

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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9. Ezekiel 34.1-16 [w/b Sunday 5th November]

“.. I will look after my sheep..”

Ezekiel was a prophet of the exile, who was able to see just why things had gone so badly wrong for a people so richly blessed by the Lord. The message which he brought articulated the promise of the gospel - the promise of the Lord's gracious renewing and restoring work in the life of His people.

In this chapter the Lord reminds us that He Himself is our Shepherd - and He contrasts all that He is as the Shepherd with the ways in which the leaders of His people (their 'shepherds') had so wretchedly failed them. As such these verses provide both an exposition of all that the Lord undertakes to be and do for us, and also an example for all called to exercise pastoral leadership in His church.

[There may not be time for all the questions to be addressed in your Community Group: key questions for us as a fellowship in this study are questions 5, 6 & 7. Do try as always to leave good time for shared prayer!]

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1. **Read Ezekiel 34.1-16.** The failings of the leaders of the people of God is contrasted in this chapter with the lead which God Himself will come to exercise among them: He will be their shepherd.

On a first reading of these verses what aspect (or aspects) of the Lord's leadership strike you most forcibly?

Who have been the people through the course of your life as a follower of Jesus who have reflected His shepherding best?

What have you valued most in their leadership?

2. Read Ezekiel 34.1-4. In these opening verses of the chapter the short-comings of the 'shepherds of Israel' are exposed by the Word of God.

What failings in leadership does the Lord highlight here?

Read **1 Pet.5.2-3**: what does Peter point to as key failings to be avoided in this 'shepherd ministry' of leaders?

3. Read Ezekiel 34.5-6. The failure of Israel's shepherds had consequences: and the Lord here points to what happens in the absence of good shepherding on the part of leaders.

What were the consequences for the people of Israel of this failure on the part of their leaders?

How does this apply to ourselves in the church of Christ today?

4. Read Ezekiel 34.7-10. Here the Lord addresses those who have been called to exercise this 'shepherd' ministry.

What prompts this message from the Lord?

What four sobering statements does the Lord make here in relation to these 'shepherds of Israel'?

What does the Lord's 'judgment' here on these shepherds have to teach us about the role of elders in the church?

5. Read Ezekiel 34.11. The emphasis shifts from the failures of the 'shepherds of Israel' to the ministry which the Lord Himself will fulfill in their stead.

How will the two main commitments the Lord makes here find expression in the role of those called to be His 'under-shepherds' in the life of the church?

Insofar as we all share in the ministry of Christ, what might a commitment on our part to 'search for my sheep' involve us in doing?

6. Read Ezekiel 34.12-13. The focus of these two verses falls more on the first of the Lord's two commitments - namely His *searching* for His sheep.

The Lord declares that He will rescue them, bring them, gather them, and pasture them: what will each of these aspects of the Lord's work look like in our life as a fellowship here in Aberdeen?

7. Read Ezekiel 34.14-16. Here the focus moves more onto the second of the Lord's two commitments - this time to '*look after*' His sheep (see v.11)

What according to these verses does the Lord's looking after His sheep involve?

How might the ministry of elders (called to 'shepherd' God's flock) reflect this aspect of the shepherding of the Lord in the life of this congregation?