

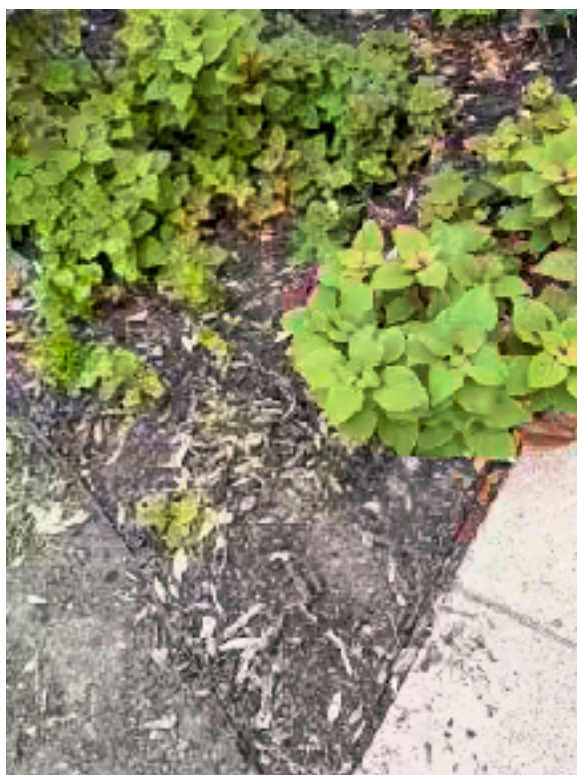
FOLLOWING IN THE WAY:

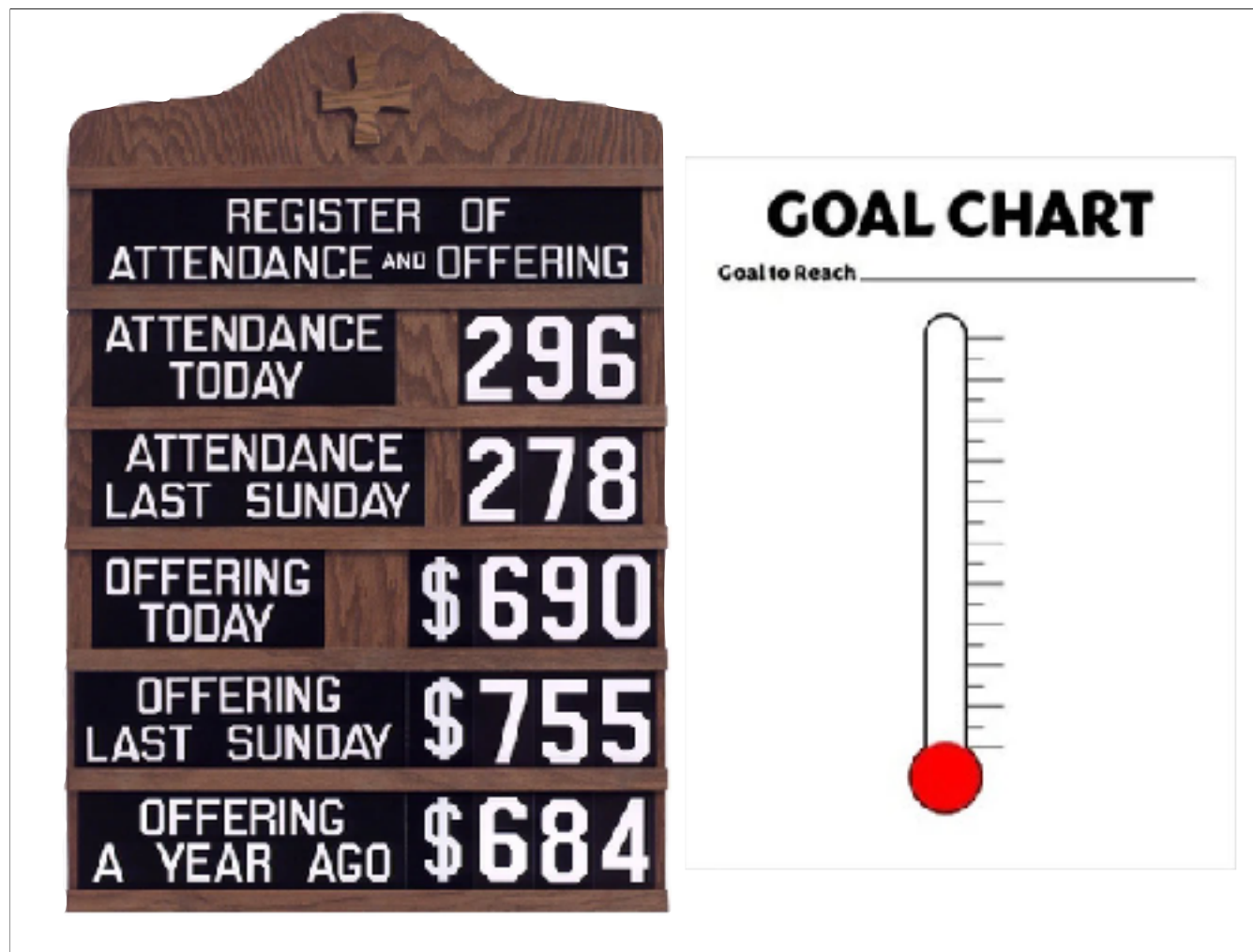
The Gospel of Mark

Growing Silently

MARK 4:21-34

10/11/26





I want you to see what we do. We measure what we have done.

