

Lessons from Gardening

#0167

Study Given by W. D. Frazee

Have any of you been gardening? Those that haven't probably will be. This is garden time, isn't it? For the next few weeks, many people will be stirring up the ground and planting some seeds. Our text this morning, Isaiah 61:11, draws some wonderful spiritual lessons. The more gardening we do, the more we'll understand this text, and the more we understand this text, the more we'll enjoy the garden—so it all goes together.

Isaiah 61:11, will you read it with me, please?

“For as the earth brings forth her bud, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations” Isaiah 61:11.

Please tell me what the second word of this verse is. “As.” What does that mean? Just like, in the same way. When we hear the word “as” used, we know there's a comparison. Here God is comparing two things. He's comparing the way things grow in the garden with the way righteousness grows in our hearts and lives. Do you want to be righteous? Do you want to be like Jesus? It'll happen, the Lord says, like things happen in the garden.

Are there gardens that were gardens last year that are just weed patches now? Did you ever see one? Are there pieces of ground that are weed patches this morning that in a few weeks will be beautiful gardens? Do you mean things can change like that? Oh, yes.

Well, that's a miracle, isn't it? No, it isn't a miracle. In a sense, it's a miracle, if by a miracle we mean something wonderful that God does. By that definition, the fact that we're all here this morning, that's a miracle.

To think that bread and beans and milk and potatoes, apples and bananas can be turned into people—that's a miracle in the sense that it's something wonderful that God does. In other words, you and I can't take the apples and bananas, and the beans and the bread and stir them all together and stir long enough, and finally we get a person. No, it doesn't happen that way. It is a wonderful thing that God does, but He does it according to certain laws, certain plans revealed to us so that we can cooperate with Him. If we want to stay alive, we go to the table and eat. If we want to keep alive, we get a drink of water. If we want to keep alive, we exercise and rest, and we breathe and we keep going.

Here we are this morning, anyone from 1 to 70 or 80 years old; some of us have been around quite a while. How does it happen we're here? Well, we might

say it's a miracle of God—not in the sense that God does some marvelous, unusual thing like turning water into wine, or raising the dead—those are miracles—He does those occasionally. But the fact that you and I are here this morning, has probably not come that way. None of us were raised from the dead last week. Yet what God does for us every day as we eat and breathe and work and sleep is just as wonderful as though He raised us from the dead. But it's according to fixed laws revealed to us so that we can cooperate with Him. Is that right?

Now, let's go back to our text. The Lord says it's that way in the garden, and that that's the way He makes righteousness to grow in our lives. As I've been meditating on this, I'm constrained to believe that few people fully understand this and appreciate it. If we did, two things would happen: 1. We would settle down to take care of the garden in our hearts and lives, and 2. We wouldn't worry about it.

A person that's taking care of a garden, when he goes out there and stirs up the ground, gets it all smooth and makes his rows and puts in his seeds, and covers them up; then he goes back to his house, and he doesn't go out there every few minutes and stir up the ground again, does he? Why not? In the first place, it wouldn't do any good. In the second place, it would interfere. You mean the same thing that gets the ground ready, it would be bad to do it right after we put the seed in, is that right? There's a time for everything.

“...as the earth brings forth her bud, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations” Isaiah 61:11.

This is springtime. Do you know why they call this spring? Because things spring! They're growing. The buds are opening. We'll see them more and more. Why, just think a few weeks from now, we'll look out there and there the trees will be green. We'll look at the ground around, and the various plants will be springing up. Jesus says it's to be this way in our lives.

Someone says, “I want it that way right now.”

Let me ask you something, and I mean to be reverent: Do you suppose if we'd all pray hard enough here this morning that we'd look out before we left and the woods would all be green? No. That would be a miracle. That miracle is not necessary, and it isn't in accordance with God's plan. We need to pray according to God's will.

We might like to pray that we'd all be ready for Heaven instantly. We can be ready to *die* instantly, but we're not ready for translation instantly. That's a process. The thief that died there on the cross by Jesus, he was ready to die when he yielded all to Christ. You and I are ready to die when we yield our all to Christ. So we can all, every minute, live so that if death overtakes us, we know we're going to be in Heaven with Jesus, and that's the way to live. Why carry a burden of worry and uncertainty around? We can know every minute that we're God's children.

Maybe we ought to get that settled right here. Let's turn to John 5:24; oh, what a wonderful promise this is that Jesus made.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” John 5:24.

