



Where do we grow from here?

Introduction

The purpose of this study is consider the question, “Where do we grow from here?” and to unpack its implications for ourselves and our churches.

Opener

Ask each person in turn in the room to provide one answer, and only one, for the question that follows, without repeating an answer already provided.

“The secret of great gardening is ...”

Bible study

Read John 15:1-17.

Question 1

At the heart of these much-loved verses is the thought of fruitfulness (see the ‘summary’ phrases Jesus uses in verses 8 and 16, in addition to the individual mentions of fruit in the text). How is fruitfulness to be understood in the passage? Why does it matter that we are fruitful?

Author D. A. Carson warns us against being too prescriptive in our definition of fruit. “Fruit’ in the vine imagery represents everything that is the product of effective prayer in Jesus’ name, including obedience to Jesus’ commands (v. 10), experience of Jesus’ joy (v. 11 – as earlier his peace, 14:27), love for one another (v. 12), and witness to the world (vv. 16, 27). This fruit is nothing less than the outcome of persevering dependence on the vine, driven by faith, embracing all of the believer’s life and the product of his witness.”

It matters because fruitfulness is our purpose, for we were created for God’s glory (verse 8, and compare Ephesians 1:11-12).

Question 2

What measures does Jesus promise to take to ensure fruitfulness and to deal with fruitlessness? See verses 1-8.

Jesus talks about pruning for fruitfulness and ‘cutting off’ to deal with fruitlessness. Verse 6 makes for uncomfortable reading. We should not avoid its challenge, but neither should it be the primary focus of discussion.

Question 3

In verses 9-17, Jesus links fruitfulness to love (5,9) and commands his disciples to love each other, pointing to himself and his Father as examples to follow. Read *The Message*



translation of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (below), and spend some time reflecting on it. What aspects of the command “Love each other” are the greatest challenge to you?

*Love never gives up,
Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
Love doesn't strut,
Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others,
Isn't always “me first,”
Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.*

Application

Watch the video for this session. This video is available from https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/540999/Where_do_we.aspx.

Prayer

In the video, Ken suggests that one of the first things we should do, if not the main thing, before thinking about personal or kingdom growth generally is to take the words “Where do we grow from here?” and make it a prayer.

So, let's do that now!

Question 4

Think about the ‘here’ element of that prayer in the context of your small group or your local church community. What is your assessment of how things are currently? Be honest about what's going well and what's not going so well.

Question 5

In the video Ken states that we can miss an obvious point about the passage in John 15: that it presupposes growth to be the natural order of things. What would be the signs of “Kingdom growth” in your small group or community?



Question 6

Building on your assessment of 'here' (question 4) and your understanding of 'grow' (question 5), what thoughts does this suggest to you about the 'where' in the prayer?

Taking it forward

Watch the feedback video for this session. This video is available from https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/540999/Where_do_we.aspx.

In the video we are invited to think about what we mean by whole-life discipleship. Jesus' original disciples *followed* him *everywhere*.

Making it personal, where and with whom will you be spending your time over the coming week? What does being a follower of Jesus look like in these contexts?

Thinking about the churches in our denomination nationally, Baptists Together churches, let's pray that we will collectively find some important answers to the question, "Where do we grow from here?"