Sometimes, it is through a thermometer chart. The better we do, the more the mercury climbs and it is used to say, “Cmon guys you got to do better than this.”

But when I was growing up it was in the form of a church attendance board, usually kept at the front next to the pulpit so everyone could see. The reason...we need to work harder because we are not giving enough or doing enough work. It's all up to us if we want this church to grow. (Those are a compilation of things I have heard church leaders say for years.)

But Jesus does not have an attendance board. He only has the message left in little small places and then left unattended to where it will grow.





We talk about “growing the church.” Most is based on numerical growth in three areas: members, money, and baptisms. We want to quantify it and justify it and perhaps boast about it.

But the truth is this emphasis has been only in the last 60 years.

It started with various books.

Ten largest Sunday Schools by Elmer Towns.

Donald McGavran on church growth

Rick Warren and his church plant at California which spawned The Purpose Driven Church.

We started comparing us to others. Are we growing? How fast?

It brought a problem. We want it to grow our way. We want linear growth, the kind you see on a business chart describing profits. Every week, month, and year, the church needs to be larger. So we compete for members. And what is called growth for many churches is nothing more than stealing members from another church.

Church Growth Problems



But the second is we start to use earthly tools to accomplish a heavenly mission.

So we try programmic styles...almost a formula...do this and you will explode in growth.

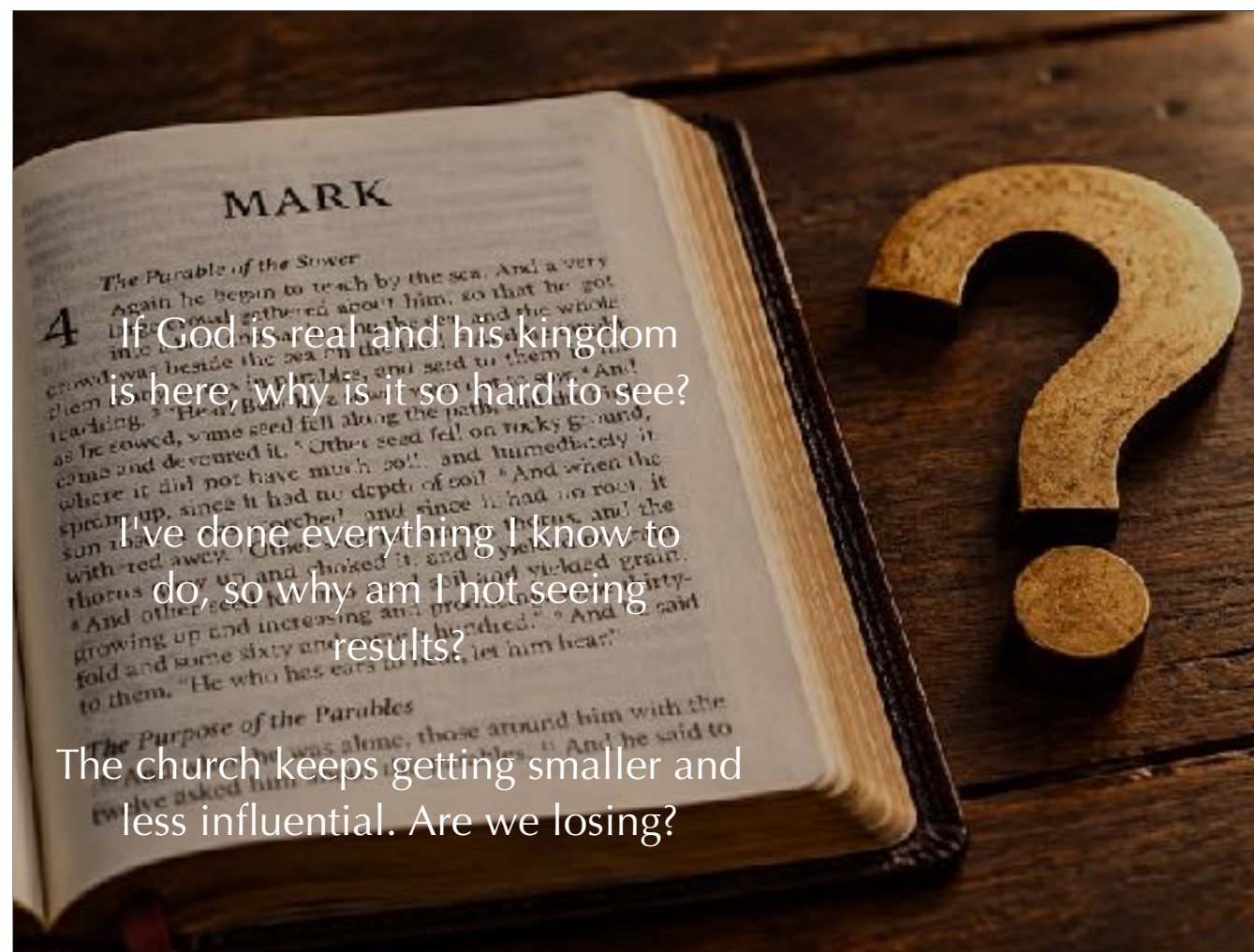
Goofy things....preacher wears jeans and a t-shirt. Give people the music they want.

