

(These notes were used as the basis for the sermon on 16th February.

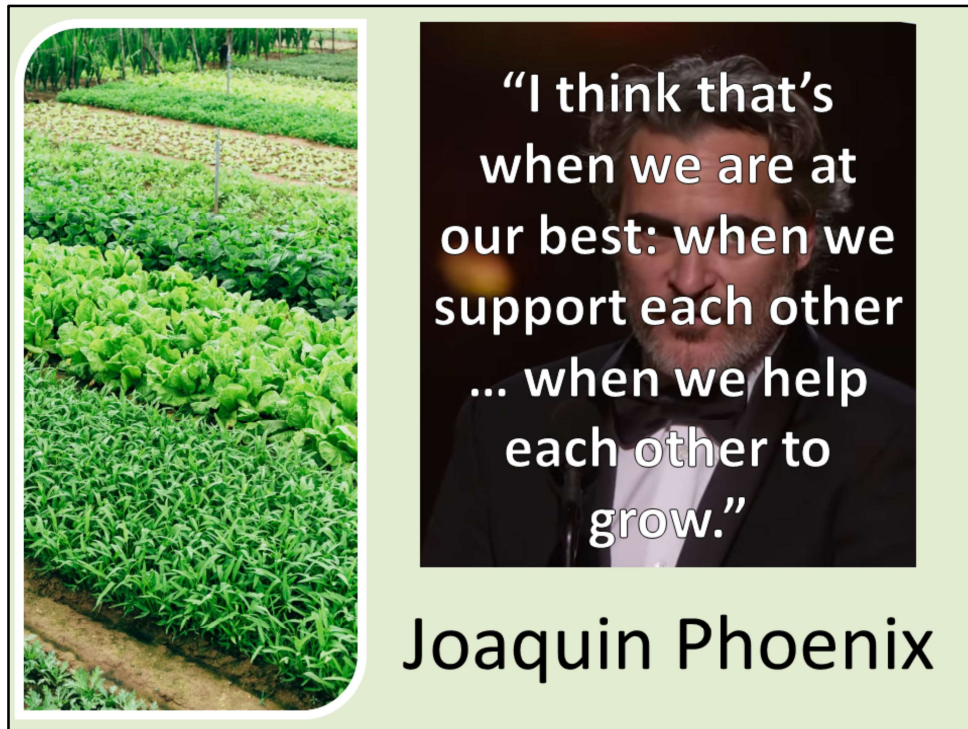
In the event the technology failed and the Powerpoint slides were not used!)



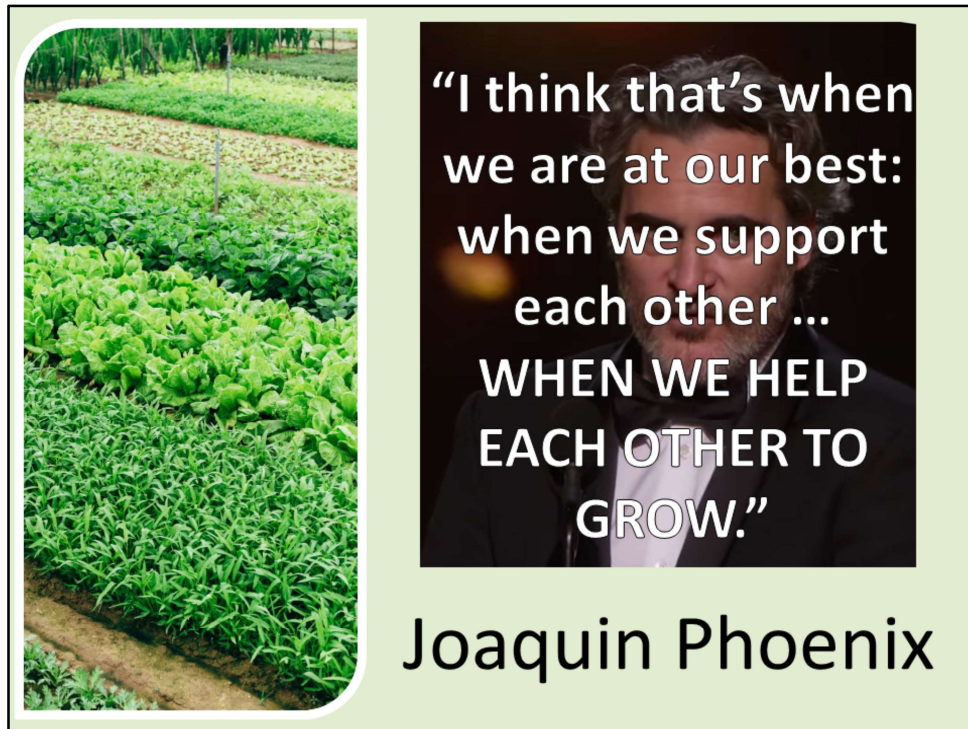
At last week's Oscar ceremony, Joaquin Phoenix received the Best Actor Oscar for his portrayal of The Joker.

