

The Call and Qualities of a Discipled

Acts 14:1-28

1243

Turning your Bible to Acts chapter 14 and that'll be our main text, although we'll be alluding to other passages in our introduction. Acts chapter 14. I want us to look at this chapter for several reasons. The major one is that I think it gives us as clear a picture of the responsibility of the believer to the world as there is anywhere in the Book of Acts. Just kind of stay there now that you're there and let me say a few things unrelated to that particular portion for a moment.

It might surprise you to know that the word "mission," the plural "missions," and the term "missionary" never appear anywhere in the Bible. Those are not biblical terms. And I'm afraid the concept that has grown up to be defined as mission, missions, missionary is not biblical either in many cases. The term is simply a Latin root, *missio*, ascending, or "*mittere*," to send. It's not a term that comes from Scripture. And I think that because we can't define those words biblically, we struggle to define them and, for the most part, we have invented a definition that probably isn't really very accurate.

For example, if I say the word "mission," most of you who were raised in California see a dilapidated adobe building founded by Juniper Osera or maybe if you're a little more sophisticated and contemporary in your orientation, you think of "mission" as the church's organizational responsibility to the world. And you talk about the mission of the church as something that is really not relative to an individual but is more related to what is the church's social organizational responsibility to the world. And, frankly, we can get very detached from reality dealing with the mission of the church.

And secondly, if I use the term "missions," and we talk about missions, your immediate response is to see an ocean, a straw hut, a 6'5" Zulu or something like that. Or maybe if you're a little more culturally sophisticated when you hear the word "missions," you think of a computer that belches out statistics telling us people are being born faster than they're being saved. There are X number of languages that don't yet have the Bible and there are certain things about the Third World and Fourth World that we haven't yet really been able to understand, catalogue and meet. And missions becomes like an illegitimate child, like a half-brother. We know it belongs in the family somewhere but it's somewhere at a distance. And, frankly, we can get very detached from reality when we deal with missions in the church.

And maybe I could mention the word "missionary," and that immediately conjures up things in your mind; somebody sitting somewhere carefully translating the Bible with a native at his right hand, a blackboard in an open field and a guy standing there in a pith helmet drawing diagrams of the doctrine of salvation for some people in loincloths. Or maybe you think of a dear lady with a bun on the back of her head showing slides about the Indians to other dear ladies with buns on the back of their heads who are more concerned about the costumes than they are the souls.

You see, you can get very detached from reality by talking about missionaries. So I think sometimes

it's just kind of in our minds that mission is too big, missions are too far and missionaries are too different to really get down to where we're at and we leave them at arm's length as that illegitimate child, that sort of half brother. I don't want to shock you this morning but I want you to know that missionaries are not cousins in the family of God; they're brothers and sisters. They're not illegitimate children in the family; they're one of us. And there is absolutely, positively no difference between a "missionary" and any other Christian. There's none.

If it will help us for this morning and maybe for good, I don't know. It probably won't work that way but for this morning anyway, let's forget those terms. Let's not talk about mission, missions or missionary. Let's use the term that the Bible does use, the term that Jesus used to describe our responsibility to a lost world. Here it comes. "Go therefore and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always even to the end of the world. Amen."

There's only one verb in that whole sentence, one major verb. It's the verb "make disciples." The word "going," the word "baptizing," and the word "teaching," are participles that modify the one main verb. The responsibility of the church in the world is to make disciples. So let's not talk about mission, missions, missionaries. Let's talk about disciple, disciples and discipling or disciplers. That's really the issue. And you say, "John, what is a discipler?" Somebody who goes; baptizes, that means win somebody to Christ; teaches, that means build them up. You say but who are the disciplers? Whom has God called to be a discipler? You answer that. Everybody.

If you are a Christian, you are discipler. The only question is whether you're any good at it. There's no such thing as the mission of the church for our thinking today, that is the mission of the church as a responsibility of the organization apart from the individual. There's no such thing as missions. That is some responsibility to people who don't live in our world or speak our language or a set of statistics with no flesh and blood. And there's no such thing as a missionary, that is as a title for somebody who goes somewhere else far away and does something that we don't understand. There are only disciplers. That's all there are. And they're one and you're one and I'm one and everybody's one and Jesus was one and Paul was one and that's it.

