

THE KINGDOM OF GOD
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Jesus also said, "The kingdom of heaven is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come." Mark 4:26-29

Often when Jesus described the kingdom of God, he used simple illustrations to help us understand. There was rarely talk of power or conquering or crowns; he usually just spoke of lamps or gardens, simple things, as in this passage from Mark. Jesus seems to be saying here that the kingdom of God is about planting, waiting, trusting, and harvesting. All the growth comes from God. We can plant, and we can nurture, and we can harvest, but we have no real idea what makes things grow. Growth is definitely a "God thing", not something we can manufacture on our own.

Growth is often a difficult process for individuals and churches to handle. In fact, most folks resist growth like it's the plague! And yet ... nature itself tells us that unless something is growing, it's dying. Nothing stays the same forever! If there's any life there at all, then there's growth. Growth only stops when all the life is gone.

True Christian discipleship is all about growth. As the saying goes, God loves us just the way we are – and he loves us too much to let us stay that way. God is patient, understanding, compassionate – and relentless. There will always be something the Spirit is working on in our lives: helping us to let go of some things, reach out for others; strengthening our character and our faith. If we refuse the Spirit's movement, if we resist change and insist on staying the same forever, we've closed ourselves off to God and his life in us begins to weaken and die.

You'd BETTER be saying, "No way! Come, Holy Spirit!"

Churches are famous for fearing and resisting growth. People like things to stay just the same as they've always known them to be. Being open to change in a church requires much faith and trust in God. But again: if we're not growing, we're dying. (And I'm not just talking about numbers!) It's inevitable: growth requires change.

God's call to growth and change is a call of renewed hope and energy, deeper faith, stronger discipleship. And ... Jesus himself says that this is the kingdom of God. Let's not miss the joy of the harvest!