

BY CURT HARLER, EDITOR



Lancaster Farming says...

Land cost vs. land value

In any meeting between two farmers, the conversation quickly turns to prices and costs

One of the first questions asked is, "What's an acre of land around here worth?" Given today's prices the figure is likely to be between \$1500 and \$7500 an acre for typical Pennsylvania farmland

Even the most optimistic land owner or dealer could hardly have predicted the skyrocketing value of farmland in the past decade or two

But there are signs it will continue

This week Austin Kiplinger, in his respected Kiplinger Washington Letter, projects farmland prices will triple by 1990 on a national average

Kiplinger says two-thirds of the gain will be due to inflation, the rest a real increase resulting from higher demand and better yield on farm crops

A bit of quick work with a computer shows the current inflation rate

alone will do the trick of tripling the cost of an acre of farmland by 1990

That means an acre of prime farmland will be selling for over \$20,000 in less than a decade. Not too long ago that figure would get an entire farm for a soldier returning from World War II

It is difficult to justify today's cost of farmland with the value of a farm business and the products it produces

Investment firms mail brochures describing farms which start at 1000 acres and go up. Price tags run over a million dollars. Surely this is not the property average young farmers seek as they get out of school. Nor is it for their parents

The sales pitch is aimed at the investor. Giant investors, or mutual funds, lick their chops and eye vast tracts of our best farmland as blue chip investments

Back in 1977 Continental Illinois Bank and Trust of Chicago had its Ag Land Trust Fund program nipped in the bud when Congress protested its potential impact on the family farm system and farmland prices

But with rates of return approaching 15 percent, the investor with sizable capital and patience can ill afford to put his funds in a bank, common stock, or even urban real estate

Meanwhile, the farmer is borrowing money at 12 percent (current Farm Credit rate) to plant a crop which at best will return six or seven percent on his investment

The average person, even the average family, can not afford the cost of getting into farming

So, farmland becomes concentrated in the hands of giant-size farmers or absentee landowners, simply because those who want to farm can't afford to compete

It may not be too many years before the nation finds itself with a two-tiered agricultural system seen in primitive nations: a large group of farm workers, peasants, tilling soil owned by a relatively small group of wealthy landholders

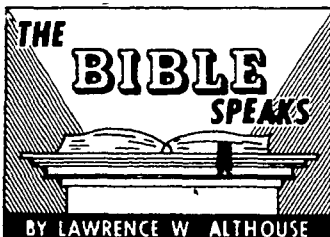
The reason is the land's value as a productive resource is not as great as its inflated cost

Ag districts may slow speculative rises in price

But as long as speculators and farmers continue to buy land expecting inflation to increase their net worth, farmland values will soar. Relying on inflation to provide a growing credit base adds fuel to the fire

Only by breaking the credit inflation cycle will farmers be able to call themselves truly independent

A first step is to distinguish between land cost and land value



BY LAWRENCE W. ALTHOUSE

HARDNESS OF HEART

March 1, 1981

Background Scripture:
Matthew 19.

Devotional Reading:
Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

"For your hardness of heart."

That, said Jesus, is the only reason that a man and woman are even allowed to terminate their marriage in divorce. Divorce is plainly not God's purpose, for as Jesus puts it, "the two shall become one." What God intends for his children is the unity of marriage, but, as in

so many of God's other intentions for his children, that intended unity is lost in marital conflict

Divorce, therefore, is sin because it fails to accomplish God's purpose. But it is not a unique sin and too often religious people and particularly religious authorities have been legalistic in this one area of human relationships. As Jesus makes clear in the Gospels, God's purpose for his children is also honesty, purity, charity, humility, self-sacrifice, and love toward all of God's children. When we lie, cheat, and strike out against others we are sinning no less than when we fail to fulfill God's purpose in marriage. Many Americans cheat on their income tax, for example, but that does not remove them beyond the bounds of God's mercy.

What God Has Joined

What I am saying, then, is not that divorce is "o.k." — it isn't — but it is not the ultimate tragedy or sin in human life. Divorce is not "o.k." and neither is our exploitation of one another or our deceit of one another. I emphasize this because often we are given the impression that there are only two possible norms for the Christian to accept in this society: (1) divorce is wrong and should not be permitted, or (2) divorce is quite acceptable

I believe there is a third position open to the follower of Christ, (3) divorce is not what God wants of us, but it may be the final recourse open to us when reconciliation seems not to be possible. That means we will uphold the sanctity of marriage, we will continue to hold divorce as failure, but, as with any other area in which we fail to

live up to God's will, we can find forgiveness and redemption even in the midst of this tragic experience

The Hardness Of Your Hearts

Yet, it is "the hardness" of our "hearts" that is usually at the roots of marital discord. Sometimes it is willful, other times it is ignorance — people simply not

realizing what is wrong with their lives. It is the same kind of "hardness of heart" that leads us to lie, cheat, bear false witness against our neighbor, resist the needs of the poor and helpless, participate in warfare, and waste the resources that God has placed at our disposal. In each one of these instances of "hardness of heart" we must

find ways and means of experiencing God's redemption.

So it is in the tragedy of divorce. What the divorced person needs from us is not our condemnation, not our legalistic self-righteousness, but the same forgiveness and love that God offers to all of us who experience failure to living the Christian life

NOW IS THE TIME

By Max Smith,
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TO KNOW YOUR TIMBER

Don't close the deal on the sale of timber from your woodlot until you are sure that the price is right, and that the buyer will not do considerable damage for the future. In too many cases the owner will sell because he thought "it sounded good" or because "I needed the money". In either case real value may not have been received. We do not have too many acres of forest or woodlots in southeastern Pennsylvania, but there are a number of farms with good woodlots. In these areas there are often good trees that are worth money. The owner should be sure of what he has and its market value before selling to anyone. Professional help from the Service

Forester of the Penna Department of Forests and Waters, or from the Extension Service is available. Don't sell too quickly and then be sorry

TO BE CAREFUL WITH FUELS

Mishaps in the handling, use, and storage of gasoline, kerosene, and diesel fuel result in many fires and explosions. During these times when we are all trying to conserve fuel, there are many opportunities for accidents. The best place to store fuel is in an underground tank. Small quantities should be stored in labeled safety cans. Do not store fuel in glass or plastic containers. Our safety specialists say that most of us are in danger when we haul gasoline in a safety can in the trunk of our car. It

can build up, or a rear-end crash, could cause an explosion. The best place to haul that can of gas is on the floor behind the front seat, then open windows for good ventilation. Be extra careful at this time when handling all types of fuels

TO STORE SUPPLIES SAFELY

Many farmers have bought and accepted early delivery on seeds, fertilizers, and other supplies. Some attention should be given to the proper storage of these items. I have seen bags of fertilizer stored too close to a barn door, or to an open window, the same with farm seeds. Extra moisture on these materials, or under them on a damp floor, can cause trouble. Also, it is very important to keep seeds away from weed-killer chemicals. These herbicides may reduce, or kill, the germination of the seeds. Also, children, pets, and livestock should not have access to stored seeds or farm chemicals. All of these materials get more expensive each year. It is only good management to store them carefully

TO BEWARE OF GYPSY MOTH INFESTATION

It appears that parts of our area (Turn to Page A12)

HAY HAWS



I'm just glad the windshield wipers broke on my way to the Lancaster Stockyards.