**Harvest Sermon Outline**

***‘What’s growing here?’***

***A celebration and inspiration for local mission***

**Bible Passages:** Psalm 92:12–15; 1 Peter 4:10-11

*Further scripture that may be useful: Psalm 1; John 15.*

**Illustration**

* When babies are born, they will be regularly checked against graphs and stats to ensure that they are putting on weight and growing properly. Health visitors will enquire about the feeding of the baby and check they are receiving the right nutrients for a healthy start in life. When you reach a certain age, you may be called in by the doctor for a bit of a ‘health MOT’ – checking cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugars and so forth. Throughout our lives we’ll be measured, weighed, prodded and poked to check we are growing properly and are physically healthy.
* But health checks aren’t just for our physical health; we need to do this similarly with our spiritual growth and health. Are our spiritual lives and our ministry in our local communities healthy and growing properly?
* Harvest is a good opportunity to do a bit of a health check: what can we celebrate and what needs a little bit of watering and nurturing?

## **Reflection / time of sharing**

* What can we praise God for this year? Where have we seen real growth, perhaps in an aspect of programme, ALPHA or discipleship course, soldiership/adherent members etc?
* What about our personal lives? Are we flourishing? Are there areas we’re neglecting in our relationship with God?
* Take stock of where you are at as individuals and as a community.

## **Bible reflections**

**Psalm 92:12–15:** **Spiritual growth flows outwards**

* Psalm 92 is written as a song for the Sabbath. Its title is the only specific mention of the Sabbath in the Psalms. We see a powerful declaration of worship grown from a place of rest, a place of reflection.
* Psalm 92:12–15 speaks of our spiritual growth. It suggests a **lifetime commitment** to growing and flourishing.
* Verse 12 (‘The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon’) combines two trees to draw our attention to both **fruitfulness** and **stature**. Trees of righteousness do not grow of their own accord; they are planted, not in common soil but in the house of the Lord. By God’s grace and Spirit they will grow taller, stronger and **fitter for use** – sweet like the dates of a palm tree and sturdy like a cedar tree. These are similes for us.
* The Bible offers a clear lens for assessing our internal spiritual health through external evidence - namely, the fruit we produce. Growth isn’t merely about numbers or visibility; it’s also about depth, quality, resilience and spiritual vitality. Ask yourself: What is growing in and around me? Does it bear the marks of sweetness or bitterness? Is there abundance or scarcity? Is it sturdy or fragile, rooted or superficial?
* **The more spiritually healthy *we* are, the healthier our ministries can be**, **the wider our reach and the richer our interactions.**
* May each thing we do be planted in the house of the Lord, reliant on his nutrients for good fruits.
* The righteous, when planted firmly in God, will naturally grow. Where growth is stunted, it often points to places where we’ve become uprooted or disconnected. Invite God to gently uncover those areas and allow the richness of his soil – his truth, grace and presence – to nourish them. In time, even the barren places can flourish again, all for his glory.
* Watch, then, how the increase in our personal spiritual health feeds all that is within our corps and community.

**1 Peter 4:10–11: Steward your gifts for the benefit of others**

* 1 Peter 4:10–11 suggests that we have no excuse not to grow. **All** believers have been given gifts to use and nurture – a skill or attribute that can be used to serve God and to serve others (v10). Peter reminds us that our spiritual gifts, whether that’s speaking, serving or leading, are the gifts of grace, **given for sharing**.
* These spiritual gifts play out in all sorts of ways, both in upfront roles and often crucially behind the scenes. Just as a farmer doesn’t hoard the wheat, so we mustn’t hide our gifts in silos – they’re meant for the feast of community!
* These verses remind us that we are ***stewards* not *owners****.* Stewarding the gifts God has given us first looks like identifying them in your life – what are you naturally good at? What do you feel a pull towards? Teaching, leading, hosting, encouraging? Once you have identified the gift you have received, explore what it looks like to use that gift to serve your community. We **all** have something to offer to enable our ministries to grow. Each person using their God-given gift for his glory, working together, will achieve far more for the Kingdom than if we left it to a select few.
* Build on this gift, be intentional with this gift. Don’t let any comparison sneak in, for this gift has been entrusted to you with intentionality by God.
* Harvest is not just about abundance; it is also about **responsibility**. We have a responsibilityto grow and flourish because that is how the Kingdom of God grows and flourishes – we need to be energised to carry the metaphorical sheaves.
* Maybe that’s leading a time of prayer, listening to someone’s pain at the tea urn or meeting a practical need in your community.
* **It all counts, it all matters and we all have a part to play.**

## **Summary**

* Harvest is not just a festival; it is a calling, a checkpoint and a responsibility. Psalm 92 reminds us to continuously pursue spiritual growth, remaining planted in the house of the Lord in all that we do. 1 Peter 4 reminds us to bring our whole, gifted selves to the table. **Living a life shaped by being rooted in God, and being stewards of what he has given us, leads to great health and flourishing in local mission.**

## **Application**

* We must, then, allow God to examine our hearts and ask ourselves the question, ‘What’s growing here?’ Am I rooted in God’s presence? Am I like a strong, healthy tree or am I wilting in the heat?
* Identify the gift(s) that God has given to you – if you’re not sure, ask a close Christian friend to help you. Spiritual gifts are often things that come naturally to you, and others should be able to see this in you.
* How are you using your gift to serve your corps, context and community? Or are you leaving it all to other people? What might be stopping you using your gift(s) fully? Lethargy / past hurt or resentment / lack of opportunity? We want to be people who flourish well into ‘old age’! Imagine if we all used what God has given us to its full potential, imagine the impact that would have on our day-to-day ministry!
* Praise God for his goodness and blessings to us, and pray that we may be good stewards of all he is given! You could also return to the opening verses of Psalm 92 in praise.