

GROWING

why growth matters, what it looks like and how it happens

“All over the world this gospel is growing.. ”
[Colossians 1.6]

‘Growth’ is the theme of this series of studies, and it’s begun with the prayer that it will prove to be a real growth point in our life, and lives, as God’s people here.

Growth is expected among God’s people, since the God who makes alive is the God who also makes things grow: and growth is exhorted upon them, as something which is neither occasional nor optional.

“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

You can find the background to this series [here](#).

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5. John 10.1-18 [w/b Sunday 8th October]

Relationship

As the shepherd's responsibility was to prepare the sheep for the altar of sacrifice, so the pastor's calling is to "*present everyone perfect [without blemish] in Christ*" (Col.1.28).

Elders, whose primary task is to 'be shepherds of the church of God' (Acts 20.28) are appointed, therefore, with a view to the *growth* of disciples. Peter describes the church as being, on the one hand, "*God's flock*" and, on the other, "*under your care*" (1 Pet.5.2): what that care involves is best seen in the 'shepherd ministry of Jesus Himself - and in particular the *relational* aspect of that care.

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1. **Read John 10.1-18.** The imagery draws heavily on the sheep/shepherd relationship which is used so fully in the Old Testament to describe God's relationship with His people.

Why does God use this picture to describe the relationship into which He calls us with Himself ?

How has this picture helped you understand your walk with the Lord?

2. **Read John 10.1-6.** Notice the repetition of the reference to the shepherd's voice (vv.3, 4 & 5).

Who comprised Jesus' audience here, and why do you think Jesus stressed the significance of the shepherd's *voice* to those He was addressing?

Three different verbs are used in relation to the sheep and the shepherd's voice: what do these verbs have to teach us about our relationship with Jesus?

3. **Read John 10.7-9.** The shepherd would himself often function as the gate (or 'door') to the sheepfold.

What truths about our relationship with Jesus does He teach by using this picture?

Whom does Jesus have in mind when He refers to "*all who have come before me*" as thieves and robbers (read v.1 again too!)?

What lessons does He teach here about God's salvation?

4. **Read John 10.10.** This well-known verse provides a contrast between the 'good Shepherd' and a thief - particularly in terms of what their respective aims are.

What does Jesus mean by 'life to the full'? What has been your experience of this 'fullness of life' which Jesus came to bring?

If elders are, in Christ, to '*shepherd* the flock of God', how will they ensure that it is this 'fullness of life' which they are bringing to those under their care?

5. Read John 10.11-13. Jesus now contrasts the shepherd with a mere 'hired hand' to highlight certain aspects of His relationship with His people.

What are the differences between the 'shepherd' and the 'hired hand' to which Jesus points?

What truths does He want to impress on the hearts of His people by means of this contrast?

How does this contrast encourage and help you in your life of discipleship?

6. Read John 10.14-15. The hallmark of the shepherd/sheep relationship lies in the fact that each *knows* the other and likens this relationship to that between Himself and His Father.

How does this comparison with the relationship between Jesus and His Father inform our understanding of what it is to have Jesus as our 'good Shepherd'?

What lessons does this have for the way elders 'shepherd' those 'under their care' ... and for each of us under the care of an elder?

7. Read John 10.15b-18. Jesus here speaks about the costliness of His Shepherd's ministry: He will lay down His life for the sheep. In order that we might have life and have it to the full - He dies.

To whom was Jesus referring when He speaks about His having 'other sheep that are not of this sheepfold'?

Why was His laying down His life so necessary for our having life in all its fullness?