

The Tulips / A Lesson in God “Math”

(by Pastor Wendell Kapena “Skip” Wright, 4/1/1994)

We had just purchased our first home here in Washington state and in the our first spring, we decided to head out on a day trip to the tulip fields in Skagit Valley during the annual “Tulip Festival”. I had no idea of what was awaiting us as we made the nearly one hour drive north along I-5 corridor. The countryside along the highway is beautiful as it is, but as we approached the exit just past the town of Burlington and could begin to catch a glimpse of the fields of tulips, it went from merely beautiful to absolutely spectacularly beautiful. Yep, you heard me right, I was blown away by the vast acres and acres of stunning ‘carpets’ of tulips and daffodils that blanketed the valley in colors so vibrant that they actually didn’t like flowers, but, thick carpets which had been laid over the valley floor. It was breath taking.

Needless to say, we had a wonderful time walking through the rows of tulips and whatever daffodils were still in bloom. That sight made a great impact on me as I could not get that sensual ‘overload’ of beautiful flowers out of my head and it was on the drive home that I had made up my mind and told Diane, “WE are going to have tulips blanketing our beautiful yard.”

Within a few days of our return home from the festival, Diane and I went to our local store and headed straight to their nursery area to find tulip bulbs where we were rewarded to find, and with a lot of excitement I may add, our prized flower bulbs readily available for purchase. I was ever more excited as I discovered they actually sold them little in “bags” of dozens (2, 3, 4, more..), and decided we would “splurge” and buy a bag of 3 dozen “mixed bulbs” (3 different sets of colors). Now, you’ve got to understand that before we purchased those tulips I actually went “online” (via our 486 computer..which took “hours” to download information..lol!) to learn as much as I could about planting them, feeding them and caring for them. What I didn’t bother learning would come in to play later, so, I won’t spoil the end here at the middle of the story.

I was so excited I both a special hand-held “scoop/digger” made especially for planting bulbs. Then, we bought special bulb “food” to be sure they didn’t starve and that they would come out their absolute best. I also bought a little handbook to supplement the online information I had gained from the computer, then read through that book to be sure my planting and technique were spot on. And so it began, with all that ‘knowledge’ I had been gaining on getting our ‘crop’ of tulips going and growing, I set out to the yard to begin the planting.

I followed the directions to the “T”, carefully measuring the distance between each bulb, while maintaining a straight line for the rows with a set of strings I had staked out along the side of our driveway in the front yard, then again, adding more rows in a section of the backyard.

After carefully measuring, then staking out the rows, I began the actual digging, BY HAND, each and every hole for each and every tulip bulb I had bought. Each hole was dug with careful precision, following the online as well as pamphlet instructions, to a depth of precisely 8 inches. Let me just say here and now, it wasn’t easy. The ground was not the easiest to dig and at times, I even cheated by using a shovel to soften the ground, then I would push the soil and gently re-pack it so I could get back on track with the hand digger. Yes sir, I finally got all thirty-six bulbs into the ground. Oh, and before I forget, it was in October when we planted them, because the

instructions “stressed” that was “the best time to plant”, no sooner, no later. That also helps explain the ground being hard. You get the picture.

Whew, was I tired, but now, in place of mere fatigue, there was real excitement as I began the ‘wait’ for our tulip blankets.

I would religiously check on the beds every day, making sure there wasn’t any excess water build up when it rained, and then prayed hard for their survival when it snowed, and it snowed a LOT that year into the next. I would go out and visit with the beds, talking to the bulbs and the earth beds, praising and thanking God for them and declaring, in Jesus’ name, that every bulb would be healthy, full, and beautiful. I mean I was “feeling it”! Praise God!

Well, October turned in to November, no sprouts. Then, November to December, still nothing. And wouldn’t you know, December turned into January and January passed on to February, and the snows came and went, and when the snow melted, NO sprouts. Mind you, I’m still praying for those bulbs and am still excited at the beautiful flowers which would be coming, blankets of color, okay, be patient.

And then it was about when February ended and we began getting into March, when my ‘calm’ prayers became prayers of ‘concern’. You know, “what if I planted them wrong?”, “what if I planted them too close together?”, “what did I miss..what did do wrong?”

It was as March was growing to a close that I noticed the first baby sprouts appeared out of the ground as little green nubs. Now my excitement was coming back because I could actually count thirty-six of those little green nubs which told me all the bulbs seem to be doing just fine. Throughout the month of March, I could swear those little guys were (if they could, and I believe they can) ‘laughing’ at me, mocking me as my daily inspections picked up from where I’d left off before the snows, and yet, they were so tiny and almost appeared as if they weren’t growing.

Then, to my elation, April rolled up on us and those little nubs began to grow at a fairly good click. By the middle of the month, they were all nearly 6 inches in height and I could begin to see little leaves appearing on each stalk. Now, I am thoroughly excited again and looking forward to the arrival of our “blanket of tulips” and our own private “Tulip Festival” in our neighborhood. It’s going to be great.

Toward the end of April, we had heard from a very dear friend Hawaii that she wanted to come up for a visit and stay with us for a few days and of course we said yes, adding that she was in for a ‘surprise’. I figured at the rate the stalks were growing, leaves sprouting and now flower buds appeared to be showing up, she would love the “Wright’s Tulip Fest”.