Have you heard Jesus' word? Do you believe in God, do you accept His Word? Do you accept Christ as your Savior? Do you believe Jesus died for you? Are you willing for Him to have your life? If the answer is yes, then you have everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation. You don't have to live under condemnation; Jesus took your condemnation, and you're accepted in *Him*.

You notice He says, “But is passed from death unto life.” You were in death in sin, but now you've accepted Jesus, He's accepted you, and you are accepted just as if you had never sinned. You've passed from death unto life. That means that you're already experiencing the eternal life of Heaven. If something would happen—suppose we go home here this morning and somebody hits us on the highway and we're dead, we'll wake up when Jesus comes. Notice the next verse, He says:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” John 5:25.

So we don't have to be afraid of death. The fact that we're not ready for translation doesn't mean we have to mourn and worry all the way until we're all ready for translation. Not at all. Translation means that when Jesus comes, we'll be caught up in the air to meet Him and go with Him without ever dying. We're not ready for that yet; at least *I'm* not. If you think you are, you're not. But although I know I'm not ready for translation this morning, I know I am ready to die whenever God sees fit. I'm safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on His gentle breast.

But I know something else. I know He's getting me ready for translation. How? Just like the plants grow in the garden.

Let's go to the 4th chapter of Mark, and you'll see what I mean. Mark the 26th chapter, beginning with the 4th verse. What's the fourth word here? “So.” What's that second word in our first text? As. As and so go together; sometimes we use one for the other—like, in the same way, similar to.

“And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground...” Mark 4:26.

Here's the garden again. So the work of God in His kingdom, His church, His way of working with men, is like casting seed into the ground. Now notice, what does this man do? Next verse:

“And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth brings forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth...”

The margin says when it's ripe. What does he do?

“...immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest is come” Mark 4:27–29.

That's translation, when the harvest is all ripe—when we become fully like Jesus. But we can be God's garden before the harvest is ripe. He's looking after us.

Now let's notice a few things about this; let's go back to those first two verses. The kingdom of God is as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and then do what? Sleep. Oh no, he wouldn't sleep if he's got a crop in the ground. Is that what it says—sleep? You mean a man would go and put his money in the seed, and put his seed in the ground and then go to sleep? Well, how could he? Look at all his investments out there in the ground. He does what? He sleeps.

Now you notice he does something before he sleeps. What does he do? He casts seed into the ground. The man that sleeps without doing that, he'll wake up to no harvest, except weeds. It isn't sleeping that brings the harvest, but there are times that all we can do is sleep after we put the seed in. In other words, God takes time to grow wheat. He takes time to grow corn. He even takes time to grow radishes, doesn't He? Fast as a radish crop is, it takes time. There's no way on earth that we can plant radishes today and have them for dinner tomorrow. No way. Nobody ever did that.

Someone says, “Think about Jonah's gourd that grew up in a day.”

Yes, it perished in a day too. But that was a miracle, Jonah's gourd, wasn't it? My point is this: That isn't the way you and I are going to get perfected. It isn't by a miracle. Now, I'm going to read that to you in plain English from the writings of the Lord's messenger today. You'll find it in this little book, *The Sanctified Life*.

If everybody can listen and understand what I'm going to read, it'll do two things. First, it will help you to understand that if you keep following the directions, God will see to it that you're perfected by the time He comes. Second, it will help you to understand that it isn't going to be by some miracle that you're perfected. There are teachings afloat today that that's how you get perfected; that no matter how *long* you garden, God has to work a miracle or else you'd never be perfected. I want to read that that isn't so; I want you all carefully listening while I'm reading inspired language:

“When we read the lives of men who have been eminent for their piety, we often regard their experiences and their attainments as far beyond our reach. But this is not the case. Christ died for all, and we are assured in His Word that He is

more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. The prophets and apostles did not perfect Christian character by a miracle. They used the means which God had placed within their reach, and all who will put forth the same effort will secure the same results" *The Sanctified Life*, page 84.

Isn't that encouraging, friend? We can all have a garden, but that doesn't mean we can have it in five minutes. Neither does it mean—and don't miss this—that no matter how long we have a garden, and no matter how faithfully we carry out the directions that we'll never have a perfected crop unless Jesus works a miracle. This plainly says that it is not so. And any teaching contrary to this is contradicting inspiration. So let's get this clear.

There are various labels on this can of instantaneous sanctification. There are some people who think you can get instantly made holy instantly the minute you give your heart to Christ. There are others who say, No, you can't get it then, but you can get it later on. There are others that say, "No, you don't get it that way, but you get it still later on." Listen, friend: the prophets and apostles did not perfect Christian character by a miracle.