Some Oscar acceptance speeches are very gushy; some Oscar speeches are very earnest.

Joaquin Phoenix opted for the earnest and pointed - talking about how the film industry can use its influence to speak up for the voiceless ... and he spoke in particular for the need to care for our planet. Then he ended on a more personal note, recognising that he hadn't always been easy to work with.



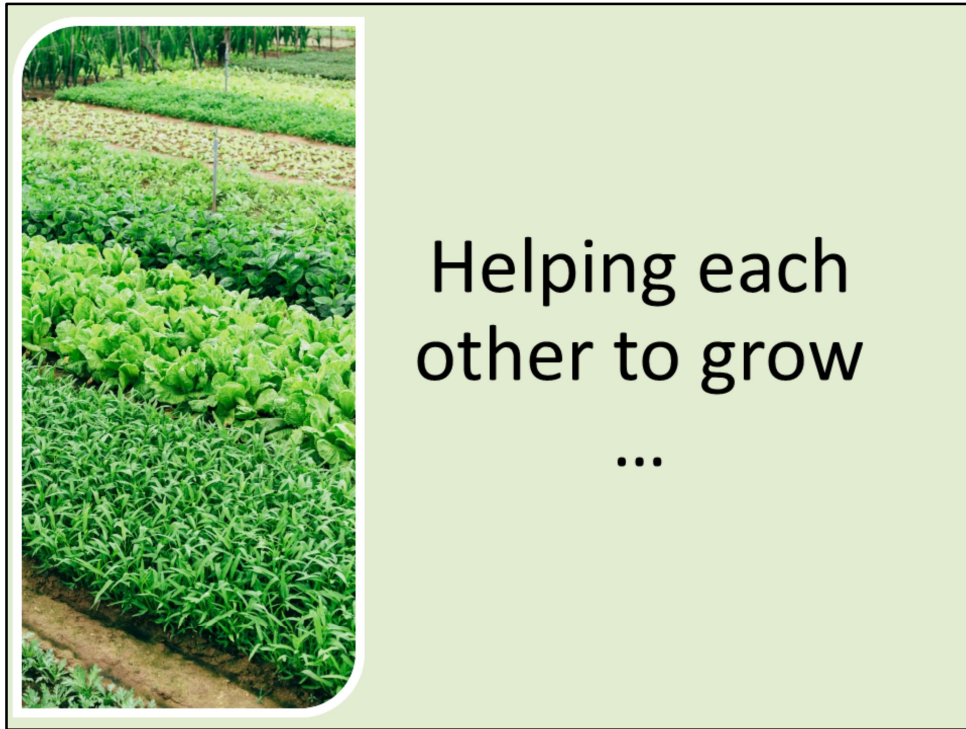
'I'm grateful that so many of you in this room have given me a second chance. I think that's when we're at our best: when we support each other. Not when we cancel each other out for our past mistakes, but when we help each other to grow. When we educate each other; when we guide each other to redemption – that is the best of humanity.'



