

Principles of Growth

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[0 : 00] Those of you who come in in this 10 o'clock hour, we meet at 9 o'clock for Sunday school, and I want to invite you all to be here for that. We are currently studying the book of Matthew verse by verse and trying to rightly divide the word of truth as well as study it line upon line, precept upon precept.

And if you want a little bit deeper study of that book, then I invite you and encourage you to show up for the Sunday school hour at 9 o'clock. But that being said, thank you for being here and for this hour and for those of you who were here for staying for this hour.

We trust that you'll receive something from the preaching this morning of Mark chapter 4. The thoughts of late have been focused on personal growth, and the last couple Sundays that I preached was about your relationship with Jesus Christ, growing in the word of God and in discerning the spirit of God and his working in your life.

And the last two sermons were growing in knowing and then growing in showing. And I really wanted to find that third word that matched all of that. And it wasn't working, growing in sowing. It just wasn't quite what I wanted. But I couldn't get away from that thought at the same time. And so I want to show you that there are definitely some principles that are going to govern your growth.

[1 : 23] And I think it's very well illustrated in this chapter of Mark, and Mark chapter 4. Because we're going to read some things from sowing seeds all the way up to mature trees.

And notice here some principles of growth. And try to outline this chapter for the most part. Let's begin by reading the first nine verses. Mark chapter 4 verse 1, it says, And he began again to teach by the seaside.

And there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship and sat in the sea. And the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine, And hearken, behold, there went out a sower to sow. And it came to pass as he sowed, some fell by the wayside, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth, and immediately it sprang up, but it had no depth of earth.

But when the sun was up, it was scorched, and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

[2 : 29] Another fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased, and brought forth some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred. And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Let's pray together. Father, it is my prayer that each one, that myself include, we'd have ears to hear. And that Lord, the word of God would enter into our ears, and sink down into our heart.

And Lord, that it would be able to grow us. Father, please help me to deliver these thoughts, and the scripture today, as I feel you've helped me in studying, and preparing.

But Lord, help me to preach. And God, may your spirit take the words that are said, in any form that they're said, and allow them to be received. And God, would you convince us, of our need to grow. And Lord, not just as a church collectively, but individually, in our hearts, and our walk with you, and in the word of God, we pray these things in the Lord Jesus' name. Amen. Alright, principles of growth.

[3 : 30] So we've already made the, or displayed the need to grow, and that we're all, nobody here is exempt from that thought, that you need to grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ, and in your knowledge of the scriptures, and your discernment of the spirit of God, and his working in this world, and in your life.

But let me say four things, by way of outlining this passage, and along with that outline, give you the principle of growth. And the first one I want to say, is there's the preparation. The preparation, that is the ground, must be prepared.

We just noticed here, in this passage, what really, it seems like, the lack of preparation, for the most part. And maybe that's what helps this principle, become very evident, and clear, that growth is determined, by the amount of preparation.

That's going to be principle number one, this morning. Growth is determined, by the amount of preparation. There's four types of surfaces, that this seed was sown upon. The sower is not a fool, he's not just missing, but there's four different surfaces, and I think that each one, displays a different degree, of preparation.

And that is really shown, by the ability, whether or not, the ground receives the seed, and to what extent, it becomes fruitful. Notice first of all, in verse four, it came to pass, as he sowed, that some fell by the wayside.

[4 : 50] The wayside is the road. In Luke's gospel, he says that it was trodden down. So, the seed that was sown here, was run over, and destroyed, and the birds, the fowls of the air came, and devoured it up.

Of course, this didn't even have a chance, did it? This surface, is a hardened surface, a surface that's been hardened, by use, and by wear, of day in, and day out. Zero attempts, have been made, to soften this ground.

Zero attempts, have been made, to prepare it, to receive seed. And so, this seed, that's sown, has no chance, at all, in growing, or even, getting a start.

This is a heart, a picture of a heart, that's been walked, all over, for a long time, and Satan has, no trouble at all, taking away, the word of God, that was sown, in that heart.

A hardened heart. Verse number 15, it describes, this is a heart, in verse 15, when he expounds, the parable. Verse 14 says, the sower soweth the word, and these are they, which by the wayside, where the word is sown, when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away, the word that was sown, in their hearts.

[6 : 02] So, we're really not talking, about ground at all, we're talking about, the hearts of men, and this heart, is a hardened heart. What I want you to consider though, and notice, that the ground, isn't hopeless.