The pattern is clear. Our Lord says, "Make disciples." There's no difference between whether you do that here and the disciple is your eight-year-old son, fathers. There's no difference whether you do that here and your disciple is your wife or, wives, your disciple is the gal you have a prayer meeting with or a Bible study or whether you go somewhere else and you do it with American Indians or whether you do it with South American Indians or whether you do it with India Indians or whether you do it with Africans or whether you do it with sophisticated people in Europe who are educated at the university. It's all the same. We're all doing it.

You're making disciples. You're reproducing; that's all. The verb *matheteuo* that is used in Matthew 18 means to make a disciple. Now how do you make a disciple? You go to somebody who isn't one, you win them to Jesus Christ and you teach them all things whatsoever I have commanded. You build them in the Word. That's the job that all of us have. Incidentally, that word, *matheteuo*, was used four times in the New Testament. It is commanded of us as it was characteristic of the Old Testament. Matthew 13 talks about the fact that the scribes were *matheteuod*. They were disciplined.

Jesus is spoken of as being a discipler; Matthew 27:57. I don't know if you ever read it this way but this is the Greek rendering of the verse. "When the evening was come, there came a rich man of

Arimathea named Joseph who also himself had been discipled by Jesus." That's the literal Greek. Jesus made disciples. You remember when He went along the Sea of Galilee and gathered them. He made disciples. Joseph of Arimathea was a man who also himself had been discipled by Jesus. So you have the Old Testament pattern. The scribes were discipled. Jesus sets the example. Jesus discipled. Jesus gave the command, "Go into all the world and you disciple people."

And then you have the illustration of obedience in Acts 14. Look at it in verse 21 and that's where we are for this morning; the fourth use of matheteuo. Acts 14:21, "And when they had preached the gospel to that city and had made disciples of many," that's the literal rendering, "and had made disciples of many." Here you have Paul and Barnabas involved in fulfilling the thing Jesus told them to do, fulfilling the thing Jesus gave them the model for doing, the thing which had even been said as a pattern in the Old Testament. Now beloved, there are only disciplers; that's all. There aren't Christians and then as another category missionaries.

There are only disciplers and we are all disciplers. It's only a question of the availability to God to be that wherever we may be. It's irrelevant. It's immaterial where it is. It's only material and it's only relevant that it is that we are disciplers. You're not a discipler because you went to Bible school. You're not a discipler because you went to seminary. You're not a discipler because the church pays you to do it. You're not a discipler because you joined a missionary organization. You are a discipler because you're saved, because you've come to Christ.

And because once you came to Christ, notice this, you came under the authority of Jesus who is Lord and He said, "Go and...what?...make disciples." You are a discipler. You have that commission. The going is the thing, not the place you go. That variable is almost infinite. So you say, "All right. Jesus is Lord. That's the theme." And when I became a Christian, I came under His lordship and the first thing His lordship says to me in terms of commission is, "Go and make disciples."

So I am a discipler. That's right. But I don't know whether I'm a very good one. Well, that's to be dealt with and that's to be dealt with in Acts 14 this morning. How can you be a good one? Well, I want you to see seven things that are characteristics of a good discipler, seven things that are characteristics of somebody who really fulfills the commission Christ has given.

Number one, effective disciplers are ministering their gifts, ministering spiritual gifts. Verse 3, chapter 14 will introduce the thought. "A long time therefore abode they," that is Paul and Barnabas here in the City of Iconium in the area known as Galatia on their first missionary journey. "A long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, who gave testimony to the Word of His grace and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands." In that verse alone, you can see that they were preaching, they were teaching and they were doing miracles.

If you study the chapter in detail, you'll see these gifts obviously used. For example, look at verse 21 and you'll see the gift of preaching. "And when they had preached the Gospel to that city..." Verse 25, "And when they had preached the Word in Perga..." You'll see also the gift of teaching in verse 22. Verse 22 says, "Confirming the souls of the disciples," and the word "confirming" there is associated with teaching. In chapter 15, verse 32 associates confirming with the words of instruction. You confirm people by teaching them. The word "confirm" in the Greek means to establish or to fix them solidly or to give them roots or to give them a foundation. So here are Paul and Barnabas using the gift of preaching, the gift of teaching.