We start to please the masses...we have productized the church into a business system designed to attract new customers. (Sounds terrible but it is true...we apply the commercial mindset to a noncommercial situation.)

But how does the kingdom of God truly grow?



But how does the kingdom of God truly grows? Is it any of what we think, what we import into the body of Christ from a culture that emphasizes numerical results and bragging rights?



If God is real and his kingdom is here, why is it so hard to see?

I've done everything I know to do, so why am I not seeing results?

The church keeps getting smaller and less influential. Are we losing?

That's why we come to today's lesson. As we approach Mark 4:21-34, we float questions that it supplies answers an insight into the answers.

If God is real, and his kingdom is here, why is it so hard to see, especially for some people? Why don't we see him working to make his church larger?

Or why don't we see results, either in our lives or in the church body?

Or we lament, the church is getting smaller and less influential. Are we losing the battle?

Mark 4:21-34

A Picture Album



To address our questions, many times unspoken, Jesus opens a picture album and his teaching comes in a visual form, in a way everyone can see.

First, is a picture of a lamp, an oil lamp designed to give light to a complete darkened space.

Second is sprouts in soil. Hardly noticeable but coming unbeckoned,

The third is a seed so small it, is almost overlooked as having any value.

“He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? (Mark 4:21)

The first is the lamp. Now the image that Jesus uses and his language is familiar.

“Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.
Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to
everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light
shine before others, that they may see your good deeds
and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:15–16,
NIV)

“He said to them, “***Do you bring*** in a lamp to put it
under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its
stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed,
and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out
into the open.” (Mark 4:21–22, NIV)

The lamp “arrives”

But to us, it is most familiar from Matthew, not Mark. In Matthew we know it well. We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. And there Jesus speaks about putting a lamp on a stand. But this passage is about us, his followers, and our influence in the world we live in.

But Mark is different. There is no light of the world and salt of the earth. Instead, he uses a strange word. He says you “bring the lamp.” The lamp “arrives.” It comes to bring light, to show you something you cannot see without it.

“He told them, “*The secret of the kingdom of God* has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, “ ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’ ” (Mark 4:11–12, NIV)

“For whatever is hidden *is meant to be* disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.” (Mark 4:22, NIV)

In last week’s lesson Jesus speaks of the “secret of the kingdom” using the word we get our word mystery from. A mystery is something kept from view until the appropriate time.

If you are reading a John Grisham novel. He sets up a dilemma and adds more to it over time until, at the proper moment toward the end, he reveals the ending and resolves it.

Even though we tend to think the Bible is easy to understand (due to our prejudices), it is confusing. Start reading and you have these stories...an ark, Abram going and he never gets what he wants but a promise. A people who are rebellious and a God who seems to stick with them. A king with a promised “forever” kingdom even though he dies. But when Jesus comes, he resolves the tension of centuries because God does things in his own time.

That’s why in vs 22, Jesus says this was “meant to be.” It was hidden in order to be brought into the open.



The truth about Jesus was intended to be revealed, not told.

One issue we struggle with is we want to tell people what the truth is rather than giving them enough to let them discover it for themselves.

“If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.” (Mark 4:23, NIV)



Then, Jesus brings back up that epigram: If anyone has ears, let them hear.

We are back to listening.

““Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued.
“With the measure you use, it will be measured to
you—and even more. Whoever has will be given
more; whoever does not have, even what they have
will be taken from them.”” (Mark 4:24–25, NIV)

And it becomes a bridge. Jesus speaks about “consider carefully what you hear.

Are you paying close attention, trying to figure it out and understand it or is it just a bunch of nice stories that keeps my attention from wandering?

““Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued.
“***With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more.*** Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”” (Mark 4:24–25, NIV)

That’s because of the “measure.” It is where we get our word “meter”. In Matt 7:2, the measure is about your condemnation and judgment of others and we bring our own measuring cup that will be used on us.

We like to quote this passage and say it is about money. The more you give, the more you get. It’s not about money.

It is about hearing, the kind that when done carefully, can get even more. We get the truth in “measures” (something we will see at the end of the lesson). But the measures you get will determine the capacity for more.

The More You
Understand the
More You Can
Understand



If you cannot hear it, you won't understand it. Why Jesus speaks to insiders not outsiders. The insider can see the insights while the outsiders shrug and say, "fun story."

Those who cannot understand basic things, don't start with complicated things. (The Chinese student and the teacher who started with the Trinity.)