Someone has said that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, and a skunk by any other name would smell as un-sweet. Do you agree with that? And false teaching, no matter what name it has. I'll give you an illustration of that: The Spirit of Prophecy has plainly told us that anybody who calls the remnant church Babylon is out of order. So people who quote the Spirit of Prophecy are pretty careful not to call the remnant church Babylon, but they call the church a lot of other names just about as bad. So it is with this matter of instantaneous perfection. Whether it's called by that name or the second blessing, or instantaneous sanctification, or being made holy instantly, whatever it is, it misses this point. That the way to grow a crop is to put the seed in and take care of it, and eventually it'll be ripe, not by some sudden miracle.

Aren't the sun and the rain that comes the day before you harvest the crop or the week before you harvest the crop, the same sun and rain that got the seed germinated in the beginning, and that you had to have again and again? Jesus doesn't come down after you've gardened six days or six weeks or six months, and say, "You've gardened faithfully, and the ordinary laws of gardening have brought you this far. But no matter if you do this for 10 years, you'll never have a crop. So I've got to work a miracle right now, and by a sudden edict I've got to bring up that crop; I've got to ripen it up."

Is that the way we get a crop? Never.

Now let me read this again because this is so important. I hope this will change some minds here this morning. Of course, I'll tell you, the best water in the world will never get in the bottle if there's a cork in the bottle. So let's open up our hearts and minds to hear the Word of God.

"When we read the lives of men who have been eminent

for their piety, we often regard their experiences and their attainments as far beyond our reach. But this is not the case. Christ died for all, and we are assured in His Word that He is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. The prophets and apostles did not perfect Christian character by a miracle" *Ibid*.

Now let me tell you something and be really frank and honest. If it weren't for that word "perfect" there, people could dodge around this. But how are you going to teach that perfection was impossible for all the saints in past ages when this says that the prophets and apostles *perfected* Christian character? How would you do that? How would anybody do it? Don't worry. They will have some doubts, friends. Let it not influence you in the slightest because this says that the apostles and prophets perfected Christian character, but it goes on to say that they didn't do it by a miracle. And it goes on to say that all of us can have the same results they had. Then we can perfect Christian character, but not by a miracle.

How will we do it? The same way they did it:

"They used the means which God had placed within their reach, and all who will put forth the same effort will secure the same results" *Ibid*.

So we have nothing to wait for. Our business every day is to be taking care of the garden.

Now let's go back to our text in Mark. The main thing I want to study with you, my friends, is how to have this experience of perfecting Christian character by day by day working in the garden. There are some things that we can do in the garden. We can stir the soil at the right time. We can cut the weeds. We can water if it's in an area where we need to irrigate. We can thin. We can prune. There are several things we can do. But most of the time between planting seed and gathering the crop is spent in waiting.

So it is in our Christian life. It makes all the difference in the world whether we wait in trust or wait in worry. This is the main thing I want to study with you about. It makes all the difference in the world whether we wait in trust or wait in worry. How are you waiting?

"Oh, I wish I were better."

Yes, I do. I wish I were better. Will worrying about it make me better? No, it'll make me worse. The more I worry, the worse I'll be, and the worse I'll am, the more I'll worry. What shall I do then? Do what Jesus says the man does: He puts the seed in the ground and sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed springs up and grows up, and he knoweth not how.

Can we explain how a seed sprouts and grows, and finally sends out shoots and leaves and flowers, and finally we get a crop, can we explain that? No. It's a

mighty work of God. It's done according to certain laws that we can learn and cooperate with. Jesus says it's that way in our lives. If we keep every day doing what we know to do, then we can trust the result with God. That's my message this morning.

Now I'd like to have you think, and I want you to help me as an audience. I'd like to have us think of a few things that we can do. We know what to do out in the garden. We know how to stir the soil, cut the weeds, cultivate, prune and thin, and all that. In our spiritual lives, what are some of the things that we can do that are like gardening? What are some of the things we can do in our spiritual life? Somebody tell me one.

We can read the Bible. How many of you anytime during the last week, have read the Bible, may I see your hand? I suppose we all have. We can do it more than once a week, can't we? It might be a good thing to do it once a day at least. But do you think we ought to read the Bible all the time? No, we ought to do what this man in the story did. What did he do after he put the seed in the ground? He slept. One thing we can do in our spiritual life is to read the Bible.

