

Intro:

*In the spring of 1952, the Fort Worth City Council received a letter from a concerned citizen. "When a person wears shorts", the alarmed woman wrote, it is "an advertisement for adultery."

*In the 50s a number of cities banned short pants in public for anyone over age 16.

*(Picture), students on LA City college in 1958 reading about an upcoming campus ban on shorts.

T. S. Eliot once described the current human endeavor as that of finding a system of order so perfect that we will not have to be good.

*ISIS, Taliban, legalistic cultures of all types and all religions and non-religions...are human attempts to bring about something good from external pressures alone.

*If founding a political movement or starting an army to enforce a set of rules were the best way to usher in the Kingdom, Jesus would have done it.

*Instead he went for the hearts of individuals one at a time.

*In fact he didn't even leave a list of "rules" on how to be his disciple...how easy would that have been?

*He did sum up the entire Bible very neatly by saying we are to "Love God, love people"

*Many, I think, have given up on the possibility of spiritual maturity and growth in Christlikeness because of a long history of personal failure or maybe even having observed the failure of others and have decided its not worth the effort.

*For those who have not given up on change the most common approach to failure is mostly "try harder"

*Or in the wider society it is a denial of failure at all...or at least personal responsibility for failure.

*ESPN announcer arrested in a prostitution sting called his choice "A lapse in judgment"

*So more of a mental error than a moral choice.

*Frequently you will hear things such as "This does not represent who I am" when famous people commit crimes.

*I think I understand what they are trying to say, and there are things we do that might not represent "all that we are"

*But If I do it or say it...it was me that did it was me said it.

Luke 6:45 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

- *So, if I do evil I am the kind of person who does evil. If I do good I am the kind of person who does good.
- *Contrary to the prevailing cultural narrative: **"Actions are not impositions on who we are, but expressions of who we are." Willard.**
- *So denial is certainly not the path to growth...why would we grow if we deny the need for change?
- *Some, as I have mentioned, just become passive..."I will fail eventually anyway, my efforts don't work...I will stop trying."
- *In the Christian sub-culture this passivity has sometimes been confused with living by Grace.
- *So ongoing failure to grow or on inability to gain victory over sin is recast as "a new awareness of Grace."
- *"I am free in Christ, God accepts me in spite of my failure." (that is true)
- *"There is nothing I can do to make God love me more or less (that is true)..."
- *Therefore I will do nothing." (that should not be true)
- *Even though I can do nothing to make God love me more or less...since I love God and want to love him more...I want to grow...I want to do what will help me grow.
- *Growth is real and should be expected...and it is the product of Grace...but it is not the result of passivity but intention.
- *Intelligent intention, empowered by the Spirit of God...is how we grow.
- *The focus on externals alone has been a colossal failure in the church and in society as a whole...like ..."ban shorts" and people will be morally pure.
- *What is clearly true is that when the heart changes, what comes from the heart changes as well...and everything comes from the heart.
- ***Prov. 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.**
- *This morning we continue in Mark chapter 4...more farming parables.
- Mark 4:26 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."**
- *Kingdom of God is the reign of God...the place where his will is done, his kingdom has come.
- *Some approach this parable as referring to the inner growth of the reign of God in an individual heart/soul.

*Some approach it as referring to the growth of the Kingdom of God in the larger context of human society...people coming to Christ and churches multiplying

*I think both approaches work equally well and some of the same conclusions can be drawn either way.

*If Christ is reigning in a human heart that fact will show up in the external life of that person and there will be a larger impact in the realm of human relationships.

*Heart change will bring life change will bring changed relationships will bring changed communities.

*Before we discuss this parable it is important to remember that scripture is to be viewed as whole not as series disconnected parts.

*For instance if you were being trained to become a plumber and one day the master plumber you were apprenticing under taught you how to "sweat" copper pipe and then the next day he taught you how to glue PVC pipe.

*His legitimate expectation would be that you would know the difference between the two types of pipe and use his instruction as a whole in your work.

*So you would take all his teaching together and not a single instruction out of the wider context...the training is not a disconnected collection of data, but a system that builds and interconnects...one part of the training will not contradict another part but it will compliment it.

*Here is the point of all that...in this passage there seems to be a sense of inevitability in terms of growth.

*The seed planted leads to harvest...period.

*The Farmer sows some seed then chills out and it magically grows.

*That could lead to a conclusion of passivity about growth.

*However when you take the Bible as a whole you see that Jesus is trying to foster confidence in us...growth in transformation and in impact will happen in the human heart because it is not merely a human activity.

*This is not about passivity...but **confident activity**.

*In the parable the Farmer actively plants, watches for the seed to sprout, does the work of harvesting at the proper time...much activity.

*However, there is mystery in all of it for the farmer...how does this happen?

*He works...but he can't make the wheat grow!