The ground, just needs to be turned over. The ground needs to be worked, and softened, and prepared, because you could grow, something there, in that very exact plot, of ground, or in that heart.

The trouble is, it's been hardened, and been used, and been walked all over. And so, there's one surface, it's not hopeless, but it is hardened, and it's not bringing forth, any fruit, the seed is not, being effective.

The next one is stony ground, notice verses 5 and 6, again, some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth, and immediately sprang up, because it had no depth of earth. When the sun was up, it was scorched, because it had no root, it withered away.

The stony ground, this receives the seed. It says in verse 16, these are they likewise, which are sown on stony ground, who when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness.

[7 : 08] So this is a good thing. It receives the word with gladness, but it quickly withers. With lack of earth, or lack of healthy growing conditions, this seed that is received, just becomes unfruitful.

Verse number 17 says, and have no root in themselves, and so endure for a time. Afterward, when affliction or persecution arises, for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. And so there's no fruit.

And this one's filled with stones. It's called the stony ground. Stone's all over the place. What is that picture? Let's take the Bible and let it explain to us and expound. Go back to Ezekiel chapter 11. Keep your place in Mark. Ezekiel 11, and allow the word of God to expound on what that kind of heart is. Stony ground. We're going to look at two quick passages here.

Ezekiel 11 and verse number 17 will begin. Notice your Bible will give you some light. Therefore say, verse 17, Thus saith the Lord God, I will even gather you from the people and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.

[8 : 22] And they shall come thither, and they shall take away all the detestable things thereof and all the abominations thereof from thence. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you, and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh, that

they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances, and so forth.

Verse number 21, But as for them whose heart walketh after the heart of the detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their way upon their heads. In verse 18, he said, I'll take away all the detestable things and all the abominations, and then he says, I'll take away the stony heart. That's what that is. That stony heart is a wicked heart. It's a heart that's gone after sin and abomination and detestable things. Look at chapter 36 of Ezekiel. One more spot in Ezekiel 36. The Word of God enters this heart, but it has no room to work. This heart doesn't give up its sin and becometh unfruitful. Verse 24, Ezekiel 36, 24, I will take you, for I will take you from among the heathen and gather you out of all countries and bring you into your own land, that I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you, and a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Verse number 32, Not for your sakes will I do this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you, be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel. So this is a picture of a wicked heart, the stony heart, the stony ground.

[10:17] It's filled with what the Bible terms in Ezekiel, wickedness, abominations, filthiness, and it needs to be cleansed. It's a wicked heart. The word enters, but there's no room in that heart to work.

But I want you to notice once again, that doesn't mean the ground is hopeless. The stones ought to be removed. It's still usable. Growth is still possible in that situation.

Just some work needs to be done. Now notice in Mark chapter 4, there's another type of ground. It's the thorny ground. In verse 7, some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

Now this third type of ground is choked out because there's no room. There's something else growing beside it, maybe we'd say. The word of God is fighting for a place to grow.

It's distracted, we might say. Verse 19, look at the explanation. Verse 18, these are they which are sown among thorns, such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

[11:26] So the thorny ground is a, maybe we'll call this a preoccupied heart. One that receives the word, but won't give it first place. First place in that heart is the cares of this world, or the lusts of other things, the deceitfulness of riches.

And that because of that, it receives the word. But the word can't grow and become fruitful in a heart that's preoccupied and distracted, fighting for a place.

The Bible says, love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. We know it's not a sin to have possessions, obviously, but it sure is a sin, as we say, if the possessions have you, or have your heart.

It'll choke the word. Again, the ground is not hopeless. Something ought to be done here. There's plenty of potential here. There's growth going on right there, but it's the wrong thing growing in that heart.

This is a usable plot of land, or a usable heart, just a matter of preparation, because growth is determined by the amount of preparation. And the Bible says in Jeremiah 4, verse 3, break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.

[12:34] Why? Because thorns will win out every time. Thorns will win out every time. The result, though, if you do break up that ground, and get good ground, verse 8, other fell on good ground, and it did yield fruit that sprang up and increased.

And we read later, in verse 20, that the good ground is such as, hear the word and receive it, and bring forth fruit. So there's the good ground.

And when that fallow, hardened, and worthless ground is broken up and worked, and the stones are removed, and the choking worldly cares and distractions are removed from that heart, the seeds sown, the seeds received, it brings forth fruit.

