

GROWING

why growth matters, what it looks like and how it happens

“All over the world this gospel is growing.. ”
[Colossians 1.6]

‘Growth’ is the theme of this series of studies, and it’s begun with the prayer that it will prove to be a real growth point in our life, and lives, as God’s people here.

Growth is expected among God’s people, since the God who makes alive is the God who also makes things grow: and growth is exhorted upon them, as something which is neither occasional nor optional.

“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

You can find the background to this series [here](#).

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4. Acts 14.21-28 [w/b Sunday 1st October]

'Strengthening the disciples'

The narrative of Paul's missionary journeys makes it very clear that, having proclaimed the gospel and seen people brought to faith in Jesus, the apostle was always concerned to ensure their growth: he plainly invested as much energy in discipleship as he did in evangelism.

The insight which this passage gives into the priorities Paul had to that end in his ministry is instructive - in terms of both the activities in which he engaged and the structures which he put in place. There is nothing 'automatic' about growth!

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1. **Read Acts 14.1-20.** To appreciate more fully the force of what Paul and Barnabas were doing as they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, it's helpful to read this background.

What had happened in these places which

- (a) made it important for Paul and Barnabas to return to them? and
- (b) might have made them think twice about returning?

Have there been times where you've been reluctant to 're-visit' a situation but have known that it's important?

2. Read Acts 14.21. Paul and Barnabas always recognized the priority of evangelism, preaching the good news with a view to their hearers becoming disciples.

The narrative of Acts often speaks in these terms, of 'large numbers' coming to faith: in what ways might this encourage us?

And in what ways should this challenge us?

3. Read Acts 14.22. Having 'won a large number of disciples' in one place, Paul and Barnabas returned to previous locations to ensure that those who'd come to faith were growing in the faith.

What do you understand by the reference to their '*strengthening*' the disciples? Have you been 'strengthened' as a disciple of Jesus, and how has that found expression?

Why will these disciples have needed the encouragement to 'remain true to the faith'?

In what ways is it possible to drift from being true to the faith?

4. Read Acts 14.22. Paul and Barnabas were very aware of the 'hardships' involved in discipleship: Jesus Himself had underlined this, too, to His disciples (see John 16.33).

What are the 'hardships' to which they referred? What hardships have you experienced as a disciple of Jesus?

Why do you think such 'hardships' are inevitable?

5. Read Acts 14.23. In returning to these young churches which had come into being on a previous visit, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each local church.

Why were elders appointed by Paul and Barnabas?

Sometimes in a church there can be a lack of clarity as to exactly what elders are meant to be, and to be doing: how might we ensure that everyone is clear about the ministry elders are there to fulfil?

6. Read Acts 14.23. The terminology used here about the appointment of elders is very similar to the manner in which

Paul and Barnabas themselves were sent out by the church at Antioch (see 13.3 and 14.26).

Why do you think that it was 'with prayer and fasting' that the elders were appointed?

The assumption here is that every new believer is part of a local church: why is it important for a believer formally to be part of a local fellowship?

7. Read Acts 14.24-28. Paul and Barnabas were not 'freelancers' when it came to their church planting: they were accountable to the church at Antioch.

At Gilcomston we're now one of the 'Didasko Churches' and have that accountability to them: what does the passage here suggest that 'accountability' should involve?

While recognising the constraints of confidentiality, how might we better share with the congregation all that God has been doing in 'opening the door of faith' to many people?