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A Time to Grow, Part 2

Mark 4:26-34

And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

I want to ask you today just to think about your life and where you are, and offer you a little self-assessment for you to evaluate if you're doing the things that God has told us to do to grow in your spiritual life.

A few questions I have for you to consider. The first one is quite simple, and it's very clear from the scriptures. The question is this: in your life, are you asking God to help you grow, to help you grow? Whatever you're facing, whatever challenges you have.

I know some people now who are facing the challenge of aging, and they need to seek God's wisdom on how to age well. Quite frankly, I'm asking him that. But the scripture tells us growth starts and begins with God. We can't force it to happen. He has not given us the ability to mature ourselves alone.

In our lesson today, it's very clear: only God makes things grow. And so the first question is, are you really asking God to grow you, mature you, help you become stronger in him, in wisdom, in favor with him?

It starts with God working in us, but God has made it clear he won't just come and zap us. We have a part to play, and if we do our part, he guarantees that he will do his part. And so Paul penned these words under the inspiration of the spirit: you work at it as if it depends on you.

Work out your own salvation. The word salvation here means wholeness, your move towards maturity and wholeness by yourself. Work it out as if it depended on you. Do it seriously with fear and trembling. And then he said, because you have a partner, for it is God who works in us. You work it out, and God will work in us to will and to please for his good pleasure.

And we, of course, know it is his good will to transform us and mature us and grow us into the image of His Son.

So are you asking God to help? And then are you consistently doing your part? And by doing your part, I would mean feeding your soul and your spirit with the right nutrition.

Are you doing your work not just to feed your body in healthy ways so it can stay strong and healthy, but feed your soul and your spirit in a way that it can keep growing and maturing? And how do we do that? By meditating on, feeding on, ingesting the Word of God.

Jesus said in Matthew four four, man, woman, does not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. How is a person brought into new birth? By hearing the word of Christ, believing the Word of Christ, and then, supernaturally, they're born again.

And how is a person nurtured and strengthened, even as a plant gets the nutrients it needs and grows? So our spiritual life must have a steady feeding of the Word of God.

God has wired it this way. Somehow the word divides our soul from our spirit, which literally means it takes our spirit and sets it free with His Spirit so our soul, our mind, our will, and emotions can be submitted to it and ruled by the Spirit of God.

The Spirit of God works in line with the Word of God and leads us, and it leads us into the glorious freedom and the maturity of Christ in the world. And so we have to keep putting ourselves before the mirror of God's Word, letting it judge the thoughts and attitudes of our heart, free us so that we might be conformed more into the image of God's Son.

God said this about His Word, comparing it again to the laws of nature: as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater—it nourishes the whole process—so shall my word that goes from my mouth. It shall not return to me empty. It will accomplish the purpose for which it goes forth.

And so we need a steady diet of God's Word. If you were to eat food physically once a week and that's it, how would your body do? And it's the same with our spirit and our soul.

As a matter of fact, the center for Biblical Engagement did some study on this, and it did a whole bunch of surveys about people ingesting the Word of God. You know, and if people hear and sort of receive the Word of God once a week, the results clearly say not much happens in their life spiritually.

If they do it twice a week, it's still not that much of an effect, even three times a week. But there's this lever point of ingesting God's word, taking it in, thinking about it, believing on it. At four days a week, things start to spiritually happen and mature and grow in our lives.

These are the statistics. People who expose themselves to the Bible through song, through reading, through teaching, through coming to services, through Bible studies, four times a week, they're 230% more likely to talk with others about spiritual growth, spiritual maturity; 228% more likely to say something about their faith because it's becoming a part of them and God is using it to stir in their faith, in their spirits—courage, boldness, understanding; 60% less spiritually stagnant.

Imagine five days, six days, seven days a week where this is welling up in you.

I talked with a lady after the last hour a number of years ago. She said, “God, I'm going to give you one hour a week.” Over the past few years, God called her into full-time ministry, and she said this to me, “If God asked me now to take one hour off from him, I don't know if I would say yes.”

She has become saturated in living out the kingdom of God in the earth. From one hour, that nugget grew and grew and grew till she gave her whole life to ministry.

And friends, this is what God wants for us: for to saturate our lives, for us to become a part of the eternal Kingdom of God as visitors, strangers here on the earth, bearing witness to him. All the rest that's happening around us in the world—temporary compared to the coming kingdom of God.

