

The Lesson of the Seed Grain

by Jessie Penn-Lewis

All of us want to bear fruit for the kingdom. But the only way to bring forth life is to die.

Jesus used many analogies to teach us the truths of the kingdom. One of these was the lesson of the seed-grain, in which He compared the life of the believer to the process of development of a grain of wheat.

“‘Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies,’” He said, “‘it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain’” (John 12:24, NKJV). This process is the same one we must go through if we are to bear fruit as we are called to do.

Let us turn to the seed-grain and see the picture lesson, that in these last days we may intelligently yield to the pierced hand of God and permit His fullest purposes to be fulfilled in us.

Joined to the Lord, the grain of wheat awakens to the law of its being and yields itself to the Son of God for sowing in the earth. It cries to God to make it fruitful at any cost. The purpose of its life begins to dawn upon it. It sees that there is an element of selfishness in being absorbed in its “own” advancement and its “own” growth.

The heavenly Husbandman hears the cry of the grain of wheat, prompted by the Holy Spirit, and silently begins to prepare it for the answer to its prayers. He prepares it for sowing in the ground by gently detaching it from the bands that bind it to its stalk.

It may appear as if He has not heeded the cry, and the little grain wonders why He does not answer; but the air and sunshine are doing their silent work. The grain is ripening,

unconsciously to itself, until suddenly it finds itself loosened from its old ties. A hand takes hold of it, and it is dropped down into the dark earth.

SEPARATION What has happened? The little grain of wheat asked for fruit, not this strange path. Where are the sunshine, the old companions, the former happy experiences?

“Where am I?” cries the lonely grain. “Where is my cozy stalk? This dark spot of earth, so repulsive, seems to be injuring my nice coat; it was so beautiful in my little nest on the top of the stalk. I was so far away from earth, so far above all.” So the little grain speaks within itself.

Presently it is shocked to find its covering beginning to deteriorate. So long as it could retain its exterior beauty it did not mind the isolation, the darkness, the apparent uselessness. But this is too much.

Moreover it seems to be “giving way” to its surroundings. It is broken by them and is not able to guard itself and remain “far above all” as before. It thought it would never be moved by earthly things again.

However, in spite of these strange dealings, the little grain rests on the faithfulness of God. It knows He will lead it safely by a way that it knows not. It cries with the psalmist, “I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God” (Ps. 42:11).

LOSS OF IDENTITY Poor little grain! Now trampled upon in the dark earth, buried out of sight, ignored, forgotten, this little grain of wheat was once greatly admired. How the other grains looked up to it and listened with reverence to its counsels!

Now it feels forgotten as it passes into solitude, crying, “I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none” (Ps. 69:20). It longs for other

children of God who may “tell of the sorrow of those whom Thou hast wounded.” But these seem to have no anguish of heart for suffering with others.

Buried grain, say “yes” to God. He is answering your prayers to become fruitful!

Maybe you were occupied with your successful service and with your happy experience in those old days. How little you were able to understand the temptations and the difficulties of the little blades of wheat. How stern you were with those who fell, not “considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

How you talked to the tiny blades of green just peeping through the ground, stating that they “ought” to be much older and more mature! How “weak” you thought them because they were bowed to the ground as soon as some heavy foot trod upon them.

How you discouraged them when they were weak in the faith and did not “receive them” nor bear lovingly with their weaknesses! How you tried to make them see what you saw in your greater maturity. You did not understand how to wait and to encourage them and to give them time to grow!

Buried grain, you were “truly guilty concerning [your] brother” (Gen. 42:21) in your lack of “anguish of heart and many tears” over the temptations and sorrows of others. How you guarded yourself and feared to stoop down to earth—to become as weak to the weak, that you might gain the more!

BROKENNESS Now learn the mystery of the kingdom unfolded in the picture lesson of the grain of wheat: The life of God in you could not break forth into fruitfulness until you had been broken by God’s own hand. The earthly surroundings and testings, the loneliness and humiliation, were permitted by Him so that He might release into life abundant the life that had come from God.

