



Growth

Love it, amazing, right up my street.

I love to imagine how awesome I'm going to be when all that growth is done, and I'm together and organised, disciplined and ever so loving.

When you'll all look at me and see a serene and delightful replica of Jesus.

But more womanly, obviously.

And probably looking a lot more stylish and slimmer than I do today as well.

I'll never speak first and think later, I'll never react out of shame or neediness, I'll never judge you for that thing you said, that opinion you had.

Growth sounds just the kind of thing I'd like to see happen

I like to send my imagination racing ahead, to see the church even fuller than it is

To brand new buildings with no damp patches and plenty of space, an amazing sound system, a bustling cafe where no-one has to move any chairs, and the kitchen has a functioning oven and a dishwasher

To see revival breaking out like in the olden days, altar calls we can't contain

Worship lifting the rafters, tears flowing, hands raised, baptisms every week,

and lives transformed, people living debt and drug free, relationships restored

I love to imagine how awesome we'll look when all that growth is done

So, bring it on, the growth...let's see it!

Or wait, just a moment, hang on.

Wasn't there something about pruning and trimming?

Wasn't there something about dying to self and living to Christ?

Wasn't there something about making ourselves less so He can be more?

Wasn't there something about taking up crosses? About loving our enemies?

About repentance?

That sounds a bit less appropriate for the front of a greetings card

I think I'd rather just wake up one day and find that the roof issues have magically fixed themselves, the kitchen has doubled in size, and everyone "out there" woke up and realised they needed Jesus...and came knocking down our door to find him.

I'd rather just go to sleep for a while, and when I wake up find the cancer of my selfishness and cynicism, laziness and grumbling, dissatisfaction and neediness are all cut away, and all the scars healing nicely.

Couldn't growth be more like buying new makeup and some Spanx, than actually making it to the gym, remembering to take my makeup off at night and drinking more water?
Couldn't revival break out without any effort on my part to love the people around us, and live out the Jesus way?

Couldn't growth be something given to us by supernatural intervention rather than just the daily slog of getting up and getting on with loving one another well, opening our Bibles and praying again and again "not my will but Yours"?

And saying again and again, "I'm sorry, please forgive me"

Couldn't growth just be easier?

I think I want depth of faith without having to dig deep
I think I want us to impact our community without actually having to have any interaction with the mess and muddle out there
I think I'd like it best if more people found out they are infinitely loved and forgiven by Father God without me having to risk the embarrassment of looking them in the eyes and telling them that myself.

So, yeah, growth.

Sounds like hard work.

Maybe here is fine.

Maybe I'm fine, we're fine, this is all fine.

Maybe fine is just fine. Maybe life in some of it's fullness will do.

Maybe a life a little bit transformed, maybe stories we heard from a friend of what God's doing somewhere far away is fine.

Maybe staying in here with the old familiar stories and songs is good enough.

Maybe comfort is better than change, maybe staying static is easier than growth.

But then again, here's the thing.

The thing is...

There is much more to life than this, to me than this, to church and community and kingdom than this.

And the other thing is...

We are called to grow, to more, to deeper, higher, fuller, real life.

It's part of the deal,

the heart of the story,

the pattern of creation from beginning to end, the point of it all.

Perhaps what our imaginations tell us - as flawed and fantastical as they are - is that change, growth, moving forward being the branches, drawing from the vine, producing the fruit, is the real story.

It's a picture of Remaining.

Being Rooted and established
Coming Alive
Changing and transforming

The Word written and the Word made flesh tell us that
The best is yet to come,
the story is only just beginning,
the term will one day be over and the holidays will stretch ahead,
the winter will give way to summer.

There will be no more mourning or crying
Every wrong will be righted
Every tear will be wiped away

How beautiful, how unutterably lovely that we get to start now.

It's not just my imagination, it's what we were promised by our God and our Lord Jesus

So, the idea of growth which fires up my imagination and my daydreams is an echo of the bigger story, of the Kingdom story, of the "More to life than this" which all of us feeling tugging at our souls, that homesickness for a place we've never been.

And it's worth chasing after. As hard as it might be.

If I have to fall into cold dark earth, and make my home there for a while getting real with God and myself, then so be it.

If I have to push my way out through the stones and thorns of this world and my own dark heart then so be it.

If I have to submit to the hand of the Gardener, allow the dry branches to be cut away, to feel the pain of repentance then so be it.

I'll keep at it.

Because the Vine says that I am His friend
and he tells me that He loves me the way the Father, the Master Gardener loves him.
He tells me that he chose me and appointed me to bear fruit,
And that, really, all the growing pains, and pruning and trimming are for my good.

For our good.

For the good of the people I share my life with, for the sake of the big wide world outside these walls.

He says, "I love you",
he says "don't be afraid for I am with you"
He says "remain in my love"

And that, by His Amazing Grace and by the work of the Holy Spirit, I can do.
Are you with me?