Again, verse 22, "and exhorting". They were using the gift of exhortation. Verse 23, "When they had ordained elders in every city". Here is the gift of administration. They were organizing. They were helping them to appoint elders and to establish an organization. Verse 3, "signs and wonders," the gift of miracles. Verse 10, "Paul said with a loud voice, 'Stand on your feet,' and he leaped and walked"; the gift of healing. Now we could see from this chapter alone that Paul and Barnabas manifest the gifts of preaching, teaching, exhortation, administration, miracles and healing. The point that I want to make is this. I think it is vital in any effective discipling ministry that the individual doing it understand and recognize and be using the gifts that the Spirit of God has given him. You will never really be effective in discipling unless you understand where you are gifted for ministry and use it. These men had been doing this before they were ever commissioned to go on this missionary journey.

In chapter 13, it tells us both of them were pastors of the church in Antioch. And as pastors of the church in Antioch, they were preaching and teaching; 13:1 calls them prophets and teachers. They were preaching and teaching and verse 2 of 13 says they were ministering to the Lord and they were fasting. They were in the flow of doing what God had gifted them to do and while they were in the flow, God sent them into the new area of responsibility. Effective disciplers are not sitting around doing nothing waiting for a call. They are in vital involvement with their gifts, learning what they are, walking in the Spirit, seeing God manifest Himself through their abilities and manifestations of the Spirit. They are ministering already and it is in the flow of that kind of living that God will place them in some area of special assignment.

It's in chapter 9 that it says, "And as Peter was going everywhere, God brought him to Lydda." And when he got to Lydda, a revival happened and it wasn't long after that until he met with the people in Joppa and raised Dorcas from the dead and another revival happened. Listen, he was in two revivals, one after another, and what is the point that I want to make out of that is that it was God who brought him there as he was busy everywhere else. God doesn't dust off indolent, do-nothing, sit-around Christians and put them into specifically strategic assignments. He uses the people that are already rolling.

It's difficult to steer a semi truck that isn't moving. Get it rolling and you can steer it anywhere you want even though it may weigh 76,000 pounds. I called a trucking agency this week to make sure. That's what they weigh. You imagine that with one hand, you can steer a 76,000-pound truck when it's rolling, you'll get a little idea of how easy it is for God to guide you when you're moving and how tough it is to turn a semi truck around. I suppose you could wait for God to take His celestial crane and pick you up and point you in the right direction and try to shove you. But it's sure a lot easier if you just get moving.

And so these people are ministering the gifts God has given them and it's in the flow of that that God is able to direct them to the area where He wants their discipling to be done. Know your gifts, beloved. Know what God has given you in terms of ministering. Know where your responsibilities lie because that's where God has gifted you and be ministering in that area. Yesterday, we were digging a hole out there to put a tree in and the man said to me, "My wife and I have discussed it and we must get involved in a ministry." Well, that's the Spirit. You don't wait for some great earth-shaking call to some far region beyond. You get involved where you are or that thing will never happen. God doesn't want to unload you on a culture that you don't even know when you haven't even taken responsibility for the one you do know.

Second thing, and we could go on and on about that first one, but we'll go to the second. The second characteristic of a discipler that you see in the passage here is courage. In chapter 14, it begins. They go to Iconium and this is in Galatia, as I mentioned, and they preach in the synagogue and, of course, you know the reaction. Some people listen, some people get saved, some people get mad. Verse 2, "The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and made their minds evil affected against the brethren." They got their minds against the brethren, Paul and Barnabas, and the people who were becoming Christians and they decided to foster some persecution.

But in spite of that, God restrained the persecution and "a long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord." I think it's so exciting what that verse said. It says "therefore". You'd think it'd say, "In spite of that, a long time they spoke boldly." No, it isn't in spite of persecution they spoke boldly; it was because of it. You see, persecution creates the environment in which boldness can occur and I'll tell you something else. Persecution always makes Christianity an issue and when Christianity becomes an issue, you have something to speak to, see, and that's good. So the more the persecution began to grow, the more there was to talk about and so "a long time" could be any time, in the Greek phrase, could be any time from weeks to years. We don't know how long.

