

# *A Lesson From My Daughter*

By Randal Stephens

She's only five and she has no idea, but my daughter frequently, innocently, opens my eyes to something I am sure I have seen before, somehow finds a way to teach me something I probably once knew. Unfortunately, those lessons are often overlooked, dismissed or forgotten in favor of the daily toil of my life. The irony is, it's the mixed blessing of the joy of watching her grow up weighed against the heart-rending terror that I will one day lose her, that reminds me that one day those lessons will be gone. Either I will become too old to learn them, or worse, she will become too old to give them. So I am trying harder these days to notice them, to store them where I can find them once again, both on this paper, and in my heart. With that, I would like to tell you what I have most recently learned from my daughter.

My daughter loves to go to the park; what kid doesn't? She is also fascinated with the natural things, like rocks, bugs and plants. Well, the park we like to go to has what every park has: a nice playground area for her to play, but it also has a large area where the trees have been left to grow. The growth is not dense but open, allowing us to wander among what are mostly pecan trees. On any given day, we may find a special rock, chase the squirrels as they scurry from tree to tree, or spot a spider web suspended between the branches of a tree, swaying gently as the wind blows.

And then there are the pecans. Or rather, acorns, according to my daughter. They're everywhere, littering the ground, cast off from the branches above. She had never really shown any interest in them, but one day she more than just saw them. She noticed them. And that was when she started asking questions.

"They're seeds," I told her. And from a five-year-old little girl, there is only one logical response to that.

"Let's plant them." Her eagerness probably came from the success we had had with the little pinto bean. If you plant something it will grow, right?

I did my best to discourage her, trying to put her off, so I told her we'd do it when we got home. She started gathering as much as her little hands could hold and brought them to me. Well, I took one look at those things and I didn't think there was any way they would grow into anything. My parents have pecan trees, so I've seen pecans past their prime. They're shriveled and useless, not good for anything; not nourishment or flavor. And these she had were the worst I had seen. They were small, cracked; some of them had small holes in them, places I believe bugs had gotten in, and I just knew they were all wrinkled to the point of being unrecognizable as pecans. But with a smile and an inner wink, I told her how we would plant them when we got home. So she shoved them into one of the ample pockets of my cargo shorts, and then went back for more. I only let her bring what her hands could carry, but I still ended up with them in my pocket.

Now I'll be honest with you, I figured she'd forget about those pecans, get distracted by something else, not want to wait to see any pecans grow into something. But I underestimated my daughter. In my farsighted view of the world, I underestimated the importance of the simple task of the planting of the seeds. Therein lies part of the lesson I learned, but you'll have to wait a few more minutes for the rest.

In short, my daughter did not forget about those little seeds, those used up, dried up little nuts; in fact, she wanted to plant them first thing when we got home. So we did. We picked a little area in one of the flowerbeds in front of the apartment where nothing was growing. We dug a little hole and inside it we placed what were probably six or seven little pecans. When we were done, we walked away and I didn't give them a second thought.

A few months went by and I know you know what was there. A little leafy growth, the beginnings of a pecan tree. It had sprouted up from those pecans I hadn't even given a chance. The funniest part—when I dragged her out to look at that little tree, I was far more excited about it than my daughter was. I just shook my head in disbelief. And then we went back inside, but this time, I didn't forget.

I passed that flowerbed every day and every day I looked at that little tree, gauging its growth, until one day it was gone, pulled out of the ground by a well-meaning maintenance man trying to keep the beds looking clean. A month or so later though, another little tree grew in its place. And a few days after, just as before, it was removed from the flowerbed but this time, replaced with a deep gouge in the earth. The ground was gutted, the remaining seeds removed. But not all.

Just a few days ago, I was just as excited as before to show my daughter a new little tree growing in our spot. Even after all those seeds had been through, there was another little tree. It's still there, growing every day, though I am sure in a day or two, it will once again be removed. But right now it's growing, and healthy. And just this morning, on my way to work, I looked down at that little tree and a thought struck me. "How is it," I thought, "that life could emerge from inside that shell?"

I spent my drive this morning thinking about it and a I eventually made a connection, the lesson learned. The only way a shriveled, wasted, useless little nut with a hard shell can grow into something is to be buried in the soil, and down there a change takes place. Not restoration. Change, true and drastic change. I don't know what it looks like, I've never seen it. But it takes months, and even then, it only emerges as a little tree, fragile and exposed. It takes years more for that tree to produce seeds of its own. But it does. In order for that to happen though, the seed has to be buried and it has to be changed. In essence, the seed has to die. And when it does, it ceases to be a seed and becomes a tree.

And as I drove, a scripture came to me, a scripture I used to quote all the time. I couldn't really remember it, so I looked it up. It's John 12:24 and it says this: "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a seed.

But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” So it’s true, then. If we bury ourselves in the warm soil of God’s Word and His Presence, even we shriveled, wasted, useless little nuts inside the hardest of shells can grow into something. But it takes time. A long time.

I don’t really know what it looks like, I’ve never really seen it, but down there, in that soil, we have to be changed. Not restored. Changed. Restoration is what happens with our relationship with God once we are buried deep enough to be changed. Change is what happens when we’re buried deep enough to die. We die as Christ died; we rise as He rose. But when we do, we still need His care. We spend time buried in Him before we can be raised, and even more time growing in Him before we begin to bear fruit. But one day we will, and that fruit will bear seeds. It always does.

Always.

And those seeds fall to the ground, and they scatter. Sometimes they are gathered, and they provide nourishment, flavor and texture. But some of those seeds return to the ground. And then the cycle begins again.

I am sure there are other lessons there, like the role of the one who would try to tear us from His soil, or the persistence of the little seed in the ground. There’s even a lesson in how my little girl is growing every day under His care. But those lessons are for another time, or another person. The lesson I learned is the lesson I needed. The truth is, I am tired of living my life as a seed, trying to bear fruit without branches of my own. It’s time for me to carve out my own hole, my six feet of space, if you will, and bury myself. I want to be transformed and bear fruit, and I want to scatter seeds.

My daughter may never know how her childlike behavior reveals the deepest of spiritual truths to me. Maybe she will. I don’t know. But if I don’t let it change me, it won’t matter anyway.