"I think that's when we're at our best: when we support each other. ... when we help each other to grow.

that is the best of humanity."


Helping each other to grow ... the best of humanity.




Helping each other to grow is not a bad way into these opening verses of 1 Corinthians 3.

This is a passage that is all about growing in God.

And it begins with Paul's concern that the Christians in Corinth have stopped growing.

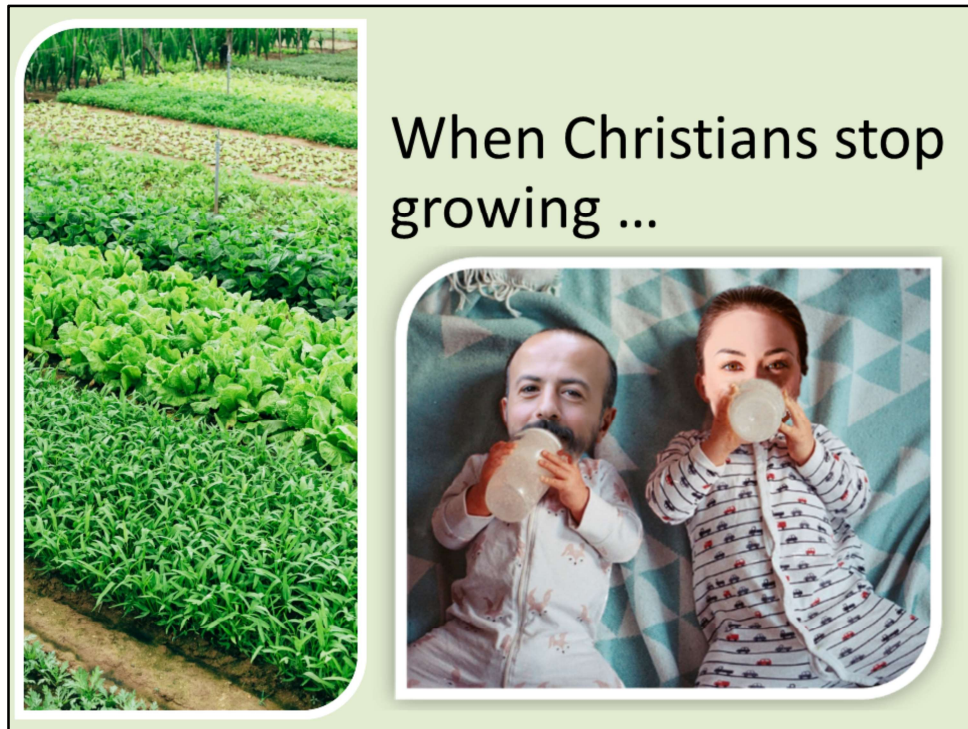


“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere **INFANTS IN CHRIST**. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.”



He addresses them as “Infants in Christ”.

They haven’t yet been weaned from milk to solids. They are not ready for it yet.



I am not quite sure how they would have responded to that charge! It's not the kind of thing that you want to hear about yourself!

It's not a particularly pleasant picture!



A spirit of self-reliance

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as **WORLDLY** – mere **infants in Christ**. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still **WORLDLY**. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not **WORLDLY**? Are you not acting like **MERE MEN**? For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not **MERE MEN**?

So what is it that leads to this lack of growth?

Paul uses two phrases that are translated here as

Worldly

Mere Men

Worldly - “people of the flesh” as opposed to “spiritual” -
“people of the Spirit”


This is really about self-reliance ... drawing on our own wisdom, making our own plans, trying to make things happen with our own ingenuity, trusting our own instincts ...



No longer looking to God ...

There is something dangerously insistent in the human spirit that wants to make us totally self-reliant.