But before that, there's growth, before the fruit, and before the growth, there's preparation. This ground is good ground for a reason.

The thorns would be there had not someone worked on that ground and tore those weeds and thorns out of the way. I read in Proverbs, I think it's 24, that the field of the slothful was grown over with thorns and nettles covered the face thereof.

[13 : 48] Why is that? He didn't plant them. He just didn't get them out. They showed up, and that's just such a picture of the wickedness of us. Because if we don't work at our heart and keep it clean and keep things out of it and keep our heart with all diligence, the thorns show up.

The lusts of other things get planted in there and start to choke the word. So there's the preparation. The ground must be prepared. The principle is that growth is determined by the amount of preparation as described in these first 20 verses of the chapter.

Now let me take you to the second point of the outline, and that is the planting. The planting. And keep moving in Mark 4 with me as we move through the chapter. That is the word of God is being sown in the heart.

But how exactly is that being accomplished? Notice in verse number 9, before we get to where I want it to be, notice verse 9, we read this already. He that he said unto them, he that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Now notice within this parable as he describes all four parts of the ground, he uses the same word. In verse 15, these are they by the wayside when the word is sown, but when they have heard, Satan cometh.

[15 : 04] Verse number 16, and these are they likewise which are sown among stony ground who, when they have heard the word, verse number 18, these are they which are sown among thorns such as hear the word, and then again in verse 19, or verse 20, these are they which are sown on good ground such as hear the word and receive it.

Each case, it's about hearing the word. That's how the planting is being done. It's being planted in your ear. It's going through your ear gate into your heart. The planting is the word of God being sown in your heart through your ears.

It's all about hearing. Now come to verse 23. Verse 23, if any man have ears to hear, let him hear. He says it again. Now follow on the next two verses. 24 and 5, he said unto them, take heed what ye hear, with what measure ye meet, it shall be measured to you, and unto you that hear shall more be given, for he that hath, hath what?

Ears to hear. Verse 23, for he that hath ears to hear, to him shall be given, and he that hath not what? Ears to hear. From him shall be taken even that which he hath.

[16 : 18] The focus is on hearing, having ears to hear, implying the intention of the man, hearing the word of God with the intention of receiving the word of God, believing the word of God to be truth, and receiving it into your heart.

Not analyzing, does that sit well with me? Is this how I really feel? Is that according to my truth? It's coming to the word of God saying, I'm guilty, I'm a sinner, I'm down here, he's up there, the book's up there, and it's drawing me up.

It's focus, it's hearing, receiving, looking for truth, looking to change if necessary. The planting, the word of God being sown in your heart. If you have ears to hear, then you'll have more that's given, and then you'll grow.

The Bible says, so then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. And so the principle here of the planting is that spiritual growth can only be accomplished by receiving the word of God.

And you receive it with ears to hear. It's not, you don't grow because you have a will to grow. Or I am resolved that I'm going to grow. It's not necessarily a decision you make, it's having ears to hear.

[17 : 36] And when you hear and receive the word of God, then the growth. Come back to Proverbs, keep your place again, but come back to the Proverbs. And this book here is laced with this truth.

I had to stop. I was finding so many references just skimming through it. Proverbs chapter 1. Look at this strong emphasis on hearing and receiving.

Verse number 5. A wise man will hear and will grow. Increase learning and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsel. Verse 8. My son, hear the instruction of thy father and forsake not the law of thy mother.

Look at chapter 4, verse 1. Proverbs 4, verse 1. Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father and attend to know understanding.

In verse 10. Hear, O my son, receive my sayings. Hear and receive. Spiritual growth can only be accomplished by receiving the word of God.

[18:44] Chapter 5, verse 1. My son, attend unto my wisdom and bow thine ear to my understanding. That is purposely, intently seeking to receive something that you don't have.

Verse 7. Hear me now, therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Oh, you can almost read chapter 8, the whole first 10 verses.

I don't want to take the time here, but verse 6 starts off with here. Receive, verse 10, my instruction. And it's all over this book.

It's too much. We'll just finish with this one. Chapter 8, verse 32. 8, 32. Now, therefore, hearken unto me, O ye children, for blessed are they that keep my ways.

Hear instruction and be wise and refuse it not. Blessed is that man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the post of my doors. It's receive, it's refuse it not, it's hearken, it's daily.

[19:47] So understand that in this operation of planting that we're referring to, the seed is being sown and it's not random, it's effective and it's when it's being received on purpose, when it's received on good prepared ground.