To understand the depths, you need to understand the simple things. We know this in the physical world. You start with addition and subtraction which gives you the basis for multiplication and division, which gives you the basis for algebra, which leads to geometry and trigonometry, that on that basis. You can do calculus. We don't start teaching a first grader calculus because he doesn't have the capacity.

Until you build your ability to understand greater spiritual truths, they will remain hidden to you.

“He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. **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.”” (Mark 4:26–29, NIV)

So he moves to picture #2, a seed growing in the ground.

Let’s start with what people do. Notice that a man scatters seed and then he does nothing but sleeps and gets up. And things happen without him ever knowing or touching it.

He is passive and uninvolved in the growth.

As has been said, a farmer doesn’t make anything grow by shouting at it to grow.

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But then notice the seed. It “spouts.” There is this small amount of growth as it pokes itself out of the soil.

The seed is what is active.



If you are old enough, you remember what happened in elementary school. I remember this. You would take lima beans and put them in a jar with a wet cloth and you would walk away. The next day you would come in and nothing....another day, and nothing, another day and nothing.

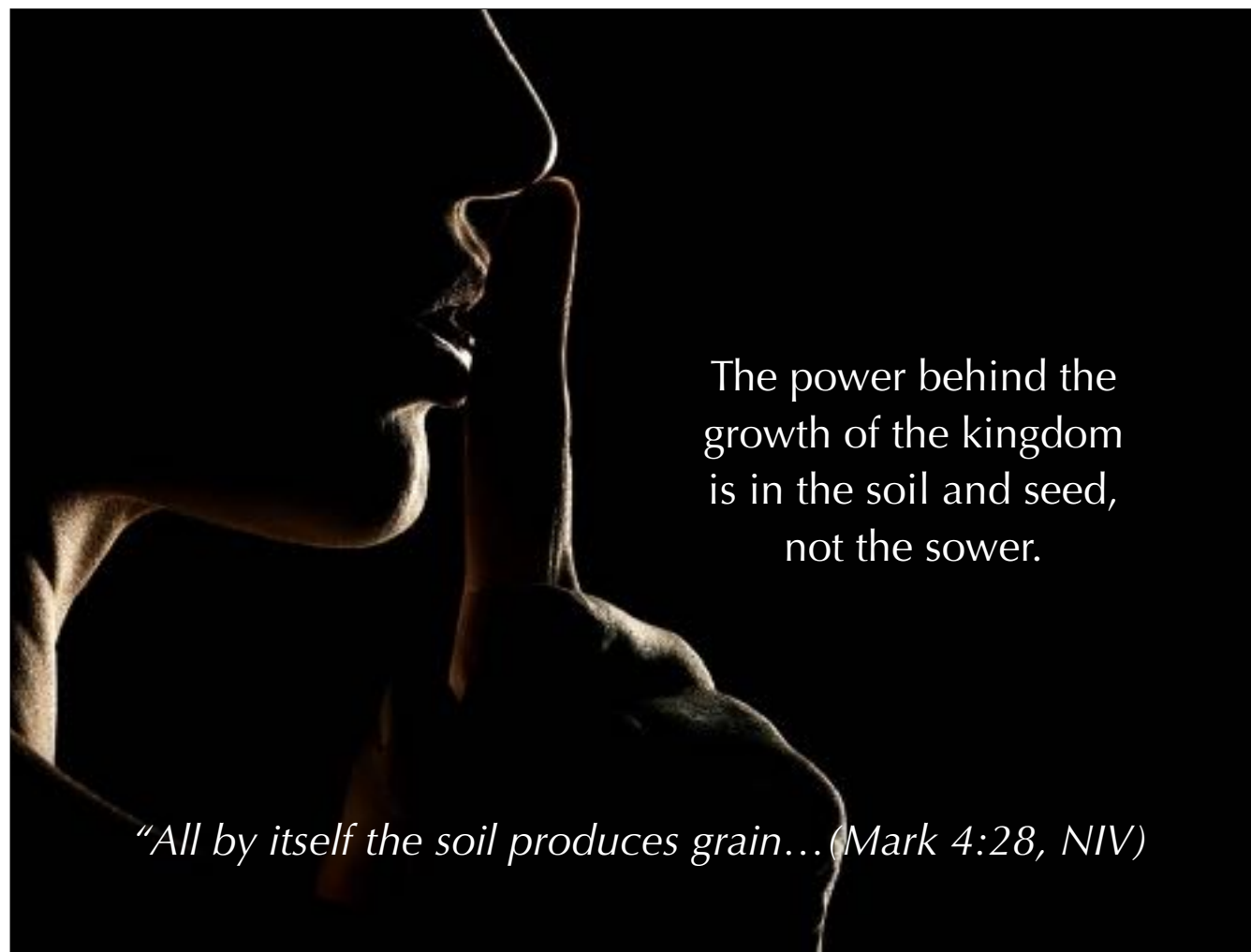
But then, one day you came in and there were these small shoots coming from the bean.

How did that happen? It just did because the power is in the seed, not the person planting it.