*The soil produces a stalk, then a head, then a full kernel in the head...from the dirt?

*"Well, Terry, there is no mystery now, we know how it all works...we are not in the first century."

*Actually...Assigning names to some processes (photosynthesis) does not in fact mean we know how it all works.

*Take an acorn, some dirt, some water, some sun and some years and...You get tons of hard wood, shade, and shelter...no, we don't know how it all works.

*And we certainly don't know exactly how God works in the heart of a person to bring about transformation.

*But he does...and the reality of real change wrought by God is what encourages us to continue to be active and intentional in pursuing him.

*Look at these two verses together...

Phil. 1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

***Confidence!**

Phil. 2:12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

***Continue to work!**

*These compliment they do not contradict each other.

*Being confident that God will complete the work he began, encourages us to work.

*So in the first parable the inevitability of growth should inspire confidence in our efforts.

*In addition, a lack of growth over time should not cause us to doubt the reality or reliability of God but rather it should cause us to question the wisdom of our current approach.

*The second parable

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.”

*I had a professor in college use this parable to question the reliability of the NT.

*His rationale was that the "Mustard seed is not the smallest seed in the world."

*He applied a strange limitation of preciseness of language to the NT that he never used in his own language.

*The Bible does not give a technical or scientific description here but a popular one..."the smallest seed you plant in the ground."

*The professor thought Jesus erred because he did not say...

"The mustard seed is small though not as small as the black orchid seed...which you have never heard of...it has not yet been discovered...but since I am God, I must use precise and wooden scientific language that no one else uses...now back to my spiritual point using the example of a small seed..."

*The Kingdom of God is similar to a mustard seed, the smallest one they would have had opportunity to see and touch...and yet grew to 10 or 12 feet tall...one of the largest of all garden plants they encountered.

*The point is simply this...do not judge the impact of the gospel by the small beginnings.

*The applications for this vary:

1. The Kingdom of God entering a life is most often a tiny, almost imperceptible change that leads to total transformation.

2. The tiny band of brothers (and sisters) that formed the original group that followed Jesus...would become a worldwide movement.

*In both parables there is reason for us to be confident.

*The seed of the Gospel has small beginnings but it will grow into something significant in a life and a culture.

APPLICATION:

*Banning shorts in FW would not have had much, if any, effect on the number of people engaging in adultery.

*External efforts alone do not lead to real change.

*Does that mean that external efforts don't matter?

*No, it means that externals that do not aim at and impact internals will not in the end make any difference at all.

*Spiritual growth is always going to be more than mere human effort...but human effort is indispensable...spiritual formation is never a passive process.

We are after heart change: impact that exceeds our own efforts.

*These parables should inspire confidence and that confidence should compel ongoing action.

***Example of the Conquest of Canaan:**

Josh. 1:1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them — to the Israelites. 3 I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. 4 Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon,

and from the great river, the Euphrates — all the Hittite country — to the Great Sea on the west. 5 No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. 6 “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. 7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

*What appears to be contradictory information is really complimentary activity:

1. I will give you every place you set your foot, as I promised.
2. No one will be able to stand up against you, I will be with you, I will never leave you.
1. Be strong and courageous because you will lead these people.
2. Be strong and very courageous.
3. Be careful to obey me so that you may be successful.
4. Keep my word and meditate on it day and night then you will be successful.

Questions:

1. If God is giving them the land and no one is going to be able to stand up against them, why so many challenges to be strong and courageous...why will strength and courage be so vital to their success?
2. If God has made this promise, then why the dependent clauses..."If you, then I"?

Press on into the historical narrative:

*First city/nation they encountered was Jericho.

- Marched onto the plain of Jericho with 40K soldiers, but didn't need them.
- God brought down the walls, no Israelite casualties.

*"So, God was pretty much doing it for them..."

*To show them he could.

*Next city/nation was Ai.

*Israel had them way outnumbered but because they did not obey God Israel was soundly defeated.

*They found out they were unable to accomplish anything without him.

*They repented and were able to have victory.

*The rest of the conquest was a combination of complete effort and confident trust in God.

*To move forward and grow...whether it is spiritual growth or moving forward in what you believe to be the promise of God for your life...two things are necessary.

A Compelling Vision

A Continuing Decision

1. A Compelling Vision:

*You don't have to wonder whether God wants you to grow, whether you can legitimately take hold of a vision of Christ being formed in you...real and substantial heart change.

*Yes, you can believe that vision is for you...you can move forward in full confidence that is God's will for you.

1Th. 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

*God's will is not merely that we verbalize the word "thanks" for things we are not at all thankful for.

*His will for us in Christ Jesus is that we **become** the kind of people who are thankful in all circumstances.

*His will is that we become like Christ so that gratitude flows from our hearts like it flowed from his.