And this is why we pray, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

But how caught up are you in it? How much does the world have a hold of your mind?

In our lesson for today, the Apostle Paul spoke about people needing spiritual milk for a long time because they have one foot in the world and one foot in the church, and they just hang there. And so they, they get a little milk from the church, but they never grow up.

But to grow, we've got to learn how to eat consistently and feed ourselves. But it's not just feeding, it's doing.

We can become fat by just eating and not doing, living. And to be alive means we move. We have action. We will stop moving when we're dead.

And so spiritually, James said it this way: do not be only hearers or partakers of the word, but do it. Do what it says. For if you say you have faith but you have no actions, you're not telling the truth.

Your spiritual life, faith without some obedience, without some actions of faith, it dies, just like the body dies without movement and action.

Jesus said it this way: anyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice. There are many people who know a lot about the Bible. They just don't believe it, and so they don't live it.

And so all this knowledge of the Bible means nothing to them because they're still spiritually dead, because they don't believe it, and they're not spiritually growing because they aren't exercising their faith.

And so Jesus said, you hear it and then do what it says. You'll be like a wise person who builds your house on a firm foundation, and the storms of life will come. They'll ravage against you, but you will not be shaken because you know what's true.

In closing, I want to just consider some things that the Word of God tells us to do, and you ask yourself how many of these things are you doing.

I want to commend you on the first one. You all showed up to church. The Bible tells us to not forsake the gathering together, to encourage each other in our faith.

Many people after Covid went home, and many of them have never come back to gathering with other people who are seeking the Lord. And, you know, spiritual atrophy and doubt grows in isolation. But as we get together, the fire of faith is fueled and belief comes more easily.

And so we're supposed to gather together to encourage each other in our faith, and here we are this morning doing that.

We're to pray in the spirit on all occasions. I had one pastor one time pointing his finger at me. He said, "Tim, never watch the news without praying." Pray in the spirit on all occasions.

Do you have a vibrant prayer life? Are you doing this?

Jesus said, give and it will be given to you, with greater measure coming back to you. If you were to have your life evaluated, would it be said of you that with your time, your talents, and your resources you're being generous by faith, giving?

Have you shared your faith with anyone? Some maturities in Christ, the Bible tells us, never come about until we actually begin to share our faith. Then we'll understand more of the riches of our faith if we'll take some courageous steps to speak of it and share about it with others.

We're to be kind and tender hearted, keeping no record of wrongs, forgiving people in our lives and letting them go. These are actions that God wants us to take, and in doing these, our faith grows because God shows up and cares for us when we do these things.

Have you considered God's faithfulness? We do that with communion and celebrate his goodness for us in Jesus. But there are many things that God does for us that never get mentioned, and have you taken time to consider the many blessings that God has given you? And this bolsters our faith.

And then what? Your attitude like? God says to mature, you have to face the challenges of this life with a faith and a confidence in him, praying for wisdom, but in a joy and in a persevering spirit.

And then as we do these things, we'll go on to maturity, not being just hearers but also doers of the word.

And I can only think that God wants us, this part of his church family, to be people of strong faith, strong hope, strong love for one another, encouraging each other in our maturity and in our perseverance.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for this opportunity to gather together today and listen to the teaching of your Word. Thank you for giving us Your Word so that we can know what life is about and how to live it.

You have said that we don't just have a biological life, but we were wired to flourish and come alive spiritually and have a spirit in us that is unquenchable, a confidence in you that is a gift that can be strengthened and nurtured as we take steps of faith and action in our lives.

Father, all of us are at different stages in our spiritual growth. I pray that you would minister to each one of us and speak to each one of us about our faith journeys.

Maybe there's someone who hasn't even started their spiritual life, and you're inviting them to open their hearts to you. Today we ask that you would do that work. As you knock on the door of their hearts, you would help them open the door and receive into their hearts the forgiveness of sins and the gift of everlasting life, and then the gift of your spirit to help them grow.

And father, for all of us that know you, I do ask that you would mature us and strengthen us, continue to grow us in the faith so we could, in a sense, as your Word says, be not of those who complain and whine and whimper, but be of those who shine like stars, holding out the word of life to others.

Do this in us, father, what we can't do for ourselves as we cooperate with you. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.