“He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. 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.”” (Mark 4:26–29, NIV)

But Jesus is not finished with this. Notice what happens without any assistance or drive from a person. It sprouts, it puts on grain and a stalk and then a head with a full kernel.

All of this is done without fanfare or notice of progress except what is seen.

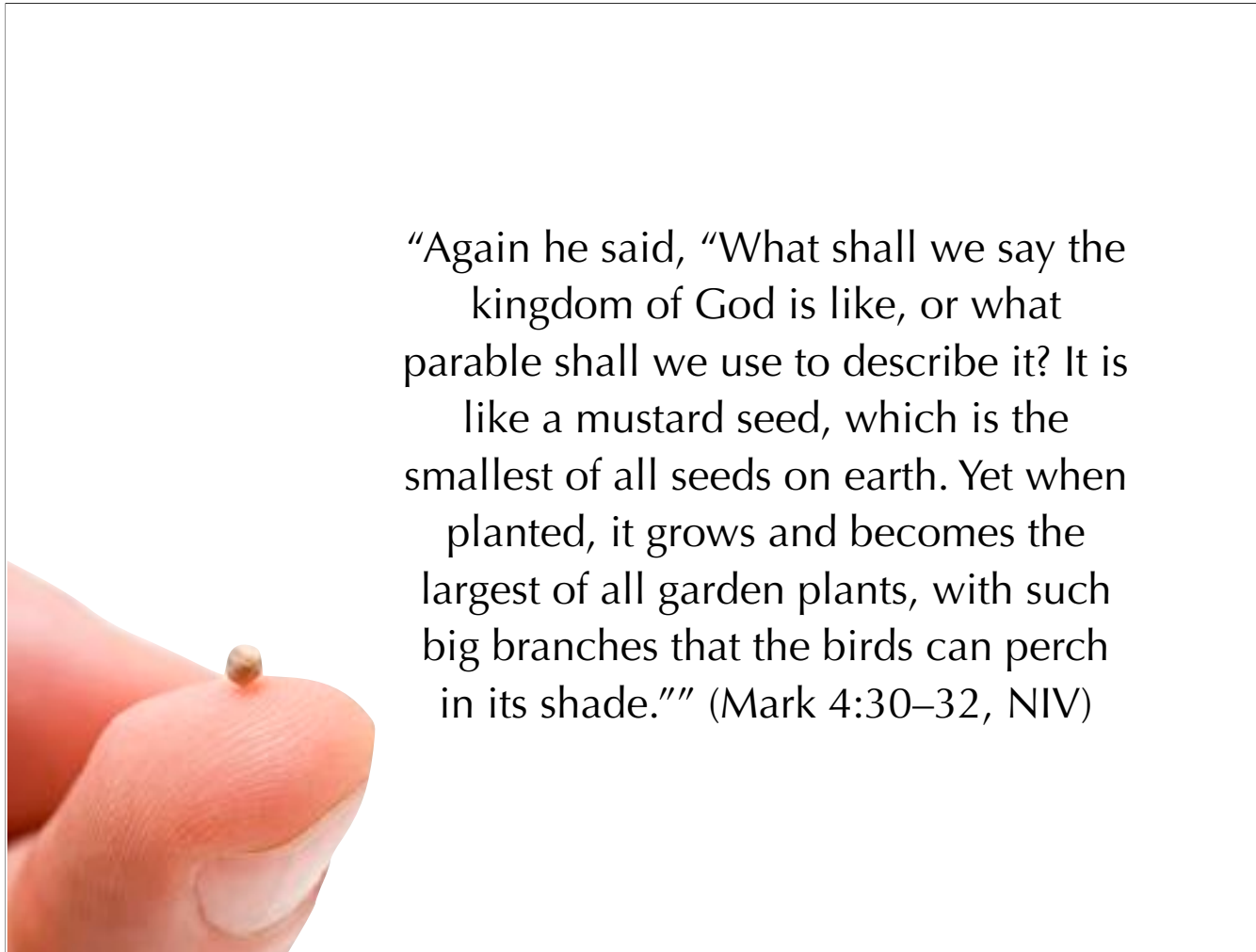


The power behind the
growth of the kingdom
is in the soil and seed,
not the sower.

"All by itself the soil produces grain... (Mark 4:28, NIV)

The secret to the growth of the kingdom is in the seed, not the sower.

In vs 28, Jesus makes it plain....all by itself the soil produces grains. A good heart and the right seed makes it work. It is not dependent on the sower but the power is outside of him. He only controls one thing. He only controls the planting.



“Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”” (Mark 4:30–32, NIV)

The next picture. The mustard seed. Hardly larger than the head of a pin.

His question is “what shall we compare the kingdom to?” Notice that he doesn’t say, “it is like a corporation with an org chart pumping out ideas and measuring the productivity of its workers.”

He says it is like a small seed, one that makes little difference in this world, which is overlooked as insignificant.

One thing to notice about this parable. He doesn’t say mustard seeds become trees but garden plants with branches that birds can perch in.



This is a black mustard plant. It is over 8 feet tall and was the result of a single mustard seed. It was a common sight in Palestine in the time of Jesus and the image of something so small creating something so impressive is hard to miss.



