

to help God's Word along? Improve it a bit. Modernize it. Make it more fun and entertaining. Then things would work! Except, if you want strawberries, what do you need to plant? Strawberries. If you want hearts faithful to Jesus, what do you need to plant? Jesus' Word! Jesus once said, *"If people do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead"* (Luke 16:31).

Do you get Jesus' point? Trust in Jesus only comes from Jesus' Word. He says, *"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, ... so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it"* (Isaiah 55:10-11). That's the point of Jesus' parables. God's Word is always working, and it's going to produce to produce something big! In fact, it already has. After Jesus ascended into heaven, there were 120 Christians in the entire world. How many are there now? Billions! So trust Jesus and his Word.

That includes dads. Fathers are farmers too! I once heard a sermon in which the pastor asked, "What's best for kids today?" Wouldn't it be nice for them to have someone who sees them every day? Someone with a powerful influence in their lives who knows them personally? Someone who cares enough to lovingly correct and train and encourage them? Someone who can plant in their hearts every day the seed of God's Word? Who was he talking about? Dad! We need dads. It doesn't matter how old you are or how old they are. Fathers are farmers. You can't control the results, but you can plant. You can plant God's Word daily, and the Word has power!

So what would you tell that man, lying on his back in the hospital, worried about his daughter falling away from Jesus? First, point him to Jesus. He has a Savior who has forgiven every sin he has committed as a father and grandfather. No one can ever separate him from Jesus' love. Point him to Jesus! Then remind that man that God's Word works, even when we're sleeping, even when we're lying on a hospital bed. God isn't yet done working with any person who has heard his Word. God's Word works! Then encourage him to trust that no matter what he sees on the outside, God's kingdom is growing and expanding in ways we won't understand until we get to heaven. Finally, tell him to keep on planting. To plant God's Word in the hearts of those you love over and over and over again. Because Christians—and Christian fathers—are farmers!

Mark 4:26-34
Pastor Nathan Nass

Father's Day
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²⁶ He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. ²⁹ As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." ³⁰ Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. ³² Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade." ³³ With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. ³⁴ He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Christian Fathers Are Farmers

I once visited a father—actually a grandfather—in the hospital. He was sick, but his memory troubles kept him from remembering what he was sick with. He couldn't tell me what he had or how long he would be there. But he had something on his mind. He leaned forward in the bed and slowly said, "I have to tell you something serious, pastor. I'm so worried!" I wondered what he would say. Was he dying? What was the bad news? "My daughter has started going to a church that doesn't teach the truth from the Bible. Oh, it hurts me so much. What can I tell her? I think about it all day long." Here he was laying on a hospital bed, hooked up to all sorts of IVs, but he wasn't one bit concerned about that. A person he loved was drifting away from Jesus. For him, that was the worst pain of all.

I bet many of you can relate to that feeling. The fact that you're here tells me that Jesus is important to you. And if Jesus is what's most important to you, then many of you know that father's pain. You've felt that same concern for your own children and the people you love. More than anything in the world, you want them to believe in Jesus. But the problem is that life is long. Life is long and full of temptations and sin and false gods. There's nothing more painful than to see people you love waver in their faith in Jesus. I can still hear that father's words, "I think about it all day long."

To comfort those fears, Jesus tells us a parable. It's not just for fathers, but it's easy to apply to fathers on Fathers' Day. Jesus said, *"A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."* We get this! A farmer plants his seed, and then farming takes a whole lot of trust. The farmer trusts that little by little—even when he's sleeping, even though he might not un-

derstand know how—that seed will grow until it’s ready to harvest.

So what’s the point? Like a farmer with his seed, plant and trust God’s Word. Farmers take a risk every time they plant their seeds. So many things are outside a farmer’s control—weather, bugs, even the end result. But a farmer knows to plant his seed and trust that little by little God will make it grow. Christians are farmers. We’re called to plant God’s Word over and over again in people’s hearts. We can’t control the end results, but God does! The apostle Paul wrote, *“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow”* (1 Corinthians 3:6). Just like in a little seed, there is inexplicable power in God’s Word. Plant the Word and trust that it will grow!

