

## How Does Your Garden Grow? *Mark 4:26-29*

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### Introduction:

We have a lot of gardeners here. I have one question for you. How does your garden grow? I know if I start talking to some of you, you will tell me about planting at certain times of year, watering in certain ways, fertilizing with certain substances, but in the end, none of us really knows how our garden grows. We do what we know and, amazingly enough, fruit comes from it. With that in mind, consider another garden. While in college, I worked in an evangelist training program with a man that many in non-institutional churches view as an expert on church growth and effective evangelism. Since that time, I too have been greatly attuned to those issues. I have read books on them. Talked with other preachers about them. Every time I hear of someone who seems to be having success, I hunt them down to find out what they are doing and why it is working. I have done this to such a degree, I have to confess in some quiet moments I have thought I am also an expert on growth and evangelism, thinking if I could just get people to listen to the wisdom I have collected, then we could convert many people and all churches could grow. However, recently, my reading in the New Testament led me through **Mark**. While reading I was slapped in the face and put in my place by **Mark 4:26-29**. It is a very simple parable about sowing the seed akin to and usually overshadowed by its more detailed and more popular sister parable about the sower. The Parable of the Sower in **Mark 4:3-9, 14-20** explained the different kinds of soils or hearts with their differing responses to the word. The final was the good soil that bore fruit. Mark follows this up with another parable of seed and soils. Examine this second parable and see what we can learn about evangelism, conversion and by extension, congregational growth.

### Discussion:

- I. We don't know how the seed grows.
  - A. I am not saying we haven't experienced more success with some plans and approaches than others. I am not suggesting we don't emphasize methods we have seen work better than others. However, this passage does tell us we don't know how the gospel works in the hearts of men.
  - B. Do you see what this means? It means we may think we have come up with the foolproof way to convert people, but we haven't. We may think our approach or program is the best and only way, but it is not. I have talked to lots of people who have baptized lots of people and they all have a tendency to look at others and wonder why they don't do it just like them. Oddly enough, I have heard from some, "Door knocking just doesn't work anymore." But I have heard from others, "I have all kinds of success at door knocking." I have heard from some that they have been instrumental in baptizing lots of people because they first take a lot of time to get to know the person and discover their felt needs and then deal with that (the "they don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care" approach). They claim others aren't converting as many because they won't first work on those relationships. But I know others, in fact, one man who has probably been instrumental in more baptisms over the past 10 years than anyone else I know, who strike up conversations with anyone and everyone he can and try to lead everyone to spiritual things in the first conversation if they can. I have heard people say, "We can't do it like they did in the New Testament where they stood on the street corner and started preaching." I have a tendency to agree, but just a few months ago I heard of someone who is studying with lots of people and baptizing people and his method is to take a sign that asks if people are interested in a Bible study and then stand on a busy corner (with pedestrian traffic, not car traffic). I know some people who have a great study or set of studies they think just blows people out of the water. I hear them and think they are amazing, but I know other people who use an entirely different set of studies and they are doing just as well. Additionally, I know people who have tried all these things and not had many studies or any baptisms.
  - C. We don't know exactly how the seed grows. Therefore, we cannot possibly know exactly how to plant it to get foolproof results.
- II. We cannot make the seed grow.
  - A. If we don't know how the seed grows, we recognize we cannot force it to grow. We cannot make the seed grow in someone's heart.

- B. Remember what Paul said in **I Corinthians 3:5-7**. Our job is to plant and water the seed. God will cause the growth. We are not successful based on the number of baptisms we have had. Rather, we are successful based on the number of seeds we have planted.
- C. However, there is a subtle corollary here. Too often, because we think the conversion is dependent on us, we spend our time fretting over when to say anything and exactly how to say it. Too often we get bogged down in analysis paralysis. We never plant the seed because we are trying to figure the exact best way to plant and water it to make it grow. But we cannot make it grow. Allow me to illustrate this. Perhaps you remember the lesson I preached a few years back on church history. I know that is a hard hitting lesson and some people don't like it. In fact, after I preached it in Beaumont, a few ladies dropped by my office upset with me because it named denominations. They said something along the lines of, "We can understand doing that study after you have gotten to know someone and figured out where they are and made sure that wouldn't be offensive, but you should never preach that as a sermon in an assembly where you might have first time guests." Here was the amazing thing. They were talking to me on Thursday morning. On Tuesday night, we had baptized a young man whose very first visit had been the night I preached that sermon and he wanted to get together and learn more about it.
- D. I am not saying be reckless or careless in how we spread the gospel. I am not saying we should think it doesn't matter what we do or say. I am merely saying we have got to understand what this parable is saying. We don't know how the seed works in hearts and how it brings forth fruit. Therefore, we must not let ourselves get bogged down with analysis paralysis. Instead, we just need to do our job in any way we can, planting and watering the seed.