*That thankfulness becomes our reflex much like bitterness or discontent is the reflex of those who have trained their hearts to not trust God.

*In the parables there is a picture of the promise of growth, a harvest.

*This harvest has humble beginnings, the seed, the change doesn't look like much at first...but we can live with real confidence.

*Without a compelling vision nothing is going to happen.

*Israel would have stayed in the desert without a vision.

*It is unlikely you will see change if you do not believe change is real or possible.

*Vision is prior to realization...not in some wacko, spiritualistic mumbo jumbo way...

*But why would we move into taking a land that we were convinced we could not possible take?

Do you believe you can be changed, substantially, in real life ways?

*What am I talking about in terms of change...spiritual feelings?

-Moving from worry to trusting

-From impurity to purity

-From addicted to free

-Away from anger, bitterness...to joy, gratitude.

*The many "commands" in the NT are more like the "results" of inner transformation.

*We read 1 Cor. 13 and believe we should **try** to **act** more "loving, kind, gentle, patient" etc.

*Certainly those are good things to try to do...but the verse actually says that those are the things that "Love is."

*God is love, he doesn't work hard to act those ways...they flow out of who he is.

*The vision of transformation is one of being changed in who we are.

*When we are being changed in who we are...then his commands become the natural results...not something we merely try to accomplish.

1 John 5:3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome...

*When our hearts are moving towards God in love...our obedience is not a burden...it is an outflow of our love.

*We are becoming people whose doing and thinking and feeling are lining up with the heart of God.

*A compelling vision

2. A Continuing Decision:

*For the vision to be realized there is the need for a continuing decision to follow him.

*I have said it like this "An initial large 'yes' followed by a thousand little 'yes's'."

*Here is how the OT says it:

"If with all our hearts we truly seek him, we shall surely find him" (Jeremiah 29:13)

***Or, as the prophet Azariah said, "If you seek Him, He will let you find Him " (2 Chronicles 15: 2)**

*The steps, processes that are part of this continuing decision vary...they include: repentance, fellowship, reflection, time in his Word, his word taking priority in our thinking processes, serving...so many things could be listed.

*But the list is not as important as the: Vision and Decision.

*If you are not currently convinced, what will it take for you to become convinced that this kind of change is available to you?

*Following that vision, you, and you alone must make the decision..."I am heading this direction, and they will find me pointing that direction when I die."

*When I get off track...I am getting back on track...right now.

*This is not effort in opposition to grace...this is effort, cooperation with grace.

*What if I told you that you could run a sub 3-minute mile (not currently possible for humans)

*Some here have a current pace of low 5 minute

*Some a pace of 30 minutes.

*Everything in between.

*Comparing to each other you might think one has a better chance than another...I mean 5 minutes is way closer to 3 minutes than 30 is.

*But if you compare yourself to the actual goal...a 3-minute mile is equally impossible for both the 5-minute and the 30-minute runner.

*However, if I said there are factors that along with your best training...mysterious factors...but real...that will empower your training such that you can indeed do this...all of you.

*It would take two things:

1. Belief: a vision...I think this is real.

2. Decision: ongoing action...I am going to train for this to happen.

*Then and only then would the third component begin to manifest...the mysterious fruit would begin to show itself over time.

*The impossible becoming possible.

A compelling vision: heart change

A continuing decision: keep saying "yes"

*This may look like a fancy way of banning short pants to ensure moral purity. (more doing, more working)

*It is not...it is a vision of a heart change where the good flows from the inside out.

*If wearing long pants is one step on the path to that heart change...no problem...we should be happy to wear them.

*But there must never be a sense that the length of pants is ever really the issue...the heart always is.

*We can easily change our pants...we can even demand others change theirs...

*But God alone can change our hearts...he is waiting for our willing cooperation.

Another application:

*There is another legitimate application for these parables that is interpersonal in nature.

*Thursday night I spoke with a college friend, I had not spent any time with for about 35 years.

*He told me that the gospel seed that had been planted in his heart back in college had taken root...he now had a relationship with Christ that was central to all he did and his children had come to Christ as well.

*I reflected back on my time with him in college and I thought of the mustard seed.

*I saw in real life how a small response to the gospel is powerful...relentless...but often slow to show itself.

*But when it is real...show itself it will...and the results are profound.

*You can have confidence in the gospel in your own heart and life...

*You can also have confidence in the gospel seed sown in the lives of others.

*But you cannot measure the final impact by the beginnings...just be faithful, announce the gospel.

*Perhaps you have become discouraged or cynical about the gospel in the lives of people...if you have no vision for the reality of change in another person's life why would you take any action that direction?

*I want to challenge your cynicism, or pessimism...I want to encourage confident action.

*Ask God to give you a vision for the transformational power of the gospel in the lives of others...and to help you not measure by the immediate results but measure by faith.

