

● A Proven Plan for Church Growth

Lesson Thesis: The “progress reports” in the book of Acts teach us how the church grows by God’s plan.

Lesson Purpose: motivate the church to evangelize individually in daily routine

INTRO:

- I. Background to the text – stoning of Stephen & rise of persecution against the church

- II. ● The most amazing word in the text – *Therefore*
 - A. Not what we would expect under threat of death
 - B. We might expect *But* – **BUT**...
 1. That’s not the word God chose...
 2. That’s not the attitude our brothers and sisters had at that time
 - C. This text is a strong lesson on church growth – Consider the context under which the church grew in its first generation

DISCUSSION:

- I. ● 2:36-41
 - A. Peter confronted a murderous mob with their sin against God
 - B. They *gladly received his word ... were baptized ... about 3,000 souls*
 - C. How could Peter stand before such people and say such things?
 1. He KNEW that God lives & will surely bless those who serve Him first
 2. He didn’t know everything that God knows – but he preached what he knew
 - a. Acts 10:17 – *doubted ... what this vision should mean*
 - b. Acts 10:34 – *Of a truth I perceive that ... in every nation...*

- II. ● 4:1-4
 - A. Peter & John were jailed overnight for preaching Christ
 - B. *Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; & the number of the men was about 5,000*
 - C. Even if you and I are persecuted, somebody may be saved from our efforts
 1. Fear of persecution is putting our comfort before God’s service
 - a. That won’t persuade souls to confess Christ
 - b. And it won’t persuade God to admit us into Heaven

- III. ● 4:32 - 5:14
 - A. Those with means provided for those without – *Neither ... any ... that lacked*
 - B. Some conspired to lie about their service – the sin was purged from the church
 - C. Apostles showed proof of the authority of the word & *they were all with one accord*
 - D. *And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women*
 - E. We must agree together in both proclaiming truth and opposing sin

- IV. ● 5:26 - 6:1a
 - A. They had been arrested and warned, but they preached again despite official prohibition – *We must obey God rather than men*
 - B. They were beaten & commanded not to preach the name of Jesus
 - C. Publicly & privately they publicly obeyed God rather than men
 - D. *...the number of the disciples was multiplied*

- E. We don't yet live under official prohibition, but we do live under popular disapproval
 1. The church today is smaller almost everywhere because we have obeyed what the world wants rather than what God commands
 2. Gal 1:10

V. ●6:1b-7

- A. Some were overlooked as the church cared for the needy
- B. There was grumbling in the church for the oversight
- C. The apostles outlined and executed a God-given plan to resolve the problem
 1. Focus on the word – continue to teach
 2. Encourage the troubled church to give its suggestions – they led by listening
 3. Prayed
- D. *And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith*

VI. ●6:9 - 8:4

- A. Religious bigots falsely accused Stephen – had him arrested – *suborned men* against
- B. Stephen preached the plan of God from the beginning – overview of Bible
- C. They killed him
- D. Saul began a universal persecution of the church – sanctioned by council & priests
- E. Thousands of Christians fled Jerusalem, leaving only the original 12 members – apostles
- F. *Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word*
- G. “OK, if we can't preach here, we'll preach somewhere else”
 1. Mat 10:23a – *when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another*
 2. Mat 6:33 – *seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you* – clothing, food, drink

VII. ●9:26-31

- A. Saul, having obeyed the gospel, sought acceptance of the church – Christians feared him
- B. Barnabas vouched for Saul – reassured the church, & Saul *spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, & disputed against the Grecians*
- C. *But they went about to slay him*
- D. The apostles, caring first for the church, brought rest by urging Saul to go elsewhere
- E. *Then had the churches rest throughout Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied*
- F. The faith and influence of the church must come first in our thinking
 1. Sometimes it's better that a preacher do his work elsewhere
 2. Each member should consider whether he is helping or hurting the church

VIII. ●9:36-42

- A. Peter brought comfort to the church & convinced the community that Jesus is Christ
- B. *And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord*
- C. Raising Dorcas wasn't preaching gospel – it was comforting emotions
 1. When the town saw the power - saw the love - heard the word... they obeyed
 2. 13 times *love one another*

- IX. ●11:19-21
- A. Christians preached to people of a different race
 - B. *And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord*
 - C. John 3:16
 - 1. Don't just love people like yourself – go to rich, poor, sinner, dirty, different
 - 2. Often people think the church loves only itself – You'll get their attention by showing them otherwise
 - 3. Many don't seek God because they think themselves of no interest to God
- X. ●11:22-24
- A. The church in Jerusalem sent a missionary to where souls were seeking Christ
 - B. *He was a good man, & full of the Holy Ghost & of faith: & much people was added unto the Lord*
 - C. The church initiated this action
 - 1. We have it backwards – mission-minded souls have to beg the church to send
 - 2. Find such men & women, and send them
- XI. ●12:20-24
- A. God removed a hostile government from hindering the preaching of Christ
 - B. *But the word of God grew and multiplied*
 - C. This is the only method in the list that you and I can't do – but we can...
 - 1. Pray according to I Timothy 2:1-4
 - 2. Do the work even under the oppression – God may open a door to greater opportunity
- XII. ●14:1 – They went to religious people *and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed*
- A. Spend time studying how to present the good news
 - 1. Some respond to lecture – Some to Q&A
 - 2. Some respond to OBS – Some to BCC
- XIII. ●16:4-5
- A. *They delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles*
 - B. *And so were the churches established in the faith and increased in number daily*
 - C. II Timothy 4:2 – *preach the word; be instant in season, out of season*
 - 1. It's the only thing that ever saved any soul
 - a. John 17:17
 - b. Mark 16:15-16

CONCLUSION:

- I. ●I Cor 3:6 – *I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase*
- A. Increase does not come before planting & watering
 - B. God will do His part – save souls and add them to the church – but not before we do our part
- II. The church of our generation has repeatedly sought & practiced uninspired methods
- A. The church of our generation has continually decreased in number
 - B. We have blamed the times & the changed receptivity of the world
 - 1. There may be some truth to that...
 - 2. But it's dishonest to deny our own failure to follow the inspired method

- III. ● We've seen 13 specific statements that the church grew under certain circumstances
 - A. We can expect God to give the increase only after we plant and water
 - 1. "Lord give me a crop this year, & I promise I'll plant next year"
 - 2. "Now stove, give me some heat, and then I'll put some wood in you"
 - B. We can duplicate the attitudes and actions of those Christians today
 - 1. ● Rom 10:1
 - 2. ● Pray "Lead Me to Some Soul Today"