

Back to the Future

discerning God's purpose for our life as His church

Every so often it's important to pause and take stock. How are we doing? What are we seeking to accomplish? Are we growing, making progress?

Such seasons of 'reflection' are as important in our communal life as a local church as they are in our individual lives.

This series of studies aims to provide a focus for such a season, a chance to let the Word of God inform our understanding of all that he calls us as His church to be and to be doing in these days of great turbulence and change.

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

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2. The grace of God

(Acts 11.22-24)

[w/b Sunday 19th January 2020]

“.. He was glad and encouraged them all ..”

The Antioch church had come into being on the back of Stephen's death and the persecution which followed. Although in some ways its origins maybe quite 'haphazard', in fact a great work of God was taking place.

These next few verses in the story of this significant church set out for us an important principle in the on-going health and growth of any church - namely the benefits of combining autonomy and accountability.

[Although there are 7 questions, your Community Group may choose to concentrate on just some of them. Key questions in this study are probably 2, 3 and 6. As always try to leave good time for shared prayer!]

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1. Read Ephesians 3.2-13. The birth of the church in Antioch is spoken of as 'what the grace of God had done': in this passage in Ephesians Paul expounds something of this ministry.

What does Paul say is 'the mystery' (vv.3, 4, 6, 9) which lies at the heart of 'the administration of God's grace'?

In what especially did Paul experience 'the gift of God's grace', and how have *you* experienced God's grace?

2. Read Acts 11.22. Although the church at Antioch hadn't come into being as part of a planned strategy of church planting, the need for some mutual accountability was recognized.

What do you think was the purpose behind the church at Jerusalem's sending someone to Antioch?

How well is that mutual accountability given expression in our own context as an 'independent' church, both locally here in Aberdeen and through the Didasko churches?

3. Read Acts 4.23-37. The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch, a man whose qualities Luke had previously highlighted: it's worth acquainting ourselves with this man.

What do we learn about Barnabas from this passage, especially vv.36f?

Barnabas was a (good) example of what characterized the lives of the early church: from what did this sort of living result, according to what we read in this passage?

From what you learn about him here why do you think the church in Jerusalem sent *him* to Antioch?

4. **Read Acts 9.19b-31.** Barnabas was not one of the apostles, but he certainly played a significant role in the life of the early church, not least in the gospel being taken to the Gentiles.

The disciples in Jerusalem 'were all afraid' of Saul: are we sometimes excessively 'wary' of new believers?

What qualities do you detect in Barnabas here in the way he commends Saul to the apostles?

Is the Lord challenging you through Barnabas' example?

5. **Read Acts 11.23.** Barnabas clearly came to Antioch with an open mind, concerned to discern what the Lord was doing rather than to pre-judge a rather 'unorthodox' church plant.

To what would Luke have been referring when he writes of Barnabas seeing 'what the grace of God had done'?

Pause to think about and view your own fellowship here at Gilcomston: what has the 'grace of God' done here?

6. **Read Acts 11.23.** The new church at Antioch was plainly very different in many respects from the church in Jerusalem: it would have been very easy to find fault and to be critical!

What would have been different in Antioch from how things were in the Jerusalem church?

Do you find yourself tending to be critical when you see things done differently in other churches?

When we're told that Barnabas 'encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts' what do you think that would have involved? How might we best replicate that here?

7. **Read Acts 11.24.** By his very presence as well as the gracious ministry he exercised, Barnabas himself was a catalyst for growth in the church at Antioch.

Read **Eph.5.18-21**: how will being 'full of the Holy Spirit' show in a person's life? How can we ensure we are 'filled with the Spirit' as Paul exhorts his readers?

Why did the character of the man issue in the increase in numbers (Luke certainly hints at that connection)?