

“The Power That Transforms Us” (Gospel Sanctification I)
(Study 7 of “Spiritual Processing Group: Sonship B” Series)

Opening Question (10-15 Minutes)

1. When you or others talk about the Christian life, what phrases or images are often used?
 - Is there a phrase or image for the Christian life that you especially like or dislike? (Describe why you feel this way about those words or the picture behind them.)

Let’s take a look at a story Jesus told about the Christian life- specifically, let’s pay attention to the words and phrases he uses to describe spiritual change...

Scripture Study (15 Minutes)

Read Mark 4:1-9, 26-29

(Read the parables aloud: depending on time, either have someone read it slowly once in the translation of their choice, or have 2 different readers read: one for the ESV, the other the NLT)

1. Be quiet for 30 seconds. Think or write. Now what are your first impressions?
 - What’s your emotional, gut-reaction?
 - Ask a question you have (or can think of).
 - Volunteer a thought or comment- about a verse or the whole passage.
2. In the first parable (verses 3-8) Jesus is comparing the Word of God to seed, the person who shares the Word to a sower, and the human heart to different kinds of soil. Using this agricultural analogy, how would you describe the story of your Christian life?
3. What does the second parable (verses 26-29) tell us about the role of...
 - Patience and confidence in the Christian life?
 - Mystery and power in the Christian life?

Scripture Passage (The Parables of the Sower and the Seed Growing)

Mark, Chapter 4- English Standard Version Translation (ESV): Again he [Jesus] began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ² And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³ “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸ And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” ⁹ And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” [...]

²⁶ And he [Jesus] said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

Mark, Chapter 4- New Living Translation (NLT): Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. A very large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat in the boat while all the people remained on the shore. ² He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

³ “Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. ⁴ As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. ⁵ Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn’t have deep roots, it died. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. ⁸ Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!” ⁹ Then he said, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.” [...]

²⁶ Jesus also said, “The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, while he’s asleep or awake, the seed sprouts and grows, but he does not understand how it happens. ²⁸ The earth produces the crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. ²⁹ And as soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle, for the harvest time has come.”

Group Discussion (25-30 minutes)

Spiritual Exercise: Reading and Reflection

“What We Do Depends on What God Does”

(Or, Christian Growth Is More Like Gardening Than an Assembly Line...)

Can I get 2 volunteers who haven’t read yet? Would each of you read aloud a paragraph from the quote below?

Have you ever planted flowers or tomatoes? If you plant a seed in the ground, what will transform it into a plant? The answer is an outside source: the sun. Of course, if you just threw your seed into the backyard, you might get something, but probably only a scrawny plant at best. So although the sun is the source of energy, you still have to do your part. You till the ground, and fertilize it with Miracle-Gro; you water your plants, perhaps even cover them, and generally keep a close eye on them. Now the question arises: did you cause the growth of the tomato plants? No. You were not the outside source of power. You created a good environment for that growth. But without the sun, even the water you give to your plants will only cause them to rot. So, if you want lots of fruit, there is plenty for you to do. You have to participate in the process that will eventually produce quality fruit, but you are not the power source of that growth and transformation.

Relating this to how we change for the better, our power source is the Holy Spirit. He is the One who transforms our hearts. However, we still participate in that process. There are plenty of things for us to do: Bible Study, prayer, the Lord’s Supper, fellowship, etc. But what we do does not make us better or produce holiness in us. Only the Spirit produces holiness; hence love,” “joy,” “peace,” etc., are called the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Furthermore, suppose that you plant your tomatoes in the shade, or perhaps a big weed grows up and blocks

the sun. There may be some growth, but not much. So, you need to make sure that nothing blocks the sun from your plants. In the Bible that is called “repentance.” The weeds and clouds are our sin, which block out the sun (God’s Spirit). Some sunlight will get through (on an ultraviolet level!) but not with full power. So, one of the attractive aspects of repentance is that it leads to a greater infusion of the Holy Spirit’s power. But many of us deeply suspect God’s love and ability to heal and forgive us do not run as deep as our sin. However, this is not the case: God’s love and his ability are always infinitely greater than our sin. Jesus is “more full of grace than I of sin.”

1. Is there a phrase or sentence you’d like to hear again? [Ask a reader to re-read that]
2. What strikes you about this description of the Christian life?
(It could be a thought, a question, or a comment.)
3. What does the gardening image make you think about?
 - Does it resonate with you? (Would you buy or sell it?)
 - Why or why not?
4. How does this gardening image describe God’s role and your role in Christian growth?
5. How does comparing the Christian life to a garden feel different than comparing it to...
 - A store?
 - A school?
 - An iPhone?
 - (Hint: think of what kinds of things a garden values: e.g. uniqueness, seasonality, process, and beauty- versus formula, consistency, efficiency and productivity.)
6. How does seeing God as your source of growth encourage you to...
 - Rejoice or rest?
 - Repent or obey?

Group Prayer (15 Minutes)

Ideas for Communal and Personal Prayer.

- Share for yourself, and pray for the person sitting at **8 o’clock** from you

1. Here is a reflection questions to ask yourself, and- if time permits- share about:

What’s one thing you’re processing about how God relates to you??

- (Is there something you’re feeling or thinking from the spiritual exercise- maybe a question or comment?)
- Is there a praise, a confession, a word of thanks, or a request you’d like to make about what you’re processing?

2. Is there something else going on that we can pray about for you?