We are ready to acknowledge that we need God's grace to sort out our mistakes from the past ... but now that's been sorted, we kind of want to do things ourselves ...



A
divisive
spirit

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is JEALOUSY AND QUARRELLING among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not mere men?

What then also happens is that a divisive spirit sets in.

This is the symptom that tells Paul that here is a group of immature Christians.

Jealousy and quarrelling have set in.

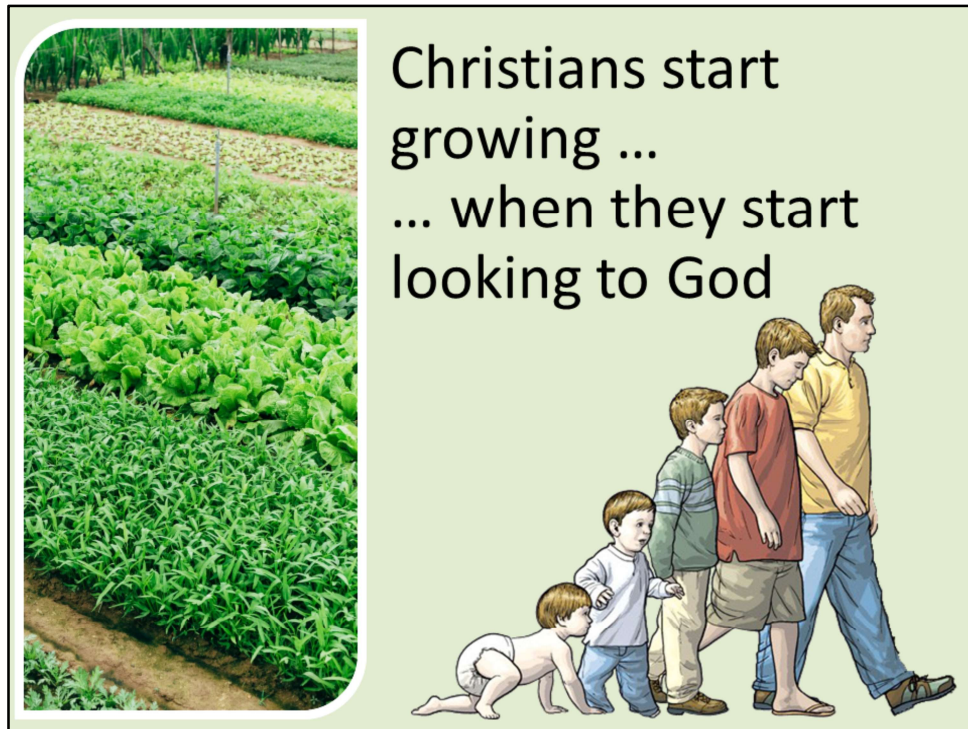
They have broken down into 'camps' - into 'us' and 'them'.



Christians stop growing when they stop helping each other to grow.

The self-reliant spirit that turns away from God, leads to a inward-looking spirit that breeds jealousy and quarrelling.

Everyone is more interested in getting one over on their fellow Christians than they are on encouraging one another, supporting one another, and helping one another to grow.




Then Paul turns to what it is that makes for healthy growth in the Christian community.

He decides to use the example of himself and Apollos as examples of this.

While they have broken down into these camps - on in support of Apollos, one in support of Paul - that's not how Paul and Apollos see things.

At the heart of what Paul has to say is that Christians start growing when they start looking to God.



