

the next step

stepping out and following where He leads

Jesus' summons is simple - 'Follow Me!'

As His disciples, those who have responded to His call, the church is, by definition, a people on the move.

As Ruth said to Naomi, so His church says to Jesus, 'Where you go, I will go.' We are bold, therefore, both as individuals and as a local fellowship of believers, to step out in faith and to follow where He leads. 'The next step' is always the most important one and it's what that 'next step' looks like for ourselves that this series of studies addresses.



You can find the background to this short series here.

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2. Growth

(Colossians 1.3-14)

[w/b Sunday 15th March 2020]

“.. bearing fruit and growing ..”

Almost by definition, the fact that there is a ‘next step’ means that there is a path to be trod, a journey to be undertaken, and at least some sort of progress to be made. The reality of *growth* as a characteristic of the kingdom of God is the theme of this study.

We expect growth as we take the steps of faith not because we are perennial optimists, but rather because we are theologians - people being taught by God about Himself. And a basic truth about God is simply this: He makes things grow.

[Although there are 7 questions as ever, all of them important, your Community Group may choose to concentrate on just some of them. Key questions in this study are probably 1, 4 and 6. As always try to leave good time for shared prayer!]

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1. **Read Col.1.3-14.** Something of the vibrancy and vitality of the early church can be sensed in these opening verses of Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae.

What types of growth are suggested through the course of this passage?

In what ways are you aware of there being growth in your own walk with the Lord?

2. **Read Col.1.3.** Paul very often began his letters with an expression of gratitude to God for His work in the lives of those to whom he was writing.

Why is Paul thanking *God* as he starts his letter?

Are you praying regularly for the conversion of others?

To what extent do your prayers include Christians you've never met, but for whom you give thanks to God?

3. Read Col.1.4-5. These believers showed the characteristic New Testament hallmarks of that new life into which we are birthed by the Spirit of God: faith and love and hope.

In relation to which of these three are you most conscious of your own need to be growing?

What does Paul mean by saying that their faith and love 'spring from the hope stored up for you'?

4. Read Col.1.6. Paul makes a great statement in this verse which is, indeed, as true today as it was when he first wrote it in the heady days of the early church's rapid expansion.

In what sense did Paul mean that the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world?

What did he mean when he stated that the gospel had been similarly growing '*among you*'? Would he be able to say that about ourselves as a fellowship? What would be the signs of that growth for which he looked?

5. Read Col.1.7-8 & Philem.23. The New Testament is full of 'unsung heroes', ordinary individuals like this man who never hit the headlines but got on with the job of making Christ known.

What do you learn about Epaphras from these verses?

In what ways had Epaphras clearly grown in Christ?

Would others recognize similar growth in yourself?

6. Read Col.1.9-11. Paul began his letter by telling the believers that he prayed for them: in vv.9-14 we learn what it was he prayed for them.

For what different expressions of growth in their lives does Paul pray here? Are you aware of such growth in your life?

What did he understand to be the *means* by which they would live fruitful lives?

7. Read Col.1.9-14. As he concludes his prayer Paul points to the progressive mature of God's work in their lives: He *has* saved them, *is* saving them and yet their salvation is still also future.

How does Paul describe the past and future dimensions of their salvation in vv.12-14?

In what ways (if any!) does the promise and prospect of your future salvation help you grow towards it?