But a long time, they were preaching boldly, giving testimony to the Word of His grace, that is to God's revelation, God's Word. "And God granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands." And, of course, you know that the signs and wonders were in order that God might confirm their word as true, as divine. So here they are and they're boldly speaking and I really feel, people, that this is a very true characteristic of somebody who's an effective discipler; courage, boldness. This is the kind of a person who isn't daunted by adversity, who doesn't fold up his tent and go home and say the field is closed because he met one door that he couldn't get through, who doesn't come back and say, "Well, I tried to witness to my neighbor but he turned me off once so I just better not try it again. I'll offend him." This is the kind of thing where you boldly go out and you do what God has called you to do and you're willing to accept what happens.

Verse 5, "The multitude of the city was divided." They split the town and, of course, when Jesus came, He said, "I didn't come to bring peace but a sword." It'll always do that. Some held with the Jews and some with the Apostles. Finally, there was an assault. The Greek word there means "a rush." The mob is a mob lynching. It was a wild mob. You know, they weren't in Rome where there was some sophisticated control. They were in wild and wooly Iconium. That was really in the sticks and there was going to be a lynching there only they were going to use stones. The Jews apparently had convinced the Gentiles that these people had blasphemed and so the Jewish execution for blasphemy was going to be carried out. So it was time to stone them. You say, "Well, what happened then?" Now we're going to see their courage.

Verse 6 said, "They were aware of it and they fled to Lystra and Derbe." Aha! They weren't any better off than me. They ran, too, just like everybody else. Well, no, not really. They went because it wasn't time yet for them to get it. There was still a ministry to be done. You say, "Well, that's easy for you to say." Well, it's easy to prove, too, because if you go to verse 21, you'll see they weren't gone very long until they came back, right back into Lystra to finish what they started. They just had some more business to take care of.

But they did leave because it was time to leave and, of course, even our Lord Jesus said if you go into a city and they don't receive you, go to another city. They left an unforgettable mark. In fact, one

of the only descriptions we have of the looks of the Apostle Paul was found in a second century writing that was found out of Iconium. When he was there in Iconium, he made enough of an impression on the city and he must have been there long enough so that they wrote this about him. "He was a man small in size with meeting eyebrows, a rather large nose, baldheaded, bow legs, strongly built, full of grace. At times, he looked like a man and at times, he had the face of an angel." That's what the Iconium people said in describing Paul.

So he made an impression but it was time to leave and they left. You say, "Where did they go?" Well, in verse 6, they fled to Lystra and Derbe which is only 18 miles south southwest so they didn't go too far. "And there," verse 7, "they preached the Gospel." Very persistent, very committed, very courageous and very bold. They had a tremendous persecution that threatened to take their life and yet they had the courage of what they believed God had called them to do. I think it's a vital thing, people, in our ministry as disciplers wherever you are and whoever it is that you're called to win and to teach and to build up, that you have the courage to go right at it, that you have the courage to believe God is going to take care of you and protect you.

And some Christians never experience God's providential courage because they never allow themselves to get in a place where they'll have to experience it. I've always felt that God doesn't give you what you need until you need it, you know? And if you ever want a great experience, get into a situation where you're being really overtly persecuted and you'll discover a tremendously new dimension of God's faithfulness. I've been in a few situations like that where I started really getting the guns fired and you think at first you're going to die under the onslaught and all of a sudden, God gives you this tremendous sense of strength and confidence and His presence that overpowers. It's exciting. Some of you have never experienced that because you never get out there where it costs something and where God can grant you that marvelous grace.

All right, a third thing, and we have to keep moving through these things and I'm suggesting these things for your thought, not trying to exhaust the subject. The third thing is power. Anybody who's going to be effective in discipling somebody is going to have to count on power. Verse 8, now I think this is a beautiful illustration. Here's Paul and he's preaching his heart out there in Lystra, just really laying it on them, and all the Lycaonian people are sitting there taking it in. He was a great preacher, maybe one of the greatest speakers that ever lived, a great orator, a great communicator.