So have we planted God’s Word over and over again in the hearts of those we love? Last year, my family didn’t get any strawberries out of our little garden. Not a single strawberry all summer. Can you believe it? You should, because we didn’t plant any strawberries. So of course we didn’t have any strawberries grow in our garden! But how often do we expect people to grow into Christians without us planting the Word in their hearts? Think about kids. We live in a society where we expect others to teach our kids. Reading? At school. Swimming? At the pool. Jesus? At church. Are we planting God’s Word into our family’s hearts at home? If I plant strawberries, there’s no guarantee they will grow. But I can guarantee what strawberries won’t ever grow—the ones I don’t plant. Do we expect a harvest without planting? That’s foolish!

A study in 1999 found that 5% of WELS families read God’s Word regularly at home. 5%. That’s not very many! What keeps us, even as Christians, from planting God’s Word over and over again in our hearts and lives? Either we must not think God is very great, or we don’t trust that God’s Word is going to work. Both are bad! How many opportunities have we missed to encourage our spouse with God’s Word? How many opportunities have we missed to plant God’s Word in our children’s hearts day after day? And then suddenly it hits you like it did for that man in the hospital bed. You see loved ones drift away. What’s not planted won’t grow.

If this is really hitting home in your heart, that’s good! That means you care about Jesus and you care about the people Jesus has put in your life. It hurts to think about how we have failed to plant the most important thing in our loved ones’ hearts. But now it’s time for God’s Word to work in your heart. It’s planted there too. And it’s God’s Word that reminds you about Jesus. About how he died for every one of your sins. For every failure of your past. God forgives you. And he wants you to know something wonderful. Nobody’s faith depends on you. Take that burden off your shoulders. Faith depends on God. When you don’t know it, when you don’t see it, God’s Word is working in their hearts. Like a seed in the ground, at God’s time it will grow.

So keep on planting God’s Word! I know that sometimes as a parent or friend you can feel so powerless. “It’s not working.” “They’re not listening.” But how long does it take for a seed to grow? Once that farmer puts the seed in the ground, he has to leave the rest

up to the seed and the God who made it. The results aren’t in his control, but they’re in God’s control. And that’s a good thing! This is what Jesus wants you to remember. Christians are farmers. God makes us no promise that everyone we love will be in heaven. But he promises that his Word is powerful. It’s always working. You can’t control the results, but you can keep on planting God’s Word!

But is it really going to work? Is God’s Word really going to accomplish anything? It sure doesn’t seem like it does! So Jesus keeps going. He asks us a question, *“What shall we say the kingdom of God is like?”* Jesus invites us to think: What is God’s kingdom like? What would you say? What do you want to say? It’s like the Golden State Warriors—always winning! It’s like a song by Adele—grand and beautiful! What’s God’s kingdom like? How about this: Jesus says it’s like a mustard seed. When you picked out a father’s day card at the store, did you see the one that said, “Dad, you’re like a mustard seed?” No! It doesn’t sound good. So tiny. So unimportant.

But Jesus had another parable to tell. The kingdom of God *“is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.”* A farmer takes and plants this littlest of all seeds. What would you expect to come from a little mustard seed? Something small, right? But that little seed over time grows and grows and grows until it’s one of the biggest garden plants around. People say a mustard plant can be ten to fifteen feet tall! That little seed produces big results.

Great. I like mustard! But what’s the point? Why add this parable? Jesus is making us a huge promise. No matter what you see on the outside, God’s kingdom is always growing. God has big plans for his Word and his people that we can’t imagine. What you see on the outside right now doesn’t tell the whole story. That’s something that we need to hear! It can so often seem like doing God’s work doesn’t work. But you don’t know what God can do with that seed planted in someone’s heart. Little by little, day by day, those family devotions, reading Bible stories, coming to church.... It’s having an impact. So keep on planting!

It’s just hard to plant and have to wait. It’s hard not to see results now! We are so used to instant gratification. Let’s be honest: It’s a whole lot easier to get carrots at the store than grow them in a garden! Why don’t diets work? You can watch what you eat for one day, but for a month? Why is it so hard to learn another language? You can learn a few Spanish words one day, but every day? We want it now! Overnight! But God doesn’t ever promise instant gratification. He promises great blessings long term through daily use of his Word. Are we patient farmers?

When I prepare for my sermons, I try to read commentaries from other pastors. As I studied this text, I read a commentary written in the 1930s. Do you know what the pastor said was a problem in the 1930s? People were tempted to think that God’s Word wasn’t enough. They felt they had to help it along. People wanted less time in the Bible and more “picnics and entertainments,” he said. Sound familiar? How often don’t we think we need