And it's not about the function of the ear that we're speaking of this morning by any means, it's about receiving the word of God with the intention that I will obey the principles, these precepts written in the word of the holy scriptures.

In Acts chapter 7, Stephen preached to the Jews and he said, ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears.

They were fighting and resisting against the word of God. He said, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost. In Matthew chapter 13, Christ said this, the same things in Luke, or I'm sorry, in Hebrews 5 that we read last week that there was a certain element among them that were dull of hearing.

Their ears, in one time in Acts, they stopped their ears, it says in Acts 7. The result is then ignorance, no understanding and no growth, minimal growth.

[20:55] Paul said that they shall turn away their ears from the truth. And so the word's being sown, but it's not being received in such cases. The principle is that spiritual growth can only be accomplished by receiving the word of God.

That's the planting that we're seeing here in Mark chapter 5. And now the number three, the patience. Look at Mark chapter 4, verse 26. The patience.

And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. The man that sowed the seed can get up all hours of the day and all hours of the night, and go and go and go and go and see, but he'll never see the growth taking place in a moment.

And he knoweth not how. He could check it out every ten minutes, he'll just never accomplish that.

Why? Because it takes time. If he were able to, some of you have probably seen the time lapse video of a small seedling getting going and taking off and springing up, it's a pretty neat little thought there and being able to watch a time lapse, but that's exactly it.

[22:17] It takes time and order for growth. Growth doesn't take place in a moment, and that's then the principle here is that growth takes time. It's not evident or accomplished overnight.

You don't have to turn, but I'm going to go to James 5 and just read a little passage by way of an illustration, something that's understood here in this realm of growing things.

A husbandman knows this. In James 5, verse 7, Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth and hath long patience for it until he receive the early and latter rain.

Be ye also patient. Establish your hearts for the coming Lord draweth nigh. It just takes time. It takes patience. And if you want to see fruit, well, then you're going to have to wait for it.

Referring now to principles of growth. And the third one being growth takes time. Now, if you're the sower, then you might as well just plan on being patient.

[23:19] Plan on remaining faithful. Faithful to water the seed. Faithful to care for that young, tender, growing plant. Wait for it. You can't make it grow.

If you're a parent that's sowing the seed of the Word of God in the hearts of your children, you can't make them get saved. You can't make them pray a prayer and say, finally, I got that done.

That's not your job. Your job is to sow the seed and be a faithful example and allow that seed when it's time. With my kids, I've always stayed hands-off to a degree.

Only because I grew up in a Christian home, in church, with the preaching, with the gospel, with people always saying, do you want to get saved? Do you want to get saved? And so with my kids, I knew I'm going to wait until I see God do something and then I'm there and ready with the Word of God.

And it happened in all four of their lives. I never said, do you want to pray a prayer today? Do you want to get saved today? You know, you're going to hell if you don't get saved today when they're three years old. They just, they hear it, they hear it, they grow up in it and eventually, all four of them, they came forward, they opened their mouth and brought the conversation out.

[24 : 28] And that's what I waited to see for the seed to show something. I didn't stand there and watch, you know, and you can't do it in trying to train your kids. You can't make them grow and make them make the right decisions.

God knows you want them to. God knows your heart is so strong toward them doing right. But you can't force it. It has to come out of their heart. And so what you can do is be patient and be faithful to water, be faithful to care, to protect.

Remember that guy mentioned in Proverbs 24, the slothful man, it said that the stone wall was broken down. And for your kids, you can't let that stone wall be broken down.

You've got to keep that wall up because there's something very precious that you want to see grow in that vineyard. If you're the sower, plan on being patient. In verse 28, it says, the earth bringeth forth fruit of itself.

So you can't make it happen, you can't even see it happen. But there is something happening. Come to 1 Corinthians 3 and let's see Paul explain what that means in application of the earth bringing forth fruit of itself while we're patient waiting for it.

[25 : 49] 1 Corinthians 3 and verse number 6, Paul says, I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

So then neither is he that planted anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase. Growing is the work of God. Spiritual growth takes time and it is the work of God, work that a man himself, a discipler or a pastor or someone who cares, they cannot make it happen, they can't, they want to see it happen.

Don't you so badly want to see somebody grow? Don't want to see them turn and go off into the world, make a wreck of their life or make poor decisions that they have to learn from. You'd so much rather see them just get the word of God in them, get the word in them, grow from the word of God and allow them, the Lord to light their path and guide their way and off they go becoming fruitful in the Christian life.

