

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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12. Esther 3.13-4.17 [w/b Sunday 26th November]

“.. for such a time as this ...”

In this second of three ‘case studies’ in growth, we consider a young woman who becomes one of the great, enduring ‘heroines’ of the Bible. Following the Lord is no easy path for a girl such as Esther to walk: she lives in the aftermath of exile, and is called to sustain her Biblical faith in a country and culture which pays scant (if any) regard to the truths which the Scriptures affirm.

Ours is a similar context, of course. To stand on the truths of the Bible today is strongly counter-cultural: following Jesus may set before us challenges akin to those which Esther faced. May we all prove, as Esther did, good students of the Word, who will grow in both the wisdom and the boldness which we need in serving Christ.

[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 3, 6 & 7. Do try as always to leave good time for shared prayer!]

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1. **Read Esther 3.1-4.17.** Not for the first (nor the last) time in history a plan was hatched which would see as its fulfillment the destruction of the Jewish people.

What has been the most challenging situation which your faith in Jesus has presented you with thus far in your life?

In what ways were you conscious of the Lord's help?

2. Read Esther 2.5-7. Esther is introduced in relation to her 'cousin', Mordecai, who had brought her up in the absence of her parents.

What two painful circumstances are alluded to in Esther's family background?

Read **2 Kings 5.1-3**: the narrative of 2 Kings 5 takes place some 300 years prior to Esther's time - how might her knowledge of this Scripture have helped her?

3. Read Esther 2.19-3.6. Mordecai had clearly been not only the father-figure in Esther's life, but had instructed her well and been very much her 'mentor'.

What do we learn about Mordecai from these verses?

How has the example of older Christians helped you to grow in your life of faith?

4. Read Esther 4.1-8. Esther begins to see that she may have a significant part to play in putting the brakes on what's shaping up as an early 'ethnic cleansing'.

What is the significance of Mordecai's putting on 'sackcloth and ashes'?

Compare **v.8** with **2.20**: when might it be wise to keep quiet about your faith? And when might it be important not to (however tempting silence might seem)?

5. Read Esther 4.9-11. Esther's reply to Mordecai reflects her awareness of how potentially dangerous is the course of action which Mordecai has suggested.

What 'risks' have *you* had to take in following Jesus?

How do you distinguish between a risk which is foolish, and one which is faithful?

6. Read Esther 4.12-14. Mordecai offers Esther some very direct, but equally very discerning, advice as to how she should view the challenges of her situation.

What three bits of advice does Mordecai give?

How do Mordecai's words encourage you?

And how do they challenge you?

7. Read Esther 4.15-17. Esther takes this particular bull by the horns and rises to the challenge with a mature and measured approach to the situation.

Are you as careful and intentional as Esther is here to ask other people to pray specifically for you when facing a critical situation?

What is the purpose of fasting at times like this?

When might such fasting and prayer be appropriate?

Compare Esther's final words with the response of Daniel's friends to the king in **Dan.3.16-18**: what's the difference between faith and fatalism?