*This seed is so tiny at first...the impact is disproportionate.

*This seed is planted by us...but God himself makes it grow.

***We tend to discount the power of the gospel in a life unless it looks like an atomic bomb going off...explosive, immediate and visible.**

*But Jesus used farm stories to describe the power of the gospel...a single seed, planted in dirt, growing slowly, invisibly at first...that becomes a harvest in time.

*Believe in the power of the gospel in your life and in the lives of others.

***Decide to do what that kind of belief would do...and keep deciding...watch and see what God will do.**

SMALL GROUP NOTES
April 12, 2015 **Mark 4:26-32**

Intro:

*What have you seen or heard about in terms of attempts to compel moral or ethical standards through external rules alone?

*For instance some churches have believed that forbidding dancing would help young people be morally pure.

*What were some of the results of those rules?

*The rules were not always bad, what was it that made them often ineffective or even counter productive?

*T. S. Eliot once described the current human endeavor as that of finding a system of order so perfect that we will not have to be good.

-Discuss what you think he meant by that.

Read:

Mark 4:26 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."

Discuss:

1. Luke 6:45 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

"Actions are not impositions on who we are, but expressions of who we are." Dallas Willard.

*Discuss the Luke passage and the Willard quote in relationship to some of the prevailing cultural "narratives" that have determined how many people view their choices.

2. "Intelligent intention, empowered by the Spirit of God...is how we grow."

*Do you agree with this?

*Why or why not?

*Does this contradict living by grace or compliment it?

*How is this so?

3. Terry said the parable is not about passivity...but **confident activity**.

*Why do you think some might conclude that the parable is about passivity?

*What are some clues in the parable that it is about confident activity?

4. **Phil. 1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**

Phil. 2:12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

*How do these two verses together demonstrate God's work and ours as being complimentary rather than contradictory?

5. Jesus said the reign of God in the heart of a person has very small, seemingly insignificant beginnings but leads to transformation.

*Where have you seen this in your life or in the life of someone you knew?

6. **Josh. 1:1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them — to the Israelites. 3 I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. 4 Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates — all the Hittite country — to the Great Sea on the west. 5 No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. 6 "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. 7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."**

*Where do you see what appears to be contradictory information in this passage?

*What do you see here and in the narrative that follows in the conquest of Canaan that leads you to believe this is really about complimentary activity?

7. What is a "Compelling Vision" and why is having one so important to a human life?

8. A compelling vision must lead to "Continuing Action" why is this?

-What is important about the addition of the word "continuing"?

9. **1John 5:3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome...**

*How could this be true in reality not merely in theory in our lives?

10. "Believe in the power of the gospel in your life and in the lives of others."

"Decide to do what that kind of belief would do...and keep deciding...watch and see what God will do."

*How do you rate yourself in terms of believing in the power of the gospel to bring real, substantial change in your life and in the lives of others?

Very Cynical--Somewhat Cynical--Cynical--neutral--deciding--confident--very confident

-These are just examples to help you think, feel free to use a word you think best describes you that is not on the scale?

11. What can you think of that would help you move to a new place "mentally" in terms of a Compelling Vision?

12. What can you think of that would help you move into a life of Continuing Decision?



***The current human endeavor is an attempt
to find a system of order so perfect that we
will not have to be good.***

T.S. Eliot

The Gospel of Mark



*"For even the
Son of Man
did not come
to be served,
but to serve,
and to give
his life as a
ransom for
many."*

Mark 10:45

Luke 6:45 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

***"Actions are not impositions on who we are,
but expressions of who we are."***

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***Passivity can be confused with
living by grace***

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Spirit of God...is how we grow.***

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your heart, for it is the wellspring of
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***The Bible is a connected whole...it
must be understood and applied
that way in our lives.***

***This parable is not about
passivity...but confident activity.***

Phil. 1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Phil. 2:12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

Complimentary activity not contradictory information

***"Confidence in God inspires ongoing
effort in us."***

Mark 4:30-32 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 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.”

***The reign of God in a life most often
has a tiny, almost imperceptible
beginning that in time and into
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transformation***



***Heart Change: Impact that exceeds
our own efforts***

Josh. 1:1-5 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them — to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates — all the Hittite country — to the Great Sea on the west. No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Josh. 1:6-9 “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

***What appears to be contradictory
information is really complimentary
activity.***

1. Jericho: Gave victory

2. Ai: Sin brought defeat

**3. The continuing pattern: Total
effort/Total trust**

A Compelling Vision

A Continuing Decision

**1 Th. 5:18 give thanks in all
circumstances, for this is God's will
for you in Christ Jesus.**

1 John 5:3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome...

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**“If with all our hearts we truly seek
him, we shall surely find him”**

Jeremiah 29:13

**“If you seek Him, He will let you
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2 Chronicles 15:2

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