

“Goodness exponential.”
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“Autumn Seedlings”
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He really was nuts. He made and lost a fortune several times. He never shaved. Rarely bathed. He refused to wear shoes, even in winter. He dressed in cast-off clothing. For his hat he wore a tin pot. He traveled from town to town, frequently sleeping on the floor when invited indoors. Often he curled up outdoors under a tree.

He was nuts. Worse. He assumed he was going to make a difference. His name was John Chapman, but we know him as Johnny Appleseed. He’s no Disney fiction; Chapman was for real.

He was nuts, and what a legacy he left. Apple sauce. Apple pie. Apple fritter. Apple crisp. Apple bread. Apple juice. Apple cider. Apple butter. Apple casserole. Caramel apples. Apple strudel. Apple dumplings.

How on earth do you get a good apple from rotten ones? Plant the seeds. The fruit may be rotten but there still is hope inside. Like people. Like these times.

What is a little red house, with no doors or windows, with a star inside? An apple, of course. Here within this little red house is all the potential for an apple tree, an apple orchard. Tasty, juicy, healthy. Satisfying, tasty, tart pulp (flesh) from these little brown seeds. Blessed seedlings propagating more seedlings. Goodness exponential. October is the best time of the year.

Johnny Appleseed Chapman did make a difference. He planted much more than seeds; he planted nurseries. He set up a system of nurseries with managers throughout Ohio, Illinois, Indiana. He left an estate of over 1,200 acres of valuable nurseries to his sister, worth millions. He also was a devout Christian and seeded the gospel along with his precious apples. “Oh, the Lord is good to me, And so I thank the Lord for giving me the things I need The sun the rain and the apple tree, The Lord is good to me.”

Why do I feel that when Chapman was a school-boy his teachers didn’t quite know what to make of him? What would his classmates have written in his yearbook predicting his future. Most likely to...

Our teacher daughter tells us how in every class there always are several who don’t fit in. They’re the ones for whom she has special affection. She admits how she wishes she was allowed to be more creative in filling out report cards. I felt that way too when I student-taught high school English. Most teachers realize report cards may be useful to track how well a student is dealing with the material the school wants the student to deal with. Fine. We also realize report cards aren’t a convincing measure of how smart a person is. Sure, basic skills need to be mastered. Equally sure, there’s more to young people than being defined by A,B,C,D, or E. We worry when kids are more concerned about grades than about learning. How exactly do we define success? Would Johnny Appleseed be considered successful?

It should be no surprise to any reader that a love of my life is soccer, the bestest of autumn sports. I haven’t been able to play for a few years since weight, injuries, age, and a little thing called an

infarction of the lower cerebellum, so I'm grateful I got lassoed into coaching an AYSO team of 11 and 10 year old boys and girls. They are the Hammers! What a hoot! The Lord has been good to me. The only thing that's annoying is those rude folks who fail to pick up their dog poop on the Merck field. Kids play here!

Sure, my co-coach and I want them to learn the basics: attend practices, show up for the match in orange jerseys, learn how to pass, dribble, shoot, how to avoid being offside, how to make a decent throw-in, defenders stay goal-side. Basic skills. We also know that mastering the basics never is enough. What we really want is what they showed the other Saturday at a game in Elysburg. The team had no bench so they each played all four quarters, For the last quarter they played a player down. What heart! They love the game. Passion, drive, improvisation. Playing through mistakes. How they play as a team, celebrating that someone's foot may kick the ball into the net but the team scores the goal. Their enthusiasm. How they want to learn more. How they focus on the play rather than the result. Their commitment. Oh, the Lord is good to us. Blessed seedlings.