"And he sees in the audience a certain man impotent in his feet." Here's a man whose feet have never worked. He has no power in them. They are totally paralyzed and no doubt the muscles were all atrophied and he was a cripple from birth. He had never walked. Paul spots him in the crowd. He's listening to Paul and he's watching Paul and Paul, by God's revelation to own brain, perceives that he has faith to be healed. He says, "Here's a guy that really believes. Here's a man who's ready to believe this Gospel if only he could be sure it was divine and if I did a miracle, it would convince him." So he sees this man's faith and look what he does.

With a loud voice; he's got a whole crowd there and he spots one guy. With a loud voice, he says, "Stand up on your feet, you over there." Now think about that. That took a lot of faith on Paul's part. You know that? Paul could have stood there and said, "Boy, I'd like to see that guy healed but what if it doesn't work? What if I say, 'Stand up and be healed,' and he just sits there? Or he jumps up and falls over. I'm going out on a limb here, Lord." You think he had that battle in his mind?

You think Peter had that battle when he saw the guy at the gate and the guy said, "Alms," you know.

He's "Oh, let's see, John. You know, we could try it. We could...let's go back and pray for a couple of hours. Then we'll come back and try it. We could try it. We could risk it, step out on faith." He just said, "Rise up and walk." Why? Because God had promised him power. He simply claimed it and exercised it. All right?

There are Christians who say, "Well, I could witness. I suppose I could try it, a couple of hours of prayer. I could sneak out, try." You know. Same thing. They don't have the confidence in the power of God. If you don't believe that you have the power to go out and win somebody to Christ and disciple that somebody, you have a lack of faith in God and you question God's promise because God said, "You shall receive power. After the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you shall be my witnesses. And you will be able to do exceeding abundantly above all, you can...what?...ask or think according to the power that works in you." Now if you have trouble believing that, you're questioning God's promises and if you question God's promises, he that believes not makes him a...what?...a liar.

Do you see what an affront to God it is when you won't do what you've been empowered to do? Paul didn't stand there and mumble around his beard saying, "Boy, I could give it a whirl there, God. You know, give me a sign," you know. "Let him jump up before I say something. Let him come across the street with a Bible in his hand saying, 'Could you explain this to me?' Then I'll witness. But not cold turkey, Lord. Not just, 'Hey, you cripple, up.' Not that."

Paul didn't fight that battle because Paul had absolute belief in God's power, didn't he? He just _____. It could have destroyed his entire credibility in that town. "Rise up," he said, "and walk." And what happened? And he leaped and walked. And I'm sure Paul didn't go, "Oh, my heart. Thank you, God. Oh. Boy, the anxiety on that one." No. He just went right on about his business. You see, here was a man who knew God had promised him power. He just claimed it and used it, you know.

Christian, you got the same thing, right? Not necessarily the apostolic gift of miracles and hearing, but you've got the power of God by the indwelling Holy Spirit to share Christ in His power, right? Power. This is an exciting principle. A true discipler, an effective discipler, is somebody who believes that the power of God is his, claims it, steps out on faith. That's the way. I'll tell you, when you do that, it's really exciting to see God work. It must be frustrating to God somewhat to have to sit back and wait for us to claim the thing He's already give us.

I always think of the couple in L.A., I read in the L.A. Times, who died of malnutrition at the age of 55 and they found \$45,000.00 in brown paper sacks in their closet. Unbelievable. There's a lot of Christians dying of spiritual malnutrition. They don't ever understand the power and the resources of God because they don't ever open the closet they've already got and take it out. No hesitance on his part. All right.

So the true discipler experiences the ministering of his gifts, courage, power. Fourthly is humility and I suppose it's true that one of the first things you have to watch for if you're really ministering your gifts and you're ministering in them in the power of God and there's tremendous effect and you're out there with boldness is that you're going to get proud about what you're doing, right? So He illustrates this so beautifully here with Paul and Barnabas. Watch what happened.

"And when the people saw what Paul had done...of course, they just were shocked and they began

to scream, the whole crowd in the marketplace...they lifted up their voice and they said in Lycaonian, which Paul didn't understand, the gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." These aren't people. These are gods. They're back again. Now they had an interesting tradition. From their history, they had had an earlier experience with the gods, they believed, in their own polytheistic religion. It didn't actually happen but this is what they believed.