What else can we do? We can pray.

Somebody else tells me something we ought to do. We can share what we learn. Is that a way to grow? Is that a way to multiply things? Oh, yes. This is wonderful.

Now you know, dear friend, those three things are the three basic things to do in Christian living. One is to read and study. The second is to pray. The third is to share with others, witness, do things for others, help them to know what we know.

If we're doing those three things, we're doing our spiritual gardening. But with all three of those, we must mix faith and trust. Otherwise, it won't work. God never intended it to work. What does that mean? Turn to Mark 11:24. I want you all to read this with me. Together:

"Therefore I say unto you, What things so ever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" Mark 11:24.

So with our prayer must be mixed faith, belief. Fifteen minutes of prayer with faith is worth more than 15 hours just worrying about it and not believing God.

"...what things so ever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" Mark 11:24.

When we kneel down and talk with God, let's tell Him we believe Him. What do you say? That's mixing faith with our prayer.

Now turn over to Hebrew 4, and I want you to see about mixing faith with our study of the Word:

“For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” Hebrews 4:2.

Did they hear the Word? Did it do them any good? Not the ones he’s talking about, because what wasn’t mixed with it? *Faith* wasn’t mixed with it. We’re to mix faith with our prayers, according to Mark 11:24, and we’re to mix faith with our study of the Word according to Hebrews 4:2.

Of course, we’ll have to mix faith with our witnessing. I don’t suppose we’d witness if we didn’t have some faith. We talk about sharing our faith—if we don’t have any faith, we don’t have anything to share.

So it’s faith with the Word, faith with prayer, and faith with witnessing—faith all the way through. And faith is not some mysterious emotion. Not at all. Faith is believing what God says. When we read His Word, if we believe it, we’ll get a blessing. When we talk to Him in prayer, if we believe He hears us and fulfills His Word, we’ll get a blessing. If we talk to others and talk faith, we’ll get a blessing, and so will they.

Now listen. When we’ve done those three things, or as we do those three things, if we do enough of it all in one day, wouldn’t we be ready for translation? Huh? No. Oh well, isn’t that too bad? No, it isn’t too bad. It’s the way God does things. Let’s be willing to walk with Him and work with Him. Let’s accept His program. We can get so worried and concerned, wishing that something would happen like that that we fail to do the little we can do day by day, and we fail to get the joy. Jesus wants us to be happy. When? Now.

If I go out here in the spring and have a garden, do I have a long face until I finally reap the crop, is that it? No. I plow in hope. I plant the seed in hope. Let us believe with all our hearts that God is in the business of finishing what He begins.

Now turn to one of my favorite text, and you’ll see what I mean.

“Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” Philippians 1:6.

What’s the second word here? Confident. What does that mean? Certain, sure, positive. No question about it. Suppose I see a neighbor out here, he’s stirring up his ground, smoothing it off, and planting the seeds. I look at him and I say,

“What are you doing?”

He says, “Oh, I’m making a garden.”

Suppose I say to him, “Do you think you’ll get a crop?”

Suppose he says to me, “Well, I don’t know. I hardly think so, but then, I just might.”

Do you suppose he'll say that? Probably not. The fact that he's out there working shows that he expects what? He expects a crop.

“Being confident of this very thing that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” Philippians 1:6.

The margin says that He'll finish it.

Now, do you know why it says He'll perform it until the day of Jesus Christ? It's going to take all the time to get you ready for translation, all the time between now and the coming of Jesus. God needs every day, and you need every day. But the good news is that we're not going to be late; we're going to be on time—God's time—it says so. He'll finish it. Well, if He's going to finish it, I can keep working with Him assured that He's going to get it done.

Somebody says, “But I fall so many times.”

Well, get up and go on. Did you ever make a mistake in gardening? I have. Does that mean we quit? Not a bit of it. Friends, the God of Heaven has guaranteed us a crop. Are you thankful this morning?

Now, I want you to tell me what you got this morning. You didn't all get the same thing; that isn't necessary. But I hope everybody got at least one thing. I wish you'd tell me what you got in your own words, in your own way to the glory of God. I hope that somebody here this morning got the precious thought that you can quit worrying and leave the concern with God. I hope somebody here this morning got the precious thought that if you put your hand in the hand of Jesus, you know He'll stay with you all the way. I hope somebody got the precious thought that as you read, as you study, as you pray, as you witness, along with it, you're going to just relax in Jesus' arms, and believe and know that He's going to make you what you ought to be.

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