

Bound to Grow

“But the word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24).

Joyful Way Inc. is a youth ministry with emphasis on music and missions. They recently hosted a concert celebrating thirty years of ministry in Ghana, West Africa. Close to the end of the performance, a young man gave a ten-minute presentation. Throughout his narration of the ministry’s history, he repeatedly said, “A seed sown in good soil is bound to grow!”

Acts records the explosive growth of the church from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the world. This account of the church’s first thirty years detail not only its growth, but also its setbacks, victories, and progress. The seedling church was destined to be a powerful force in its world. Why? “A seed sown in good soil is bound to grow!”

C. Peter Wagner in *Your Church Can Grow* conducted a study on church growth in the Book of Acts. What happened when the seed was sown in good soil?

Peter spread the seed through preaching the Word. He concluded his message by instructing his listeners, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).

It was evident that the Lord was working with them, confirming His Word. (See Mark 16:20.)

The early church determined to please their Lord, win souls for His kingdom, and to reach heaven.

Those converted continued in:

- Apostle’s doctrine
- Fellowship (membership, participation)
- Prayer
- Unity
- Praises and worship
- Giving
- Evangelism (Acts 2:42-47).

All of these components are essential and evident in growing, local churches. A church (or an individual) cannot get by with emphasizing only two or three of these and remain healthy and progressive.

“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

A miracle at the Gate Beautiful caused jealousy among the Jewish leaders. They threw the two preachers into prison, but the seed planted in good soil was bound to grow.

“But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so that the number of believers totaled about five thousand men, not counting women and children” (Acts 4:4, *NLT*).

C. Peter Wagner concludes that there were at least five thousand women that also believed. If we estimate that each man and woman had one child, there were about 15,000 believers at that point.

The preachers were slapped around, threatened, and told not to preach, teach, or use the name of Jesus. They responded in prayer. God heard, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness.

Leadership problems developed because the church grew so big the widows could not be ministered to properly.

The apostles had to make a decision. Should they wait on tables? Should they prioritize to enhance greater growth?

Their decision: They would continue to sow the seed of God’s Word. They knew that a seed sown in good soil is bound to grow.

“But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).

The results: “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” (Acts 6:7).

Did you notice? The church growth in Acts started with addition, but then moved to multiplication.

Wagner estimates that the original 120 grew to around 25,000 people even before the fertile fields of Samaria and beyond were reached.

Persecution stormed in, and the disciples were scattered everywhere, sowing the seed of the Word. (See Acts 8:4.)

Philip the evangelist stepped on the scene and preached the gospel in traditionally despised Samaria.

“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

Next, the church extended to the Gentiles. It began at Antioch; the first place believers were called “Christians.” The Church has been spreading ever since (Acts 11:26).

“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21).

Paul and his friends were involved in three missionary journeys throughout the later portion of the Book of Acts. Their ministry birthed the global missions movement.

“And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe” (Acts 21:20).

The story of church growth in Acts ends with this testimony: “Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:31).

An Analysis of Church Growth in Acts

The seed (Word of God, gospel, doctrine of the kingdom) planted in fertile soil (hearts of men) caused the young church to grow. It grew as grain grows—seedling, stalk, and the full ear.

“But the word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24).

How did the Word of God grow? It did not grow in size; a bigger and better Bible. It took root in ready soil and increased in its influence and control over the lives of believers. The Word grew and multiplied through being sown, and an ever-increasing number of people accepted the truth. That is multiplication.

God’s Word produces fruit.

“The rain and snow come down from the heavens and stay on the ground to water the earth. They cause the grain to grow, producing seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry. It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it” (Isaiah 55:10-11, *NLT*).

1. Stages of Church Growth

“For the soil made the seeds grow. First a leaf-blade pushed through, and later the wheat-heads formed and finally the grain ripened” (Mark 4:28, *TLB*).

The growth of the church (and of the Christian life) can be summarized in four stages.

1. Prepared Soil and Seed: Church planting precedes church growth. Good soil is bound to produce when it receives the seed. In its time the combination of the seed and soil will produce. Growth is gradual. We cannot make the seed grow, but God can. Sow the seed in good ground. It is bound to grow! God will do His work.

2. Blade: The beginning is small. The green, feeble tender seedling pokes its way through the soil. It needs special care—watering and protection from the winds and rain.

3. Stalk: The time in which the plant grows tall and strong.

4. Full Ear: The plant ripens and produces fruit. Good fruit is the product of good seed and good soil.

What happened when Isaac sowed in the land (Genesis 26:12)?

“That year Isaac’s crops were tremendous! He harvested a hundred times more grain than he planted, for the LORD blessed him” (Genesis 26:12).

Like Isaac, we can reach our maximum potential and reap our greatest harvest when we sow in a fertile land. A seed planted in good soil is bound to grow.

Study Questions

1. What did the young man (in the Joyful Way Inc. concert) repeatedly say? _____

2. What were the concluding remarks that Peter used in his Acts 2 message? _____

3. What was the response from those listening to Peter’s message? _____

4. What did the believers continue doing in Acts 2:42-47? _____

5. How many men were in the church according to Acts 4:4? _____

6. This number did not include whom? _____

7. What estimate did C. Peter Wagner give concerning the church population at this point?

8. What decision did the apostles make when faced with the problem concerning feeding the widows? _____

9. What impact did this have on the size of the church? _____

10. C. Peter Wagner estimated the church increased to what size (Acts 6:7)? _____

11. What effect did persecution have on the early church? _____

12. “But the word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24). How did the Word of God grow? _____

13. What are the four stages of church growth (as compared to Mark 4:28)? _____