They believed that the two gods, Zeus and Hermes, had visited them. They believed that Zeus and Hermes had descended on their town of Lystra some years earlier and they had gone around disguised as men just to check out whether the Lystra people were really true worshippers. And everywhere they went, they asked for lodging and food and no one would give it to them. So Hermes and Zeus went through the whole town trying to get somebody to put them up for the night and feed them and keep them a few days and no one would do it.

Finally, they came to some old poor peasants by the name of Philemon and Valas, a man and his wife, and they took them in and gave them everything they needed and kept them and fed them and gave them the best that they had and the result of it was that Zeus and Hermes were so mad at the whole town of Lystra, they killed everybody in the town but those two people and those two people became the guardians of a splendid temple and when they died, they were turned into two great big tall living trees. Doesn't sound like a hot deal to me but I guess in their religion being a tree was something great.

But anyway, so they were thinking of that old deal and they figured, "Hey, they're back again and we're not going to blow it this time. Zeus and Hermes are here." And they used the Roman names for Zeus and Hermes which were Jupiter and Mercury. Now Zeus was the king of all the gods and they named Barnabas that and that tells me that Barnabas must have been a great big handsome, imposing, statuesque figure. And Hermes was the god of speech and they decided that Paul was that and that tells you that they were evaluating Paul's speaking and said, "This has got to be the god of speech. What a speaker." And the reason if they would parallel Paul with the god who was most like him, that's why I say Barnabas probably was most like somebody who was very kingly in his stature.

So here are these two guys and they don't know what's going on because they can't speak Lycaonian. Paul and Barnabas are standing there saying, "There's something going on. What is it?" And they began to shout and they called Barnabas, Jupiter and Paul, Mercury because he was the chief speaker. And then the priest of Jupiter, he comes flowing down and he brings the oxen and the garlands and they're going to get ready to sacrifice to these two guys. And they're still standing there trying to check it out. They know something's up, lots of scurrying around. Here comes a bunch of oxen and flowers to hang around you and somebody's going to get sacrificed. All of a sudden, they realize what's going on in verse 14. When they understood it, they began to rip their clothes and they ran throughout the crowd crying out "Sirs, why are you doing this?"

And you want to know something interesting? This was one chance at a little glory. All right? It's not asking much. This is kind of fun, Lord. Let it go for awhile. I mean listen. I know a lot of false prophets who've been trying to get deistic recognition all their life. There are false prophets who have just had all their life the ambition that someone would think they were a god. And this would have been their time to say, "I'll take my palace over there, the temple over there and the treasury over there and the harem over there. I'd like a large backyard with a pool." You know.

I mean this would have been their opportunity and they could have said, "Well, you know something, Barnabas? If we play our cards right on this baby, we'll get that whole thing set up and we'll be in a position to tell these people anything and they'll believe it. And we can preach the Gospel and they can all get saved." You want to know something? You always do God's work from the vantage point of humility; never from the vantage point of human exaltation; always. God doesn't want Christian superstars. He wants humble people. I think the vantage point of humility is always the vantage point from which God's work is done. They didn't want any exaltation. They didn't see it as a means to an end. They wanted to do God's work God's way.

And when Jesus came into the world, He came as a servant and He said, "When you go into the world, you go as servants." And when Jesus came into the world, He humbled Himself and when He sends us into the world, He humbles us. If we exalt ourselves we violate that. And so they said, "None of that. We're like you." Verse 15, "We are men like you with the same passions. We have come here to preach that you should stop these vanities. We're not trying to get you to worship these gods. We're trying to get you to quit it and worship the Living God." And then he goes on to describe who that Living God is using natural revelation. He doesn't use the Old Testament because they didn't know it so he uses natural revelation. And as a footnote, I would say that any good discipler is going to speak to the people in the context of their own culture and he does that.

Well, verse 18 says after telling them that it's the God who made everything and the God who was patient with the nations and the God who brings the rain and the seasons and all this, they tried with these words but they could hardly restrain the people. They were so hot to make a sacrifice to these two guys. They had a hard time cooling them off. But the thing that's so beautiful about this is that they struggled and fought tooth and nail to maintain the vantage point of humility. You see?