I had noticed something during my daily inspections that was beginning to trouble me a bit. First, I was a little trouble, but then as the stalks, leaves and flower buds began to mature and get bigger, and then began to get a LOT more “troubled” at what I was, or should I say, “was NOT” seeing. It was as the tulips matured and were drawing closer to blossoming that I went from excitement to frustration and unhappiness. Okay, I was angry.

A strange thing overcame this farmer, this planter, this careful cultivator of tulips as I noticed there was only going to be ONE flower per stalk, instead of praising God for these little rascals and thanking Him for them, I found, and my wife overheard me on at least one very harsh occasion, calling these plants, “Stupid”, “Lazy”, “Non-Smelling Waste of My Time”. I was heard asking God, “Why didn’t you tell me?” “Why would you let me waste all that time on each one and let me think they would come in at least ‘pairs’ of flowers and not ‘singular’ blooms?” Yep, I was a little frustrated.

And that wasn’t the end of my ‘humiliation’. Another friend, also from Hawaii but who lived here in Washington state had come over to see our beautiful tulips that I was so excited about. Well, the thing is this, another thing I discovered about tulips. The buds are beautiful when we see them in traditional ‘cupped’ shape, then when they open, the flowers are also very pretty. However, those flowers, once they open up, they don’t stick around very long and begin to fall off the stalks, leaving empty stalks behind. And wouldn’t know, my friend and his wife had to delay their visit to us a few days so that by the time they came over, yep, you got it, rather than “blankets” of beautiful tulip “cups” or even “flowers”, they saw mostly empty stalks surrounded by fallen leaves. I’m glad he had a good laugh over it because I was still upset with those little shysters. Then, to make matters worse, that weekend is when our friend came up to visit with us and there weren’t even any flowers on the stems or the ground. I’d raked up every last fallen flower.

Well, it was shortly after our visitor had left for Hawaii that I made a drastic, but executive decision, to rid our home and yard of this “waste of my time and energy”, and decided to dig them all up. So, on my first weekend off, with the weather being beautiful, the sun shining and it still being on the cool side, I went out to the backyard first, with shovel in hand, and fully intending to dig every one of those thirty-six bulbs right out of the ground and give them to someone else to care for them.

I was still frustrated as I buried the shovel into the ground, searching for those ‘lazy’ bulbs, when I noticed something very humbling and one of my life-changing memories. As I began to uncover the bulbs I noticed that instead of one bulb in each place I’d planted them, each bulb had anywhere from 4 to 6 to 8 additional bulbs with each one. They had increased in number without me seeing or noticing it.

It was then that God spoke very lovingly and so graciously, teaching me a life lesson for all life lessons. It was simply this, He told me (and showed me by the tulip bulbs), “This is how I do things. It’s not what you can see on the surface that matters most, but what lies beneath the surface. The things that matter in your life, our lives and in others lives, the real source of my work is done where it’s beneath the surface in the heart and soul of you.”

And then He added, “By the way, you can see that my ‘Math’ is different than yours. You multiply and add item by item and that’s how you’ve seen and thought how I grow things, but, look closely at the Tulip and see that when I GROW THINGS, I GROW THEM EXPONENTIALLY..BEYOND WHAT YOU CAN SEE OR THINK OR IMAGINE. And the same is true when you grow in me, beyond what you can see or think or imagine, and all that growth, ACCORDING TO THE POWER AT WORK IN YOU.” (Ephesians 3:20)

So the question is, “How much of Gods’ power are you allowing to work in your life? How much are you willing to Trust God with in the depths of your heart and soul to bring you to a place of growth in Him, in Jesus Christ, by His Spirit, that He sees, even if you don’t see it?”

(Isaiah 64:4) I Corinthians 2:9 “But as it is written: ‘eye has not seen’, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

II Corinthians 4:18 “..while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Hebrews 11:1,3,7 “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen..By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible..By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with Godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”

A great reminder for us all and most certainly one for my book of heartfelt lessons and memories, right? Just because you can’t see what God is doing, doesn’t mean He’s not “doing”! Always remember, if God says He will or is about to do something, IT WILL BE DONE! His Word does NOT RETURN TO HIM VOID or without effect or results. It WILL ACCOMPLISH WHAT HE SENDS IT TO ACCOMPLISH. Bank On It and Be Encouraged! Amen.

Isaiah 55:10-11 “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, making it bear and sprout, and providing seed to the sower and bread to the eater, So will My Word be which goes out of My mouth; It will not return to Me void (useless, without result), without accomplishing what I desire. And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

Just saying if you’re going through trials as we all do and shall continue to go through, there is someone who gave His life for you so that He could bring healing, deliverance, strength, comfort and peace to you and he begins in all those places that others, and at times even we can’t see or are aware of. His name is Jesus, and all you need to do is Invite Him into your heart right now, Receive Him as Your Lord and Savior, then thank Him for His forgiveness of ALL your sins. Next, Invite Gods’ Spirit, yes, the Holy Spirit, into your life and He shall accomplish the “cleaning” beyond what anyone else could do. All this God offers us so that we can enjoy eternal life in abundance and in pure joy, with Him. (*John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever would believe in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life.”*)

If you’ve said that simple prayer, you’ve invited and received Jesus as your Lord and the Holy Spirit as your Guide into your new relationship with God in Jesus Christ and your Teacher of Gods Word as you’ve never experienced. One more thing. When you receive Jesus as Lord, ALL of Heaven is Rejoicing for and with you! Just saying. GOD BLESS YOU!