A spirit of trust

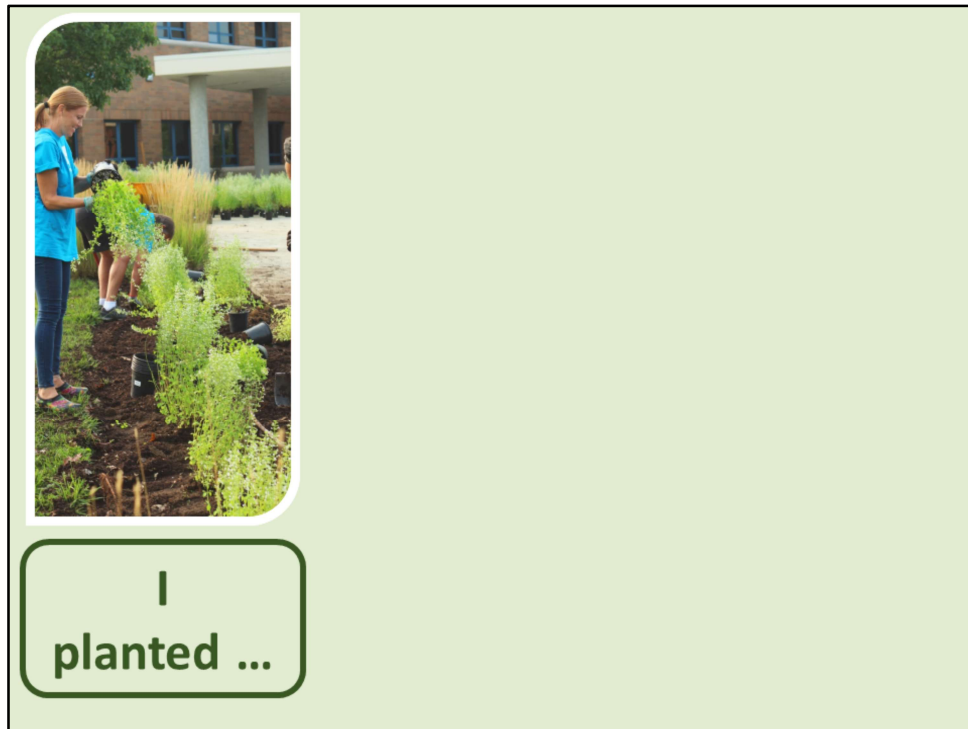
What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – **AS THE LORD HAS ASSIGNED TO EACH HIS TASK**. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but **GOD MADE IT GROW**. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but **ONLY GOD, WHO MAKES THINGS GROW**. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. For we are **GOD'S** fellow workers; you are **GOD'S** field, **GOD'S** building.

Look at how much emphasis there is on God in these verses.

Paul and Apollos are different, and work differently - not because they are trying to compete with each other, but because God has given them each a different task.

They work in a spirit of trust in God ... all they want to do is to do what God is asking them to do ...

“as the Lord has assigned to each his task.”



We're different, not because we disagree, but because God has given us different jobs to do in his market-gardening business of growing churches and growing Christians.

My job was to plant ...



Apollos' job was to water ...

Apollos had to pick up where I left off.

The gifts you need for planting a congregation are not the gifts you need for taking a congregation and a church to the next stage.

Apollos with his very different gifts and abilities has come along to do that ...



But it is God who brought about any growth ...

