him to bring about something good.

YOU, A LONG, LONG TIME AGO

As way of background for the main metaphor of this book, imagine it's the year 50 AD and you live in the hustling, bustling Greek city of Corinth.

Your life is simple. You wear tunics and sandals everyday. You get absolutely no cell service (which is fine because you don't have a cellphone). Dust and its removal are some of your biggest problems.

You're an average Greek person except for one thing: though you live in the land of gods like Zeus and Ares and Athena, you've come to believe in a guy named Jesus. You believe he actually lived and walked around on the earth about twenty years ago. You also believe He had a lot of great ideas about what God is like, how people should treat each other, and the best way to live. You don't just believe this guy was a great teacher, though. You believe He was the living, breathing Son of God who was killed by people who didn't like Him, yet rose from the dead three days later. Wild, huh?

You believe all of this because someone had come to Corinth, telling people about this Jesus guy, what He taught, what He did, and how He loves everybody and wants each individual person to believe in Him, receive His love, be forgiven, and follow Him.

The person who taught you may have been a guy named Paul (who you'd heard crazy stories about). Or, it could've been a different fella named Apollos (which is a very cool name). Or, it could've been Penelope, the lady down the street who'd fallen in love with Jesus and couldn't keep her newfound passion to herself. Or that one guy who has a funny looking scar.

Initially, all of the Jesus-followers hang out together, live life together, and love each other really well.

But, soon, this big happy group starts to splinter off into factions.

One faction is made up of people who say they "belong" to Paul because Paul was the one who taught them about Jesus.

Another faction is people who say they "belong" to Apollos because he was the way they came to know Jesus.

Another is the "I belong to Penelope" faction.

And then there's the faction of people who say they "belong" to That One Guy Whose Name You Can't Quite Remember, But He Has a Scar on His Cheek That's Kind of in the Shape of a Shrimp Fork.

It's become a mess with the factions not getting along, thinking one is more right than the other.

Then a letter shows up in Corinth. It's from Paul.

After a few weeks of this letter (basically a scroll with a stamp on it) being passed around from faction to faction, it finally ends up with your group where one of your friends reads it aloud.

After some opening niceties about how thankful Paul is for all of the people who love Jesus and live in Corinth, Paul gets to the elephant in the room. Suddenly, you realize this letter isn't going to be a "Hey, buddies! How's it going? Having a rad summer?!" kind of letter. Paul writes:

Are you not acting like mere humans?

(Meaning: you're behaving like regular-joe people who don't know Jesus and don't think His thoughts on how people should interact with each other and treat each other matters. Yikes.)

For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere humans?

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service.

He basically makes the point that no Jesus followers "belong" to anybody, except to God.

Then, to put a cap on the concept and drive it home with a metaphor, he writes:

You are God's field.

And then you realize that all of you Jesus-followers in Corinth have been acting as if the hand hired to run the field actually owns the field. That's not the case. The field belongs to God.

With that, you decide you'll do what you can to stop thinking of yourself as Paul's or Apollos' or Fork Scar's. Instead, you'll think of yourself—and all of your Jesus-following friends—as belonging to God.

But something about this metaphor grabs you. As your friend continues to read aloud, you stare out the window and think.

You imagine yourself, not as a person, but as a plot of land. And you imagine that land belonging to an unseen farmer—God.

Suddenly, that little metaphor has your mind running, imagining what farmers do with fields, how fields are meant to respond to the farmer, and what good could come from the work a farmer does with a field. As you think through those things, you realize this little metaphor may be helpful for understanding God better. And yourself. And the world. And what God wants to do in your life.

THE CORE QUESTION

When your first think of this this metaphor, you may (like me) immediately think of a list of things a farmer does. Things like: getting up early, pulling weeds, plowing, planting seeds, spreading animal poop all over the place, chasing off crows and varmints, sweating in the baking sun, watching the skies for rain, waiting through the winter, and finally harvesting all he's grown.

Then, you may consider how those actions relate to the things God does in our lives.

But before we get to what a farmer does with a field, and what the means for us and our lives, it'd be good to ask an underlying question first.

Why?

Why does a farmer do all of those things? Why does a farmer sweat and plow and wait and handle animal poo? Why does he put the effort in?

A farmer has a vision.

A farmer doesn't just see the weed-ridden, dry and dusty, seemingly barren in front of him. He sees what the land can become.

A farmer sees what can be grown.

That's what makes him get up early and weed and plow and plant and, eventually, harvest.

A farmer does what he does because he sees the end.

So, we might as ourselves: if God is a farmer and I am His field, then why does He do what He does with me?

Because God has a vision.

God doesn't just see our lives as they currently are. He sees what our lives can become.

God sees what can be grown in us.

That's what makes Him do all that He does in us.

God does what He does because He sees the end.

I've come to truly believe this for myself. I really believe God sees me as a wonderful place where He can grow great things.

I don't just believe this about me, though. I believe this about my wife. And my daughters. And my extended family. And my friends. And strangers.

And you.

Yeah, even though I probably don't know you, I believe God sees you this way. He sees the potential, the prospects, and the promise in you. He sees you as a wonderful place where He can grow great things.

God is a farmer.

You are His field.