At each stage of growth there must be the casting off of much that was necessary before if there is to be fuller development. At the beginning, the germ of life is hidden within the outward form of the written word; the shell may pass away (that is, from our memories) but the life—the Living Word—remains. Under favorable conditions for growth, in “an honest and good heart,” cleansed from all that would choke the seed, the life progresses, showing itself in varied outward forms that may be described as the blade, the stalk, the ear, the full corn in the ear.

In the fullness of time the knife must be used, for there must come the severing from old supports, the parting with old experiences, the passing away of outward things that once helped us. The blades of green, the stalk, the ear of wheat—these were only outward coverings for a life that was pressing through them to full maturity.

Severed from old supports, detached from old surroundings, again the life within the matured grain cannot break forth into the hundredfold without a further stripping—a breaking of an outward shell that would prevent the fruitfulness.

In honest hearts crying out to God for His fullest purposes to be fulfilled in them, the Holy Spirit works even when they do not understand His working. The danger lies in their clinging to old experiences, old helps and old supports when the Spirit-life within is pressing them on to another stage—especially if that stage seems “downward” instead of “upward.” Our picture lesson shows us that “downward” means fruitfulness and is the sequence to the “upward” path of the full development of the grain of wheat.

What all this means in practical experience the Holy Spirit alone can make us understand. It is sufficient for us to know enough of the principles of His working that we may learn to yield trustfully to all His dealings.

BEARING FRUIT At last the grain of wheat is willing to be hidden away from the eyes of men. Willing to be trampled upon and lie in silence in some lonely corner chosen of God. Willing to appear what others would call a "failure." Willing to live in the will of God apart from glorious experiences. Willing to dwell in solitude and isolation, away from happy fellowship with other grains of wheat.

Silently, surely, the divine life breaks forth into fruitfulness. The grain has given itself, it has parted with its "own life"; yet it still lives—lives now in the life of its Lord.

A buried seed-grain, it is content to be forgotten! For who thinks of the grain and of all the sorrow and suffering it underwent in the dark when they see the harvest field?

But the grain of wheat is satisfied because the law of its being is fulfilled. It has sunk itself and its own getting and now lives in others, not even desiring to have it known that from it the hundredfold has sprung.

So Christ Himself poured out His soul unto death that He might "see His seed" (Is. 53:10, KJV), see the travail of His soul and be satisfied (see v. 11) as He lives again in His redeemed ones. Thus in God's wondrous law—the law of nature repeated in the spiritual world—the first Grain of wheat, sown by God Himself, is reproduced in other grains, having the same characteristics and law of being: "'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit'" (John 12:24, NASB).

LIFE OUT OF DEATH We have followed the little grain in its downward path into the ground to die. It has "hated its life in this world," and now its life is hid with Christ in God. While it has been consenting to the breaking and stripping in its lonely, hidden path, the divine life within it has been breaking forth in life to others and silently springing up

into stronger, fuller, purer union with the ascended Lord.

This is not an easy path. Even the Lord Christ was troubled as He drew near the hour of desolation and suffering foreshadowed in Psalm 22. "'Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour?' But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Thy Name'" (John 12:27-28).

The hiding of the Father's face was more than broken heart, nails and spear. Jesus knew what was to come, and He could have saved Himself—He could have spoken to His Father and had legions of angels fulfill His requests—but where then would have been the first fruits unto God and the Lamb? Nay, the Master's only prayer could be, "'Father, glorify Thy Name.'"

If we follow the Lamb where He went, if we are willing to die in order to bring forth life, there will surely come to us, as to Him, the assurance from the Father: "'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again'" (v. 28). And in the end a great reward will be given us: "'To Him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne'" (Rev. 3:21, NKJV).

Jessie Penn-Lewis (1861-1927) was a frequent Keswick speaker whose messages proclaimed the centrality of the cross in the life and experience of the Christian. She regularly contributed to *The Overcomer*, a worldwide quarterly, which she founded in 1908.