The Big Event Temptation

Yet if the kingdom grows through the smallest efforts, we fall in love with the Big Event.

What it takes for the church to grow...

Let's rent the local coliseum and have a big name preacher come and tell everyone what God wants. That will flood the church with new members.

The story of the campaign in the late 90's that would supposedly deliver material to every home in America about the gospel. It would be promoted on radio and TV, there were banners and special speakers and a lot of fund raising. In the end, it was a bust...why? It wasn't a mustard seed moment.

Big events depend on our efforts. We have to do this.

As we have found out, you can knock a hundred doors but you get more result from a simple conversation with the neighbor you have never shared with.

“With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them,
as much as they could understand. He did not say
anything to them without using a parable. But when he
was alone with his own disciples, he explained
everything.” (Mark 4:33–34, NIV)

This is what Jesus demonstrated. He spoke in parables but he only spoke as much as they could understand.

He measured it out in small doses, planting mustard seeds, and letting God’s power of the word and soil do the rest of the work.

He knew those on the outside did not have the capacity to understand more but to the insiders, his disciples, he could pour more into them because they had developed a larger measure.

Which Picture Do You Need Most?

Picture	The worry it answers	What God does	What we do
Lamp	"It's hidden."	Brings it into the open	Don't mistake hidden for absent
Measure	"I'm not getting much."	Gives more to the one who receives	Bring a larger measure
Growing seed	"Nothing is happening."	Gives the growth, unseen and in stages	Sow, wait, be ready for harvest
Mustard seed	"It's too small."	Makes the finish far greater than the start	Don't despise small beginnings

So look at these pictures. Which do you need most.

Perhaps you are worried that God is not visible enough in our world. God brings it into the light and don't mistake being hidden for being absent. Like the book of Esther, God is not mentioned but it doesn't mean that God is absent.

Or the measure. You may feel you just are not growing enough. God says I will give you more when you are open to more. What is happening in your life to keep your measure too small?

Or you lament that nothing seems to be happening. Do you believe God gives growth even when you cannot see it or when you are idle. Plant single seed in the life of someone and walk away and watch the power go to work.

Or do you feel insignificant or that anything you do is insignificant. Don't look at the finish line, that's God's business. Do the smallest kindness, share the smallest insight, and let God make it into something.



Our part is sowing and hearing. God's part is growth and harvest.

Most of our discouragement comes from trying to do his part, and most of our stagnation comes from neglecting ours.

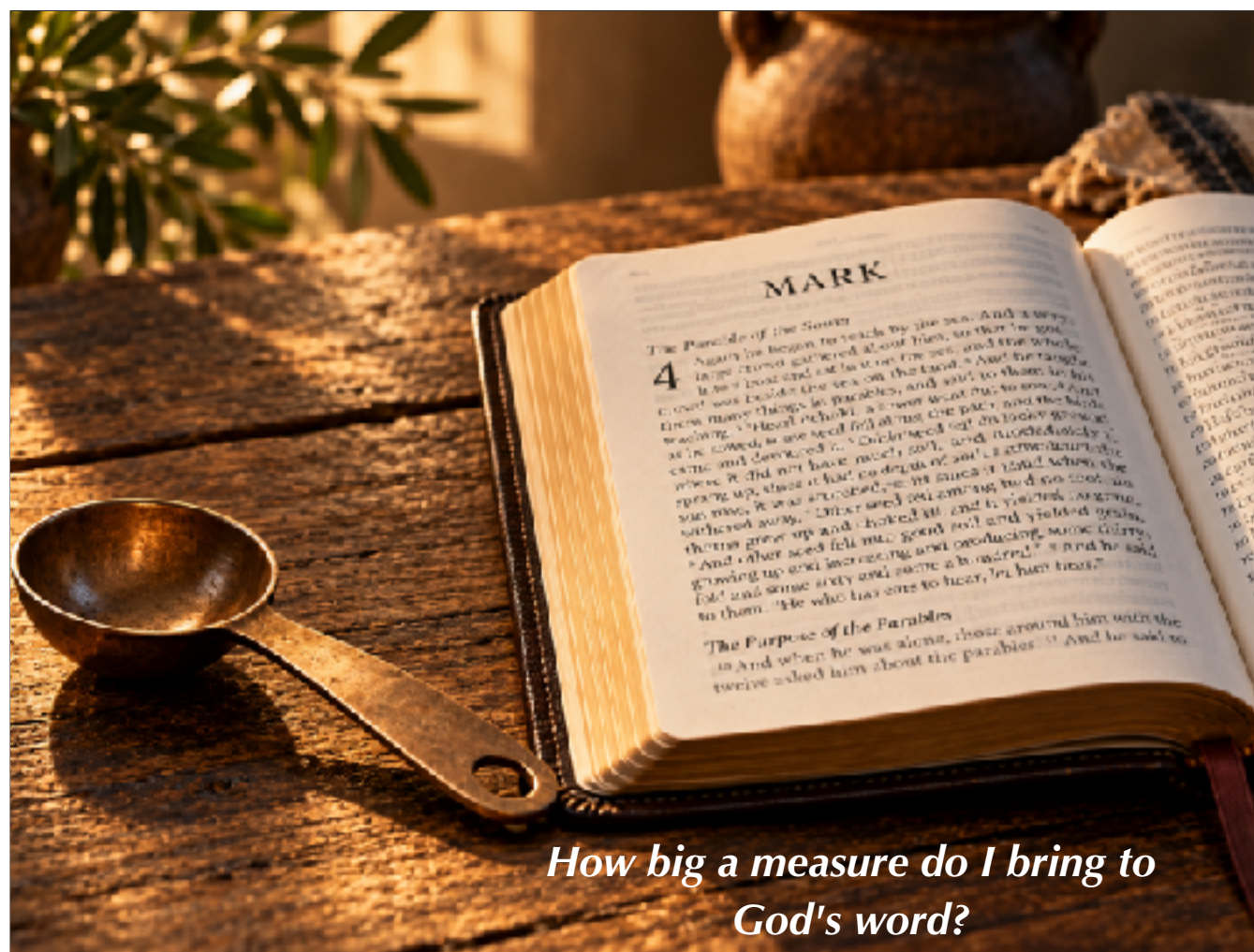
The only part we play in this process is sowing hearing. God's part is growth and harvest. Most of our discouragement comes from trying to do God's part and most of our stagnation comes from neglecting ours.