The true discipler never looks for self exaltation. He never looks for self glory. He never looks to be lifted up, but always that Christ be lifted up. He doesn't want people to think he is somebody. He wants people to know Christ is everybody. There aren't any big shots. There aren't any people to be worshipped. And so what do we learn then? To be a good discipler, to be an effective discipler, you're out ministering your gifts, courage, power, humility.

Let me give you a fifth. We don't have anymore time on that. Persistence; there needs to be persistence. This is so good. Verse 19, I think a true discipler is somebody who doesn't quit, doesn't give up, and boy, you know, it's a battle. It's a struggle. It's a contest. Paul uses the word about athletics so many times. In Philippians 1, he uses the verb "athleto," athletics. He uses "agonidzo," agonized, struggle. Persistence was always a part of his life.

In any true discipler, you're going to see some walls and you're just going to go charging right on through. "And there came from certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium persuaded the people." Here come the rabble-rousers from the other town down to Lystra. Some of them come as far as 118 miles chasing him down. That'll give you some idea of the fever of the persecution. And they walked the whole way. "And they arrived and they persuaded the people and they stoned Paul and threw him out of the city." They just threw him out in the dump. They stoned him, thinking that he was dead. Now whether he was dead or not is hard to know but they thought he was dead. They had pulverized his body with boulders, crushed him, broken his body, no doubt to pieces. Threw him on the dump, assuming him dead.

And verse 20, "Nevertheless, the disciples stood around him." So all the people stood around. You

can imagine the sadness and the sorrow and the weeping. And he rose up. I like that. Don't you? He just got up. Oh, such a big deal for such a small statement. He rose up. There's got to be at least five paragraphs there. What happened? What do you mean? I'd like to see that scene reproduced. And you say when he got up, certainly he retreated away for a little time of rest and re-gathering his thoughts. No. He rose up and went back into the city. He wasn't finished yet. He walked right back into the city. He didn't say, "Oh, Lord. The door is closed to Lystra." He went back in and finished what he wanted to say.

I like that kind of persistence. He preached there and the next day, he departed and went to Derbe. The next day after he'd been stoned to death or near death, his body pulverized with permanent scarring. He went right back and finished the sermon and the next day, he walked 30 miles to Derbe. When he got done getting there, he preached there and when he finished there, he went back to Lystra, back to Iconium and back to Antioch, 21 says; never stopped any of the time. Hard to believe; absolutely incredible. Brutally stoned, cut, bruised, his body scarred for life; tension packed weeks and months of preaching and persecution. He drags his beaten, bleeding body off a dump, walks back into the city, finishes his message, goes 30 miles, preaches some more and fires back through the whole 150-mile trek the other way, going back to where he'd just been so he could confirm the saints that had come to Christ when he was there the first time.

The man was persistent. The man knew how to redeem the time. You know what? Melancton, the great reformer, it was said of Melancton that he kept a record written in his notebook of all of the hours of his day not spent for the Lord. I like that kind of persistence. I like the kind of persistence that he exhibits in chapter 16 when he starts to go to Asia Minor and the Spirit stops him. And then he starts to go to Bithynia north and the Spirit stops him and he can't go anywhere so he walks the thin corridor between those two countries, slams into the Aegean Sea and says, "I'm still moving, Lord. What now?" And then God says...sends a Macedonian...and says, "Come over and help us."

He was persistent and he just kept pursuing, pursuing, pursuing until he ran into the Aegean Sea and when he couldn't go any further then God said, "I like your persistence. I think I can use you in Europe." God wants persistent people. God was giving Paul a good test to see whether he could face the issues in Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth and Athens because it wasn't going to be easy.

Early in his life, Robert Morrison of England, great missionary, set his heart on going to China. He studied Chinese in London and in 1807, he came to New York to get a ship to China. No one wanted to take him. He couldn't find a ship. He couldn't get there. Foreigners were not allowed in China. But he finally by some means was able to get passage and arrive in China and he had to live hiding out for six months in a French warehouse on the docks of Canton. He learned to cook Chinese food, dress in Chinese clothes. He studied the difficult Cantonese language.

