

I was looking through Lynne's and my wedding photos on Thursday. I opened the photo album to this photo of Lynne and I signing the Marriage Register. Look in the background and note the man who's reading.

His name is Brian. When I was 17, Brian began to invest in my life. He invested time and interest. He invested by giving me books for study. Whenever I came back to Christchurch, he'd ring and we'd catch up. Brian became key in my growth as a Christian and my growth as a leader.

Most of us can name people who've invested in us in our lives. I can tell you about Brian, I could tell you about Graeme and Dawn who gave me books that raised my spiritual horizons, I could tell you about Peter or Marjory who gave me significant up-front ministry opportunities at a young age; Most of us can name people who've invested in us in our lives.

I want to invite you to pause and take a moment to think about who's invested in your life

And in this spirit of quiet and worship. I invite you to name them. Not as an act of human praise, but as a way of honouring God for growth in our lives. Let's call them out ...the names of people who've invested in our lives.

And it's these names, this fact of people who've invest in us, and because they've invested and helped us grow, that lies behind Growth Coaching.

Here at Opawa we have a ministry called Growth coaching. It involves pairing people one on one. Involves a person who wants to grow and it involves a Growth Coach, a person who cheers, challenges, encourages, intentionally invests in another person's life.

Go looking for a Biblical basis for Growth coaching and it doesn't take long to stumble on Luke 1:39-45, story of Mary meeting Elizabeth. For those who like Biblical meat in their sermons, one way to study the Bible is to compare similar scenes. Compare all the times that Jesus eats with people; compare all the times that Jesus walks by a lake.

So one way to study Mary meeting Elizabeth is to study other Bible stories where people visit each other in their homes. We Kiwis phone ahead and then pop around for a visit. So how do people in the Bible visit each others homes?

So we could look at Exodus 18:7

So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent.

So what do we learn when we compare a father in law house visiting with Moses and Mary house visiting Elizabeth?

Moses went out to meet, outside the house of Mary entered Elizabeth and Zechariah's house.

Moses is host, but shows respect for his father-in-law by going outside his tent to say hello. Elizabeth is host, and Mary shows her respect by going inside before saying hello. That's one difference.

A second difference is this.. Moses and his father-in-law greeted each other. Compared with Elizabeth, who In a loud voice makes a speech.

So comparing the two visiting stories;

We see the tables are turned. We are shocked when the respected host, the older Elizabeth, is suddenly blessing the younger visitor.

The first word that pops into Elizabeth's mouth is the word "Blessed." She repeats it three times, twice "Blessed" in verses 42 and once "blessed" in verses 45. The shock, of the respected host, the older Elizabeth, is suddenly three times blessing the younger visitor.

For those who like even more Biblical depth, the Greek word is *makaria*. It's the same Greek word that kicks off each of the Beatitudes, Blessed are the poor, Blessed or *makaria* are those who are hungry now; Blessed or *makaria* are those who weep.

The shock; Elizabeth, the respected host, the older person, the person who owns the house, three times Blessing, saying *makaria*, to the younger person.

Sounds like a Growth Coaching to me. A fundamental commitment to bless, to invest and to want the best to emerge in someone else. Looking for a Biblical basis for growth coaching, start with Elizabeth in Luke 1.

Secondly, What does Elizabeth bless? Fascinating that she names the unspoken. First she blesses Mary. Second she blesses that bump in Mary's tummy. So often we as people skirt around the difficult issues. We struggle with how to be honest and be real with people.

I went to see the movie *North Country* on Monday. A film set in a mining town in Michigan.

The main character, a woman, returns to the town as a solo mum with her two kids.

She turns up at a church social. And the next camera shot is of the women in the kitchen talking, gossiping, about the solo mum and her history. But as soon as the mum comes into earshot, they go quiet. Church people, skirting around the difficult issues. Struggling with how to name what is unspoken.

So unlike Elizabeth in Luke 1. Who names the unspoken. Blessed is your bump. Names it, not in judgment, or in gossip in the kitchen, but in a way that allows Mary to go, phew, we can talk about this.

Sounds like Growth Coaching to me. The first time a Growth Coach meets with a person who wants to be coached, they start by giving them 99 questions to answer. Questions like ... do you have a Christian response to those Danish cartoons? Could you invite your workmates and your church mates to the same social function? Or do you act 2 different ways in 2 different worlds.

Point of these questions is to name the bump. To let people be real and honest about ways they could grow. First, blessing. Second, naming the unspoken.

Thirdly, Elizabeth describes a new future. In verse 45; "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promise to her!"

Elizabeth could've chosen to name a scared teenager with a bump. Instead she names a woman of faith and courage. That's a gift. To see promise and potential and to name it over someone's life.

Which again, sounds a lot like Growth Coaching. The first time the Coach and a person wanting to be blessed and grow meet, you've got these 99 questions to help describe the unspoken.

The second time they meet, the Coach describes a new future. They've listened to you and to the Spirit of God. Now they describe a new future. They say something like; after listening to you and God; I dream for you, that as a result of this Growth coaching, your Christian faith will be more integrated with how you live in the workplace.

Or they say, if I hear you and God right; I have a vision for you being far less stressed in your life because you've tidied up that messy spare room.

That's describing a new future. They've blessed. They've named the unspoken. They've described a new future. And they pause. Because, fourthly, Elizabeth is participating with the Spirit.

Last year someone came to me to ask some questions about growth coaching. They said, "Steve, before we start, I need to know. Is growth coaching some sort of self-help programme? Some sort of help yourself fad.

Elizabeth would say no. There's no self-help. In verse 41; "Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit." And so at the heart of Growth Coaching is a person responding the work of the Spirit. Saying, yes, to the God who wants them to grow.

And then it's about a Coach in tune with the Spirit, who prays and who pauses, to check if their listening agrees with the work of the Spirit in the person being coached.

And when the Spirit filling the coach agrees with the Spirit growing the person, then two or more on earth agree, and a Growth Coaching is drawn up. What will the person being do to grow; How will the coach hold them accountable. That's Growth Coaching. Just like Elizabeth and Mary.

A heart to bless. A willingness to name the unspoken. A gift of described a new future. And a participation between 2 people with the Spirit of God, whom we honour for growth in our lives

Conclusion

Every church has something of a wider reputation; something it's known for in the wider Christian community; go to that church and you'll get great worship, go there for a missions heart. At Opawa, I'd like us to be known for Growing people. Oh, you go to Opawa. You'll grow there.

As it says on our vision statement; Opawa Baptist, enabling people to walk and grow with Jesus and reflecting his love into our communities and beyond.

Oh, you go to Opawa. You'll grow there. Hence Growth Coaching. A way of being intentional about growing people.

Opawa Baptist Church in 2006: Growing, blessing, birthing; I'm asking you to pray blessing on our Growth Coaches and Growth Coaching.

I'm asking you to consider if God is calling you to grow in 2006. If you want to ask questions about Growth Coaching, then come along to the Life Party this Thursday.