### III. If we plant the seed, it will grow.

- A. Even if you have never seen the movie (which actually, I haven't) ***Field of Dreams***, you have heard the phrase, "If you build it, they will come." This parable essentially says, "If you plant it, they will grow." We don't know how the seed grows in the hearts of men. We cannot force it to grow. But if we plant the seed, it will grow.
- B. **Isaiah 55:10-11** points out just like God sends the rain and it produces fruit on the earth, His word will not return to Him void. It will accomplish His plan. Now, don't misunderstand either this passage or the parable in **Mark**. This is not saying everywhere we plant a seed will produce mature fruit. Don't forget Jesus has already told the Parable of the Sower, in which a minority of the seed produced good fruit. Further, God's word was not sent merely to save souls, but also to judge those who refuse to accept it (**John 12:48**). Therefore, I am not saying fruit will grow everywhere we plant the seed.
- C. However, I am saying when we plant seeds wherever we can, without getting bogged down in analysis paralysis, trying to figure out exactly how the word grows in men's hearts, then the seed will sprout and grow.

### IV. Even when we have moved on the seed may grow.

- A. Since we don't know how the seed will grow in a person's heart, we need to understand it may not grow on our timetable. I have heard numerous stories of people who had planted and watered seed repeatedly with some and never saw any visible fruit. But then they found out years later that the person had become a child of God and it all started way back when the seed was planted. Consider a scriptural example of this. In **John 7:5**, we learn Jesus' own brothers did not believe Him while He was with them. Talk about major seed planting that seemed to be leading nowhere. However, read **Acts 1:14**. After the resurrection and the ascension, the brothers had become believers.
- B. Further, I have even seen and heard of instances where someone pushed the seed away. They were made mad by the seed and seemed to reject it. The sowers thought they had messed up the growing of the seed. But, in time the person heeded and became a Christian. Back in Beaumont, one of our elders' mothers told me about her conversion. She attended a Gospel meeting and the preacher made her absolutely livid. She vowed never to go back. But as she studied her Bible based on the things he said, she found them to be true and became a Christian. I know another case in which a man was dating a woman and brought her to the assemblies. She visited several times and it just seemed every time something happened that in-

censed her. She got mad at me, at the other evangelist, Max Dawson, at our elders, she even got mad at one of the deacons for something he said in the announcements. As far as I was concerned, we had blown that one. She was a lost cause. Then one Friday, after she and the fellow were married, out of the blue she called me and wanted to discuss some issues. Somehow, something in all that contact caused her to ask her new husband some questions. We baptized her that Friday and she is now one of the most active workers in the congregation.

- C. We never know how long it will take for the seed to sprout and grow to maturity. We never know when. We never know what water must go under the bridge before the word sinks in. But it is there and it can do its work. So, do what you can, when you can and leave the rest to God. Even if we have to move on, we never know how God's word is working in the hearts of men. As long as the seed has been planted, there is always opportunity for growth.
- V. We must let the seed grow at its own pace.
- A. The final statement in the parable also caught my attention. The farmer doesn't put his sickle in until the grain is ripe. He doesn't see a sprout and get the sickle. Sometimes I think we do that when we plant and water. The moment we see a flicker of hope, we jump all over it. If baptism doesn't happen immediately, we decide nothing is going to happen and we abandon it.
  - B. I know some people who have looked at **Acts 2** or **Acts 16** and saw people converted after one lesson or one contact. Therefore, they try to come up with some way in which people will be baptized after only one study. I have had that happen. I have taught some people the lesson on religious history and they wanted to know since they got saved a denominational way, how can they be saved God's way from the Bible and we baptized them after one study. I have taught some people the lesson we learned from Ken Craig about God's amazing plan to redeem us and baptized them after the first study. But I have used both of the lessons with others that either had to keep studying before they became Christians or who have yet to become Christians. Each heart is different. Each one will grow at its own pace.
  - C. We must not try to force people to be farther along than they are. Rather, we plant the seed and we keep watering it. When the seed reaches maturity on its time table, then we can bring in the sickle and harvest the fruit.
- VI. With all this in mind, we must at least do something.
- A. Review what we have learned from this parable. We don't know what makes the seed grow. Our job is not to make the seed grow, but to plant and water the seed. If we plant the seed, it will grow even at times after we have moved on. The seed will grow at its own pace. When we consider all of this, it leads us to one major conclusion.
  - B. We have to do something. We can spend all our time trying to figure the exact perfect thing to do to plant and water the seed and we will never get anything done. We have got to at least do something. Frankly, as long as it is scriptural, I don't care what you do. But do something. Even if people have said, "That will never work." Who knows? We don't know how the seed grows. I will tell you this, I would rather do some work that never results in any baptisms than never do anything and try to explain to God, "Well, I never could figure out what would work." Consider the parable of the talents in this context (**Matthew 25:14-30**).
  - C. Do something. Invite people to our Gospel Meeting. Invite them to classes. Have a home study. Knock doors. Talk to check out clerks. Develop friendships with a plan to get to spiritual discussion. It doesn't matter what we do, but we must do something. Then we can leave the rest up to God. Growing the seed is His job anyway.

### **Conclusion:**

The only conclusion we need is to ask this one question: What are you doing to plant and water the seed? Please, do something.