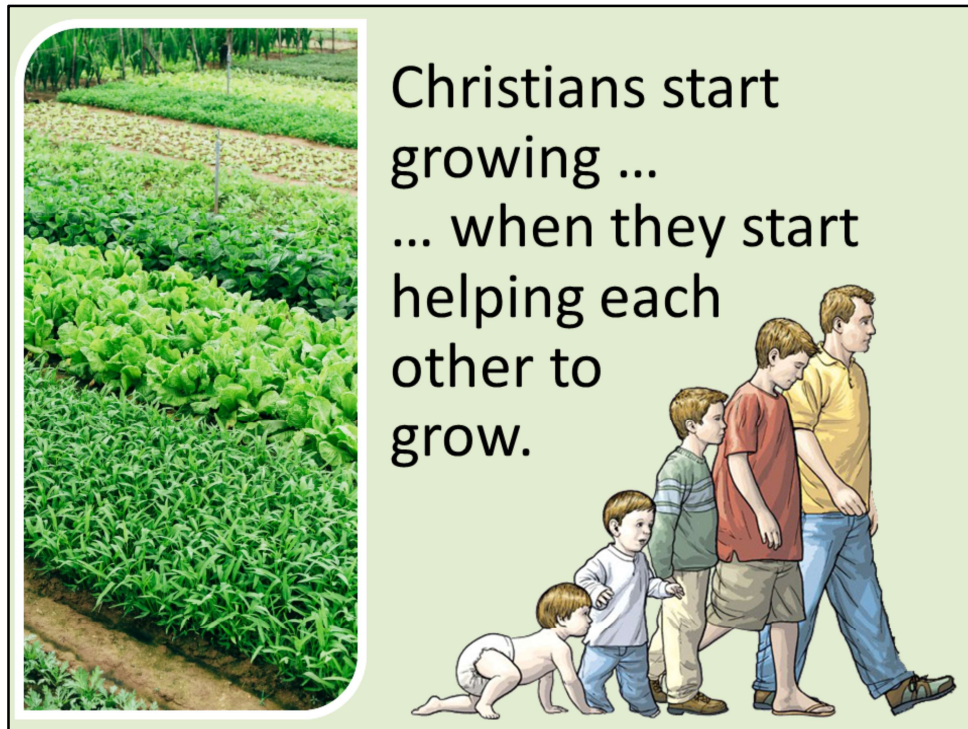
This is what we need to get our heads around.

Any growth, or development in our lives that is worth having, happens because God makes it possible.




Gardening is all about learning how things grow and then working with those natural processes to create the best environment in which things can grow.

All we can do is to create the right environment for growth to happen ... learning to cooperate with what God is doing.



When they start looking to God, they will start helping each other to grow ...




A spirit
of
humility

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only **SERVANTS**, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. **SO NEITHER HE WHO PLANTS NOR HE WHO WATERS IS ANYTHING**, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

Trust and dependence on God leads to a humility of spirit.

Servants ... not only servants of God, but servants of one another ...

Acknowledging that all of the growth comes from God, we won't allow ourselves to get too full of our own importance.



A spirit of
co-
operation

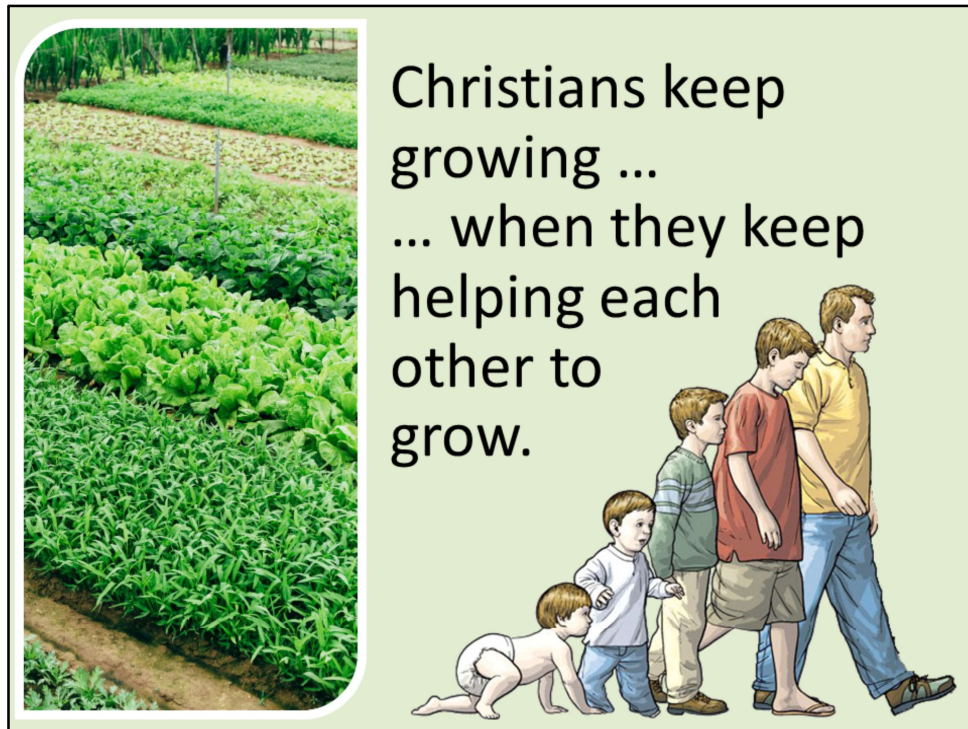
What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. **! PLANTED THE SEED, APOLLOS WATERED IT**, but God made it grow. **So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything**, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have **ONE PURPOSE**, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. For we are **GOD'S FELLOW WORKERS**; you are God's field, God's building.