*Where does God seem hidden to
me right now?*

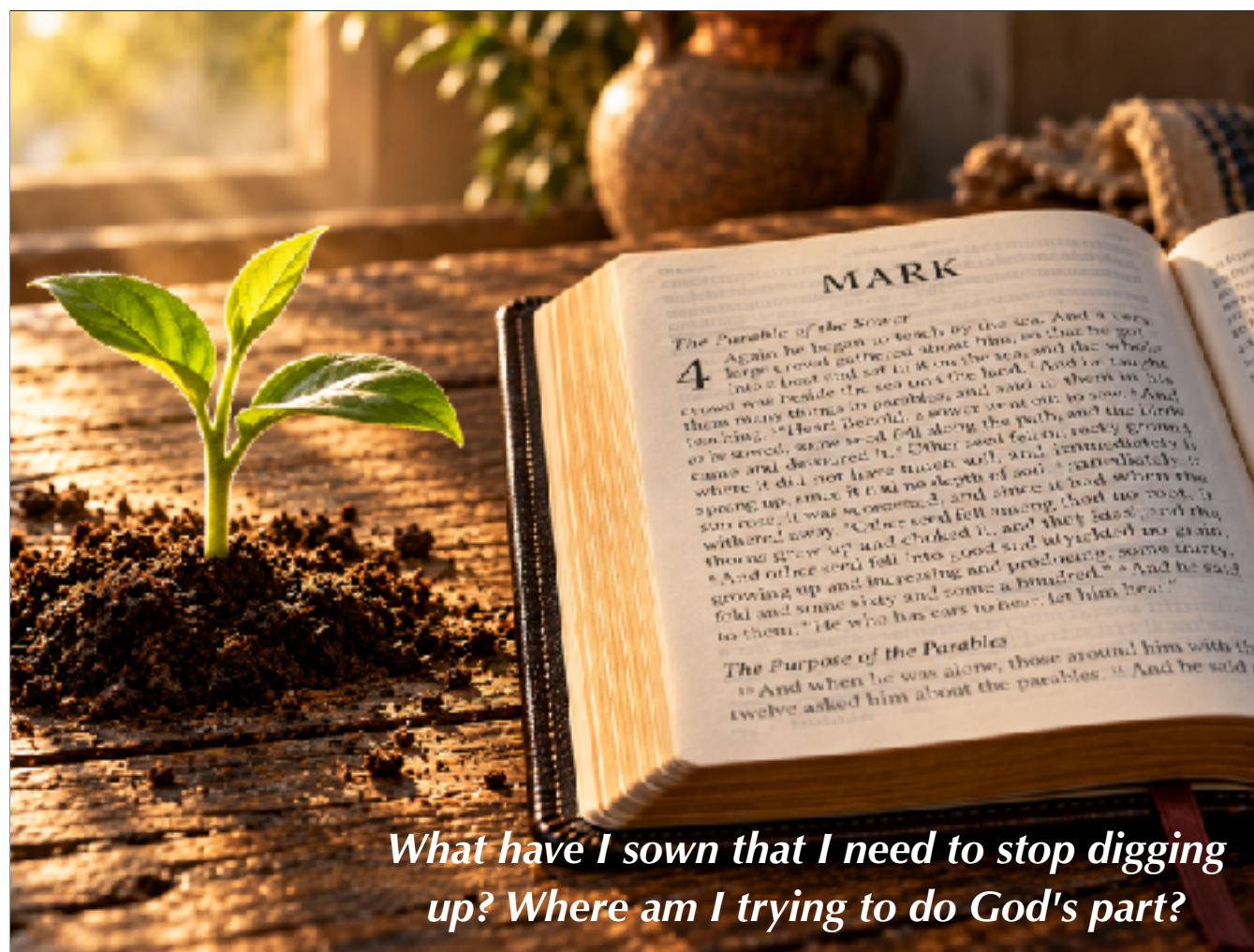
So ask yourself some questions.

