Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Qualities of a Great Missionary, Part 3
Scripture: Acts 14:21-28
Code: 1749

1973

Turn in your Bibles to the 14th chapter and take a look with us at what is part three of our study of the 14 chapter, Qualities of a Great Missionary. Really these are qualities as we've said of any great servant of Christ, be he a servant at home or on a foreign field. Qualities of a Great Missionary is the theme, and in the verses that make up this chapter we find flowing out of the narrative as we have said in past weeks the principles are the qualities or qualifications of effective service.

As we come to the 14th chapter we're reminded again that we're following Paul and Barnabas. They're on the first missionary journey. Previous to this, they were pastors of the church at Antioch in Syria. The church sent them out under of course the commission and call of the Holy Spirit and they went to Cyprus and then they've been touring Galatia. We find them in chapter 14 on the Galatian tour, and as we watch them ministering the Gospel to the gentiles as the church expands, we find that in their ministry there are very evident features that just kind of rise out of the text that indicate to us factors of success. It's not as I've said before a lecture on success factors but rather an illustration of them.

Jesus gave a rather simple directive frankly. In the beginning of all of this missionary effort Jesus simply said, "Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" and that's the calling of believers that still stands. It's basic to the missionary effort. Further, Jesus said in the Book of Acts prior to His ascension into Heaven, "You shall be witnesses unto Me." It wasn't really an option; it was a statement of fact. All believers upon the receiving of the Holy Spirit are witnesses. It's only a question of whether you're a good one or a bad one. Every Christian is giving testimony to Jesus Christ. The issue is what kind of testimony.

And so there is a basic commission that is really laid on the life of every believer to bare the truth of Christ to the world and you are doing that in some fashion. The call still stands today and of course obviously what Christ wants is faithful Christians who will dedicate themselves to carrying out The Great Commission with diligence and with success, but you know as you study the history of the church, and I think that we're all aware of this; as you study the history of the church you find that it's always the minority that do it and the majority that don't. There always seems to be in the - were we able to paint a portrait of the history of the church we would find the foreground dotted with individuals and then we would find a mass of faceless humanity in the background but the commission isn't any

different for all of them. It's just that sometimes in every period of church history there are men singularly who dominate it, and women, and then there are masses of Christians lost in the fog in the background.

It was one man, David Livingston, who so greatly influenced the continent of Africa toward God that Africa and Livingston are almost synonymous terms. It was one man, William Carey, responsible for the redemptive transforming power of Christ being effectively presented to the teeming millions in India. It was because of one man, William Booth, who gave himself completely to God's service that there started in the slums of London the beginnings of an evangelistic movement that encircled the globe known as the Salvation Army. It was CH Chapin who said on one occasion, "Not armies, not nations have advanced the race, but here and there in the course of the ages an individual has stood up and cast his shadow over the world." He's right, and the history of the church is no different.

The history of the church is the history of individuals, and there are individuals that move in church history, and between the individuals there's the flow that they have created. It's like seeing a whole lot of people lying down and then one standing up and then lying down and standing up in intervals. The mass of the church sleeps and here and there great men have changed its history for God. Now what is it that makes somebody dominate the foreground and somebody else get lost in the background? What is the difference between the Christian that makes things happen and the Christian that doesn't know they're happening? What is the difference between the success in a dynamic sense of some Christians and the sort of anonymity of another one? Well I think the answer lies in Acts 14 and it lies in many other features in the New Testament but it's here for sure, because in this chapter I've found at least eight qualifications of a successful missionary.

If you want to be one there are qualifications. If you're already one, these are the qualities that made you one. They're success factors and they're not lectured to us but they are just illustrated. We're looking at two men, Paul and Barnabas. Really one cast his shadow in a sense over the other. Paul dominates Barnabas in a sense. Both of them cast their shadow over the world and Paul's shadow still lingers over the world. The world is still affected by what Paul has written. Now flowing out of this record of their touring Galatia are some principles that signal their greatness, and I really am so hopeful and prayerfully hopeful that you get these because I think these can really become things that you can nail down, principles that you can get handles on for understanding what makes the difference in the Christian experience. Now we've already discussed five of them and we'll review those and then discuss the last three that I see in this chapter.