That spirit of humility then leads to a spirit of co-operation.

Differences are about complementing one another, not about being in competition with one another.

Sharing a common purpose of co-operating with God in making possible the growth that God longs to bring.

All God's fellow workers.

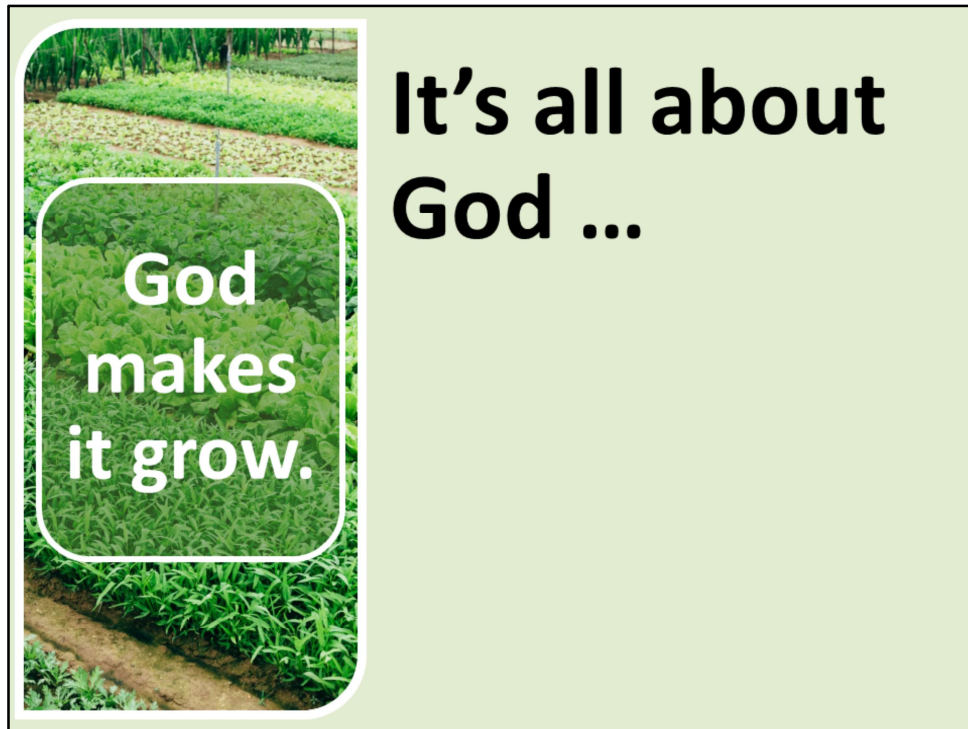


Christians start growing ...

Christians keep growing ... when they keep helping each other to grow.

Which means that in order to grow in God we need God, but we need each other as well.

God gives us each other to help us to grow.



So at the heart of this we need to learn that it is all about God.

Whether we are growing in love, in grace, in a heart for justice, in caring for creation, in our relationship with God ...

... this growth comes from God, and our part is to create the environment for this growth to be possible.

It's all about God.

God gives growth.