Where does God seem hidden to you right now? Is there a place you need to just be open to a mystery revealed?



*How big a measure do I bring to
God's word?*

How big a measure to I bring to God's word? Some bring an eye dropper. They only want to know the information. And God will give you information but you will never have understanding and depth until you bring more hearing and listening to the deeper things of the Lord.

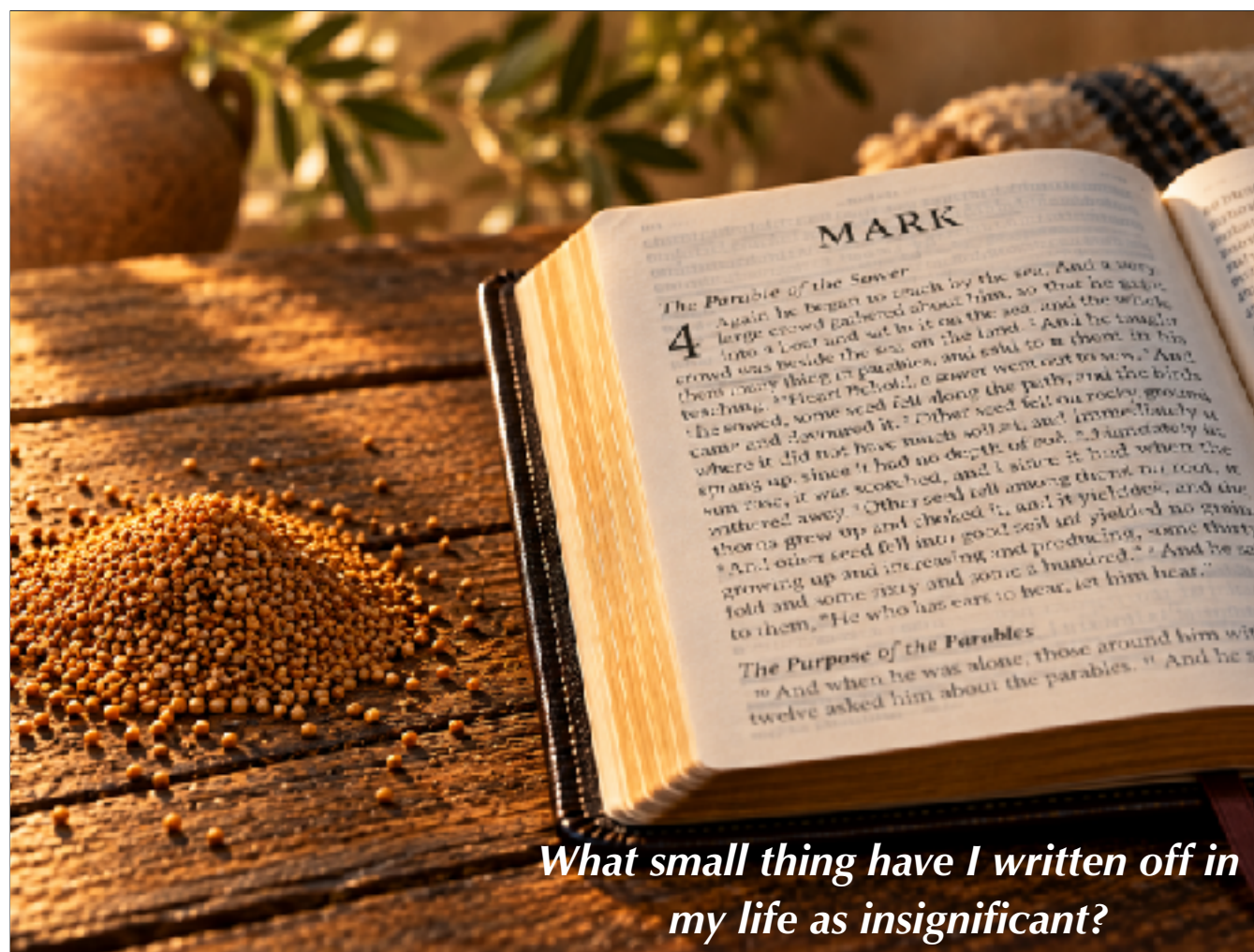


What have I sown that I need to stop digging up? Where am I trying to do God's part?

What have I sown that I need to stop digging up? Are you doing God's part.

I find it interesting that sometimes people when plants don't grow, dig it up because "it's not growing" but in doing so, they stop the silent growth path.

Don't give up on people. It may take a lifetime for the gospel to grow in their heart and life.



*What small thing have I written off in
my life as insignificant?*

And finally, what small thing have I written off in my life as insignificant?

Small words spoken at the appropriate times can make a world of difference. An I love you to someone who feels unloved can change everything. Never miss a moment to take a mustard seed out of your pocket and drop it. Then trust God to do something with it.