

The Cross Shaped Life: Shaped by Unexplainable Growth (Mark 4.26-29)

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Dominant Thought: God works extraordinary growth through ordinary routines.

Objectives:

I want my listeners to understand God grows His kingdom.

I want my listeners to feel encouraged by the ultimate victory in God's kingdom.

I want my listeners to choose a way to participate in God's kingdom this week.

In [Mark 4.26-29](#), we encounter a fairly ordinary story that is only recorded in the gospel of Mark. Maybe Matthew and Luke didn't want to include it because it's fairly short. There's not a lot of action. There's no surprise reversal at the end. In fact, on the surface, this story is kind of boring. There's only one character, a farmer. There's only one seed. It's hard to have much of a crop with one seed. Could you imagine in a few months seeing these green and yellow planters moving through their fields with only one seed to plant?

Jesus begins His story by comparing the kingdom of God "as if a man should scatter seed on the ground" ([Mark 4.26](#)). I describe the **kingdom of God as God's reign through the gospel of Jesus and the ministry of the Holy Spirit**. This story Jesus tells compares the reign or rule of God through the good news story of Jesus and the ministry of the Holy Spirit to a farmer with one seed and some dirt.

Jesus, are you sure? I think you'd be better off with a lots of seeds. He told that story earlier in [Mark 4](#) with the different types of soil: the path, rocky, thorny, and good soil.

This time, Jesus wants to use something small. One farmer and one seed. It is similar to the story Jesus will tell after this one. In [Mark 4.30-32](#), Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a mustard seed, "the smallest of all the seeds

on the earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches.”

The kingdom of God starts out small.

Mark 4.27 starts out quite boring but ends with some mystery. The man sleeps and rises night and day. Do we need this detail? If the man was a good farmer, then he'd cultivate the ground, water the lone seed. He'd load up the sprayer with insecticide or herbicide or fungicide. He'd do some work. But no, it simply says, “he sleeps and rises night and day.”

And yet, maybe this man is a good farmer. Sometimes sleeping and rising day and night is a description of faithfulness. He's doing what needs to be done. He or she gets up, gets the kids off to school, goes off to work, picks the kids up from the babysitter, fixes supper, bathes the kids, and prays together before bed. Sleep and rises night and day.

This could describe the ordinary routines of life. Get up, have a cup of coffee, open your Bible for time with God, off to work, call your 21-Days prayer partner on your lunch hour, go to the grandkids ball game to cheer them on, back home to take the dog out for an evening walk, then home for bed, sleeps and rises night and day.

Ordinary mundane life. Wake up in the morning, off to school, facing that difficult class with courage, eager to sit with your friends at lunch, try to stay awake in the afternoon class, then off to practices or games or matches, home for a late supper, finish your homework, read your Bible before bed. Sleeps and rises day and night.

Those days turn into weeks, and something happens to that seed. “The seed sprouts and grows; he does not know how.” I love watching the crops grow. It's still amazing to see the growth from a seed to a seedling. It takes time. It takes patience. The man in the story doesn't know how it grows. It's a mystery. Sure, we can explain the science of light, water, soil. We can talk about the chemicals and the environment for growth. And yet, it still is a bit of a mystery. It seems like it grows up overnight.

In Mark 4.28, the growth process is further described with a single word. It is where we get our word, “automatic.” Automatically. “The earth produces by itself.” The earth produces “automatically.” The NIV reads, “All by itself.” First, the blade, then the ear, then the full grain of the ear.

The word for all by itself or automatically is used one other time in the New Testament. Peter is miraculously rescued by an angel out of prison in [Acts 12](#). As Peter escapes prison, we read in [Acts 12:10](#), the iron gate leading into the city opened automatically or all by itself. This word is a miraculous power word.

In a few months when the snow melts and the crops go in, we will witness this growth process. We even use the image in our discipleship growth stages: seed, seedling, tree, and orchard. Again, the growth process is a patient process.

All by itself. If the environment is healthy, then the seed will automatically grow. Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes the growth process to the church in Corinth in [1 Corinthians 3:6–7](#), “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” Paul says humans have responsibilities in God’s kingdom: sowing and watering, speaking and encouraging, teaching and praying, serving and loving. But it is God who gives the growth. God grows His kingdom.

This theme is foundational for our goal to be a healthy church. Christian Schwarz with Natural Church Development believes healthy organisms and churches will naturally grow. It is a life principle.

Ben Merold was fond of saying, “It takes about 10 years to have overnight success.” If you do the right things in the right way for a long period of time, generally, the outcome will be favorable.

God’s kingdom is lived out in simple consistent routine acts of faithfulness over a long period of time.

Matthew Kemingk tells the following story in his book, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear* (pages 240-241). Every month, for more than a decade, Christian women have faithfully gathered in a heavily Muslim section of Rotterdam, Netherlands to stitch, knit, and talk. Every month they invite their Muslim neighbors—measuring and cutting, folding and seeming, and talking. Sewing proved to be a brilliant kinesthetic way to break boundaries and build relationships.

When the author asked why the Muslim women felt drawn to the club, he was told that they initially came “because they like to sew.” However, the women said with a smile, it is the *gezelligheid* that keeps them coming

back. *Gezelligheid* is the most beautiful word in the Dutch language. There is no English word for it. The best English approximation for *gezelligheid* is a description of a communal sense of coziness, conviviality, trust, joy, and connection. *Gezelligheid* is exactly what these women have built together.

The author asked the women what their ultimate goal is for their sewing group. The Christian women unapologetically stated that their hope was to share the story of Jesus. “But,” they hastened to add, “that is a very long road.” It is not one to be rushed or forced. “Only God saves people!” one of them declared to me. “God alone sows the seed of conversion in a person’s soul. God alone makes the seeds of faith grow.” We simple need “to remove the stones from their garden.”

God works extraordinary growth through ordinary routines.

[James 5:7–8](#) “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

The story Jesus tells about God’s kingdom closes in [Mark 4:29](#), “But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

Klyne Snodgrass writes in his book, *Stories with Intent*, “While people go about their daily routines, the kingdom is present and at work, and God’s harvest with his judgment will certainly follow. Humans do not bring in the kingdom; they are servants of the kingdom, not its cause.”

The Old Testament prophet uses the image of sickle and harvest in [Joel 3:13](#), “Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.” In Joel’s message, the harvest was a judgment against evil. In the parable of Jesus, Craig Blomberg summarizes, “At the end of the age the kingdom will have grown into its fullness, after which Judgment Day will immediately follow” (*Interpreting the Parables*, p. 266).

The first words of Jesus recorded in Mark’s gospel are in [Mark 1:15](#) “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Jesus shows that the kingdom will not come in a way the people were expecting. It would not come by force or aggression. It will come patiently, surprisingly, through the ordinary mundane activities of faithful followers of Jesus. Sleeping and rising, night and day.

In what ways will you participate in God's kingdom this week? He's the one that causes the growth. He's the one that reigns over His kingdom and will hold people accountable in the end. He's the one who is victorious over evil and sin through the perfect ministry of Jesus Christ. How can you show your allegiance to Christ's kingdom through your everyday routines?