But you just can't make that happen. It's a work of God and it takes time and it can't be rushed and it can't be forced. There must be patience. So thirdly is the patience. The fourth thing that we want to see in this outline of this chapter is the potential.

The potential, and it's seen here in the next few verses, verse 30 through 32. And he said, What starts small doesn't have to stay small.

[27 : 39] If it's sown on hard hard, that small thing will get trodden over and be quickly plucked away by Satan, won't be effectual for anything. But on good ground and with patience and with watering and the faithfulness that we're describing here, that seed grows up.

And what started small doesn't have to stay small. It can become, as the passage says, great. And so I'll say this, never underestimate potential. Never overlook what seems small and insignificant to you and assume that God can't use it for His glory.

Don't ever see somebody walk inside of the building and think, no chance there. Boy, they've got a long way to go. They haven't been around 30 years like I have been around 30 years.

They haven't raised their family for Jesus Christ like I have. They can't even find the place in the Bible. Lose that attitude and realize that could be the smallest of seeds, the size of a grain of mustard seed.

It's least among herbs. But in the right conditions, is the Word of God bound? You answer that.

[28 : 57] I know what the book says. It's not bound. And in the right conditions, in the right heart, with the right patience, in the right working, what seems small, what seems insignificant, can be great.

It can be something God can use for His glory. The lad that just had a mere five loaves and two small fishes, the disciples looked at him and they said, what is that among so many?

Look at the multitudes. What is that? Get out of here. Jesus Christ's all potential. That's all I need. He just needs a heart that's prepared.

He just needs good soil. The Word of God can do the work. Look at 1 Corinthians 2, last place here that we'll turn this morning. 1 Corinthians chapter 2. The potential.

The potential. 1 Corinthians chapter 2.

[30 : 02] We'll begin. Hey, that's not the right passage. Chapter 1. Verse 25. To the end.

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. And God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty and base things of the world and things which are despised hath God chosen.

Yea, the things which are not to bring to naught things that are. Why? That no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption that according as it is written, He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord.

This is all backing up the thought that growth is accomplished by, it's a work of God, a working of God in the heart of you or anyone else. And what's ever taken place in your heart is by the grace of God at the same time.

[31 : 18] It's not at all because you've done something or you're holier than someone else or because you made the right choice back when you were... It's because of the mercy and grace of God that you're not in hell right now or that you're not out there drunk or on the side of the road yourself.

Praise the Lord for His mercy and for His growth in your heart. But don't ever overlook or ever underestimate the potential that God could use anyone else because He just showed you the ones that He chooses, the ones that He looks out after and says, I'll take that one.

If anything's ever done with that one, they're going to know it's me and He'll get the glory. Years ago, I was a young man just out of my teenage years and I was just fighting in and out of the will of God.

Knew what God had called me to do, didn't want to do it and at a few months or maybe a full year or something, kind of got in and got back in church and got involved with the bus ministry we had at our church with a fellow who was a guy that I liked, a friend of mine who was a bus captain and he and I would go out on Saturday mornings and we'd go through neighborhoods and knocking on doors and inviting anybody to church and offering to pick them up and just trying to expand the bus route.

So we went through these apartments and they were government hood apartments and it wasn't a great element. It wasn't a terrible area but it just wasn't a great, you know, element of people necessarily in these apartments, kind of rough and just careless and you understand.

[32 : 50] And there were several young kids that we had made contact with, several families or something like that and we ended up getting a crop of kids out of that development and we picked them up week after week after week and over time they just move on or over time they quit coming or they get a little older and not interested but one girl kept coming.

She was just a young girl, a funny, just a friendly young girl and she kept coming to church and just kept coming and she got in her teenage years, she kept coming faithfully, she loved the church, she loved the people in her class, the teachers and she just, she was different and her name was Ashley and Ashley didn't have anything at home as far as helping her grow.

Nobody cared for anything like that. Just get your check and spend it on yourself and she didn't have anything but she had a heart. It was good ground and she started coming to church and the workers just loved her.

She was faithful, she had a good attitude and eventually they realized we want to help this girl out. She's not going to get anywhere in life at her house and we want to just see if we can find a way to help her go on to something else and so they looked into Pensacola Christian College and thought, you know, does she have any interest in going to college?

