



Where do we grow from here?

Main video

I love the passage in John 15 about the vine and the branches, even if some of the pruning sounds a little bit uncomfortable. It begins, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.” I invite you to read through that passage, maybe all the way down to verse 17, “This is my command, love each other.”

One of the things we can miss, the most obvious point in that passage, is it’s about growth, a vine and branches, and bearing fruit. It presupposes growth to be the natural order of things.

Within my time as Vice President and President I’m asking the question, “Where do we grow from here?” and I want to invite as many people as possible to investigate that and process it. One of the first things, maybe the main thing I want people to do and would invite people to do, is to pray it. Would you pray, accepting that that passage and others presupposes growth, “Lord, where do we grow from here?”

So, when I do that, I need to make it personal first of all – that’s what I’ve found. And although it says “we”, I find myself asking, “Lord, where do *I* grow from here?” Then I can expand out that word “we” and say, “Lord, my church, where do we grow from here?” And then my city, and then our stream of churches, Baptist Together churches in the UK and even wider.

When we’ve done that it’s worth taking a look at the word “here” and having a genuinely honest take on where “here” is. If you’re going to give directions – “Where do we go from here?” or “Where do we grow from here?” as I’ve called it – then you need to know where “here” is, so “What is the current state of play in churches today and in the UK today” – and a number of things might well follow from that.

Having done that, it’s worth taking an honest look at the word “growth” because some growth might not be the sort of growth our Father wants. So, we need to accept that we mean genuine kingdom growth, people committing to Jesus for the first time or recommitting and people becoming more like Him, growing in that discipleship journey, in discernment, in wisdom, in love, in fruits of the Spirit and so on. When we’ve done that, then we can begin to look at the “where” question and in looking at the “where” question we might have a variety of different answers. So each of those words has possible implications and I invite you in your groups to look at them one at a time beginning with the prayer and then look at the various implications of them.



Feedback video

One of the questions that flows from what we've just discussed is a personal one.

If we're looking first of all as we did (after praying it, through that phrase "Where do we grow from here?") at the "we" bit and the personal bit of where do I grow from here ... 'Where' - what does that exactly look like?

One of the things I'm really encouraging is for us to take a whole-life discipleship emphasis rather than look at just one particular aspect. So, it's worth unpacking what we mean by whole-life discipleship. In some ways we ought not to need the words "whole-life" in front of discipleship, because that's what discipleship is, but, just to step back from that one stage further, we ought to admit that the word discipleship isn't in our Bibles. The word "disciple" is, and so people then feel fairly free I think to mean a whole variety of things by the word discipleship.

Some people mean a follow-on course after conversion, something for super spiritual Christians. Some people may mean something very internal within the life of our church. Some people mean certain levels of spiritual disciplines, so the word has become attached to a whole variety of different things.

A disciple in Jesus' day just followed him everywhere and so that's what I mean by whole-life disciples, following Jesus everywhere. And so, we need to therefore think about the majority of our lives, wherever we find ourselves, hence our emphasis on the word frontline, the place where we spend most time with people who aren't yet believers. It would be a shame, a crying shame, if we limit discipleship to the way that we act like Jesus in a Christian environment. So, we use the term "whole-life discipleship" to widen it out to what I think a disciple was always meant to be, somebody who follows Jesus 24/7.