Preaching was illegal but he gathered a group of people and behind closed doors, met with them and there were never more than ten people but he met with them. Seven years after coming, he baptized his first convert, seven years. Finally, he finished the Book of Acts in Cantonese and succeeded in having it printed but an argument arose among the Christian craftsmen who chipped out the wooden blocks for each page and the authorities heard about the argument and Morrison was forbidden from preaching and printing anything at all and all of his effort was halted.

Persistent and undaunted, his biographer says, he stayed on the job feeling God was in it. He mastered the Cantonese language and translated the entire Bible into Cantonese. He completed a

six volume Chinese-English dictionary to train missionaries and every missionary that ever went to China is indebted to one man's persistence...one man, persistent.

What kind of a disciple are you? Persistent? Do you stay after that person you're discipling? Do you stay after it? Are you easily discouraged? It's an exciting thing to think about. You are a discipler. You can be an effective one by ministering your gifts; courage, power, humility, persistence. Let me give you this follow up and this turns the corner a little bit from attitudes to method. But look at verse 21 and here we find again they went and made disciples. The word "taught" should be translated "made disciples." And how did they do this? How did they do this follow up?

Now he goes back to Lystra, back to Iconium and back to Antioch, second time through, and he meets the Christians that he's already won to Christ. What does he do? Four things. Here are four steps to follow up. It couldn't be a better outline. First of all, confirming. Confirming, "episderizo" means to make solid, to fix, to glue down. He made them solid in the word. Teaching. How do you disciple somebody? You teach them. You give them a solid foundation. You teach them solid doctrine, sound doctrine, sound teaching. Get them from being a spiritual babe to the level of a spiritual young man.

The second thing, exhort. And he exhorted them, it says, to continue in the faith. What is exhortation? It's urging a person to the proper course of conduct. He gave them solid doctrine and then he urged them and both of those are vital. I know in the people that I've disciplined in my life, you must teach them solid doctrine and you must confront their problems and their misbehaviors and their weaknesses and encourage them towards strength.

Thirdly, you have to lead them. Verse 23, he ordained elders in the city. He prayed with them. What is so important about that is that he exercised leadership. He helped them get organized. In those cases, it was a total congregation but I think as a discipler, you've got to have leadership. You've got to be able to say to that disciple whether it's one or ten dozen, "Here's what to do. Here's the structure. Here's how to live the life. Here's how to set a pattern for your living." Help them get organized. Help them get involved into a body of believers. And that's what Paul did. Follow up then is to teach the Word, to exhort to the right behavior and to put them into the right community of believers.

And fourthly, and this is the capstone of all follow up, verse 23 says, "Commended them to the Lord on whom they believe." You know the last thing you do when you follow up some disciple? You give him to the Lord for the final follow up, right? Commit him to the Lord. Disciplers follow up. They don't quit after they've led somebody to Christ. They go back and teach. They go back and exhort. They go back and help them to get involved in the church. They go back and then they commit that person to the Lord in prayer. That's a true disciple.

And one last thing, one last thing a discipler does is share what he's doing with other disciplers so that they can be encouraged. After that, Paul, verse 24, says they went to Pisidia, Pamphylia; verse 25, Perga Attalia. They finally got back to Antioch where they had started. That's the home church. And when they got there, verse 27 says, in the middle of the verse, "They reviewed all that...what?...God had done with them, how he opened the door of the faith to the Gentiles. And they there abode there a long time with the disciples."

You say, "Why didn't they get back into work? Why should they lay around a long time?" Because it is just as important to communicate what God has done with a fresh group of people as it is to do it because that's where you recruit for the next group, right? Disciplers are people who not only disciple but they encourage other disciplers to get into the act. Why do we have this Disciplers' Conference? Why do we bring missionaries here? In order that you might meet with them, listen to them, hear them, share with them and they might say, "This is what God is doing with us." And the implication is what is God doing with you? You want to be a discipler the way God wants it? Know your gifts and use them. Be courageous. Rest in his power. Humble yourself. Be persistent. Follow up and share with others what He's doing. Let us pray.

Father, thank You for our time this morning and for this Word to us. Thank You for making us all disciplers, sending us to baptize and to teach. Help us not to think about us as something different than people somewhere else. We're not. It's all the same. Help us to pray with one another and for one another and all of us to be involved in reaching out to win the world around us to Jesus Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).