They have a work program. Maybe you could get signed up and just work your way through and get away from your environment and get into a cleaner place around good people, Christians and she loved it. She was all in and so actually my wife and I and another couple from church took the

church minivan and packed her up and drove her down to Florida and dropped her off there at Pensacola Christian College back in 2000, I don't know, 5, 6, 7, somewhere in there and Ashley went to the school.

[34 : 41] She worked her way through their work program. I don't know if it took her six years or something like that but she finished and the church gave her some money to help her out and tried to help with some of the bills and people sent her packages throughout time and it was just a wonderful thing to see her do that.

She ended up graduating. She ended up marrying a guy and I believe they were on their way to the mission field the last I saw her which is some years ago and I really just lost touch with her but I know that she was serving the Lord, married a guy, graduated from the school, wanted to serve God and what a blessing it was but look back on the days that we knocked on those doors.

Never did I see the potential of a girl who may end up being a missionary. You hear those stories, oh it might be, but never did I actually see it and actually watch God do it.

It started with the ground being prepared. It started with her having a heart to receive the word of God and want it and not want what the world was offering her and what was in her environment but wanting something better.

A different spirit about that girl and she was willing to put the time in because it takes time. She was patient and to go to a college and say for the next six years of my life I'm going to be working part time and going to school part time but she loved it and God gets the glory from it all.

[36 : 07] When the ground's prepared and when the heart is open to receive and when you're willing to allow God to do the work and be patient, put the time in, the potential is not limited.

However, let me close by saying this. God is limited. God is limited when the ground is hard or when the ground's full of stones or when it's full of thorns because the thorns win.

And God is limited on what He can do and work in your heart if you love the world, if your heart's out there, if you're trying to chase other things instead of His will. You limit Him.

He is limited when we turn our ears away from the truth and turn onto fables or when we're distracted by other things that we truly love. And God's limited also if you attempt to get ahead of Him and His working and push and try to make something happen that's apart from His working.

Be patient, therefore. Church, these are just principles of growing and we all need to grow. I don't want to be too much of a broken record on this, but I need to grow.

[37 : 20] And it starts with having ground prepared, ears to hear, having some patience, and then see what God does with you. I wonder this morning do you have ears to hear?

Because not everybody does. Are you looking at your own heart right now and saying, is this for me or are you thinking about somebody else sitting over there or somebody that should be here or they should hear this?

Isn't that funny how we hear a sermon and automatically think, oh, they should be here. What is up with you? You know what it is? You don't have ears to hear because you're not receiving it into your heart. The potential's there.

The ground needs to be prepared. And I've said enough. What about you this morning? You got some thorns? You got some cares of this world or some other things that are just choking the word of God from ever bearing forth, bringing forth fruit?

You know, in John chapter 15, Jesus Christ is the vine and near the branches and he's seeking to see fruit. He's seeking to see that fruit grow out of you but it starts with abiding in him.

[38 : 30] Let's bow our heads together. The moment will be dismissed. Principles of growth this morning. With your heads bowed and your eyes closed and just have a moment here of privacy, a moment for you to reflect and look and say, am I growing as we've been preaching the last couple weeks?

Am I personally growing in the Lord or am I stale right now? Am I stuck? Is there anything happening or is the thorns growing in my heart? Is that what's growing?

Did you reach your peak for the Lord? You've already done some things and now you're just kind of drifting and I'm warning you, those thorns are growing whether you know it or not. If you're not fighting them and pulling them out and breaking up that fallow ground and the word of God and seeking by his grace and through the blood of Christ getting the stones out and keeping them out. Don't the stones keep showing up? You tend to garden every year there's more stones that just show up. They work their way up. These principles are real and these things are they're governing

whether you're growing or not.

It's my prayer and aim to help you grow and to facilitate that through the preaching of the word of God but you have to have ears to hear. Father, thank you for these thoughts and for the word of God and Lord, may we each submit ourselves to it and not fight, not resist and not allow our flesh to get an inch.

[40 : 01] God, I pray we'd submit and open our hearts and receive the word and Lord, if you're showing anybody anything this morning, whatever it may be, big or small, give them the courage to deal with it.

Give them that desire in the new man to want to fight it and put it down and to exalt Jesus Christ and Lord, I pray that we'd be sinners that are saved by the grace of God that are available and useful for your will, for your glory and may Jesus Christ be praised in it all.

And it's in his name I pray. Amen. We're going to sing a hymn here 118 in the hymnal as we sing.