

JENNY:

Last time we looked at the things that stifle and restrict our growth and we're going to revisit that in more detail after Easter. Tonight we're going to look at some of the things that encourage and promote our growth. This isn't going to be an exhaustive list as we've already looked at some areas that help growth – like good devotional practice, etc.

The title is feeding and watering so the first thing I did was a keyword search of water in the Bible... And I found something really cool: the Bible starts (or nearly starts) and ends with a picture of a river. In Genesis 1 the perfection of God's creation is described – the pinnacle of which was the Garden of Eden. Then in *Genesis 2:10*, we read this:

A stream flowed in Eden and watered the garden; beyond Eden it divided into four rivers.

This stream watered the garden and gave life and growth to the things that grew there – then it headed on out of the garden to water more of the earth.

Then in *Revelation 22*, we read this:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

This river flows directly from the throne of God: 'Life from God streams unceasingly through the new world'. The effects of this water are perpetual fruitfulness and healing – restoration of the perfection God created and we destroyed.

What does this picture of a river represent?

The presence of God that brings life

The salvation of God

The life-imparting and cleansing ministry of the Holy Spirit.

GORDY:

So how can we experience this water?

Psalm 1

1 Blessed is the man

*who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.*

*2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

*3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.*

Experiencing the river through the ministry of others

We need to spend time with the wise rather than the simple, the fool or the mocker – see powerpoint for verses that relate directly to each of these.

Jeremiah 17:7-9

*7 "But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose confidence is in him.*

*8 He will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.
It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.
It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit."*

Experiencing the river through intentionally taking time to soak in God's presence

We need to make sure that our confidence is in God alone – that He is the one we confide in.

JENNY:

Those words that we heard in Revelation 22 are not the first time that something very similar appears in the Bible. Let's listen to Ezekiel 47:

Ezekiel 47

The River From the Temple

1 The man brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar. 2 He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was flowing from the south side.

3 As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits ^[a] and then led me through water that was ankle-deep. 4 He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist. 5 He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross. 6 He asked me, "Son of man, do you see this?"

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. 7 When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. 8 He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, ^[b] where it enters the Sea. ^[c] When it empties into the Sea, ^[d] the water there becomes fresh. 9 Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. 10 Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds—like the fish of the Great Sea.

^[e] 11 *But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. 12 Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing."*

This river also comes from God – the temple where God was understood to be in the Old Testament. This river is fresh and makes the sea fresh where it joins it. Where this river flows, ‘everything will live’. This river encourages the growth of perpetually fruit-bearing trees which will be used for food and for healing.

But there seems to be an invitation implicit in Ezekiel’s telling of it...

Our boys have been having swimming lessons for about 18 months. They were 3 and 4 when they started and the first class they went into was all about water confidence. They’d always enjoyed splashing about in the water – baths take hours! – and in these lessons they got to enjoy deeper water with the safety of a teacher to guide them across. Then, after a couple of blocks of this class, Josh got put up to level 2. Now, he’s not a very big boy and because we’d started the swimming lessons quite early on, he was younger and quite a lot smaller than any of the other children in level 2. And the first time he stood on the edge of the pool in this new class, it took everything in me not to howl. He looked so tiny and defenceless and, to be honest, frightened on the edge of what (for him) is quite a big bit of water. If I had gone and told him it was ok to go back into the happy splashing around of level 1, he would have jumped at the chance...

Fast forward a year and now both boys are in the esteemed level 2 class. They no longer look quite so tiny or defenceless and certainly not frightened. They can swim on top of the water, under the water, do a variety of different strokes, turn somersaults, dive for toys on the bottom... They love and enjoy the water and will spend hours in there unless you bribe them with happy meals to get out!

You see what’s implicit in Ezekiel’s telling of his encounter is that we can actually get in the river. We can splash in the shallows, wade a bit deeper or get totally soaked as we go swimming. No one’s going to give us a big shove into the deepest part – we choose to go there and enjoy the water ourselves.

There’s a rightness about enjoying the shallows – about splashing around with God – just as the boys got their confidence in the baby class, but we can’t fully enjoy the expanse of the water and all it has to offer unless we choose to go a bit deeper and get a bit wetter. We can stay on the edge of a relationship with God – He’s not going to push us out of our depth if we don’t want to go there, but it’s as we choose to go deeper and deeper that we begin to appreciate the expanse of what that relationship means.

Some of us need to take off our armbands – get rid of our backup plans as we talked about back in November. Some of us need to choose to take a step

into deeper water. Some of us need to take a deep breath and start swimming!

Verses relating to Water & Rivers:

Isaiah 12:3 With joy you will draw water
from the wells of salvation.

Zechariah 14:8 On that day living water will flow out from
Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in
summer and in winter.

Joel 3:18 "In that day the mountains will drip new wine,
and the hills will flow with milk;
all the ravines of Judah will run with water.
A fountain will flow out of the LORD's house
and will water the valley of acacias.

Isaiah 44:3-4 For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring,
and my blessing on your descendants.

They will spring up like grass in a meadow,
like poplar trees by flowing streams.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter
the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

John 4:13-14 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water
will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will
never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a
spring of water welling up to eternal life."

John 7:37-38 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus
stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to
me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said,
streams of living water will flow from within him."

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not because of righteous things we had
done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing
of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

Psalms 87:7 As they make music they will sing,
"All my fountains are in you."

Psalm 36:8 They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.

Psalm 46:4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of
God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.

Isaiah 33:21 There the LORD will be our Mighty One.
It will be like a place of broad rivers and streams.
No galley with oars will ride them,
no mighty ship will sail them.

Amos 5:24 But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a
never-failing stream!

Psalm 42:1-2 As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?

Deuteronomy 8:7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a
good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs
flowing in the valleys and hills

Isaiah 43:19 See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the desert
and streams in the wasteland.