The first thing that was such a key to their success was they were ministering spiritual gifts. Remember that? We have said, and said it many times, that the Christian is most effective when he is functioning in an area where he has been gifted by the Holy Spirit, and when they were doing that they consequently were of the most effect. Now it is true that Christians for example may not have the gift of teaching or preaching or administration or helps or showing mercy or whatever. You may have

some gifts of course, others you don't have, and yet in the sense even though you don't have a gift there is a sense in which you need to minister in all those areas. For example, we all don't have the gift of exhortation but we're all called on to exhort each other. We all don't have the gift of teaching but we're all to declare Christ. So there's a sense in which we don't all have the master gift but we all in a lesser sense are called to do all these things but when we really function dominantly through those gifts that are specially given to us, then our success is really dynamic, not in terms of the world but in terms of what God wants.

Now these guys were functioning according to their gifts. Preaching, teaching, exhortation and administration are all apparent in this chapter. Those are the four gifts of a leader in the church, and they had them and they exercised them and thus they were really functioning in the energy of the Spirit, and so they were successful to begin with then because they ministered their gifts. Christians need to begin with to find their gifts and use them. Secondly we saw they were successful because of boldness. There's no substitute for boldness because boldness is the ability to go through opposition, and if you don't go through opposition you never get anywhere because any time you try to do something for God, what's the first thing that happens? Opposition. So if you can't handle oppositions you can't handle anything and that's boldness, plowing through the opposition.

The third thing we saw that was so basic and so intrinsic to success was Divine power. We saw in the illustration verses 1-7 dealt with boldness and versus 8-10 dealt with Divine power. The Apostle Paul right in the middle of a sermon God just goes right through him and performs a miracle. These guys lived in the power flow and last week we talked about the fact that some of us Christians know something is coming up and we can take a week to kind of get the power going again, but Paul just lived with the power flow and at any moment right in the middle of his sermon God just interrupted him and healed the guy. I mean the flow was there all the time. He lived in the power of God. That's why his gifts ministered so effectively as well, and there's no substitute for ministering in the power of the Spirit. Believe me, there's none. I mean I know that from my own life. If I have the gift of teaching I can minister the gift of teaching in the flesh or in the Spirit.

Just to give you a little homespun personal illustration, I would rather preach here than anywhere, and I mean that sincerely, than anywhere, and yet the flesh in me would say, "But Macarthur, when you preach here you have to study hard because they know everything you know and you have to come up with something different every week" and that's right, but I would rather do that. I would rather spend 25 or 30 hours a week at least studying to tell you something once than to be a traveling speaker, and you know there's a lot of kind of glamour in being the traveling whatever who comes to town, the professional Bible teacher. That's a great ministry. I used to do that. For about three and a half years or so I did that. I went all over the place.

It was in a very real sense very difficult to really minister in the Spirit, and I want to tell you why. When you do that you find that wherever you go there are certain messages that you use, the good ones. In

the business we call them the sugar sticks. You go back to these and you get excited as you can get when you hear you're gonna go someplace you've never been. All your good stuff you can use. They've never heard you, right? That's very easy to do, and I'm not knocking it.

It's fine if you can handle it in the spirit, and of course it was always the same things. They always want to hear salvation, Holy Spirit, prophecy, and something about marriage and sex, always the same things, and so you had a little series that you'd come in and you'd say, "Let's see, it'll be message number 13, 14, 15 and 16 this week" and you punch your little button and that's it. You've got it so in your brain you know exactly when they're going to laugh, you know how to build up to it, you know when they're going to cry, you know everything, you've got that little outline. If your wife punches you in the middle of the night you sit up and you repeat the message. It's there; let's face it. You've got that one down pat. Believe me, you could have absolutely no connection to God and you can give that thing. I know. I've been there.

You know what? I did that for just a few years and I realized that was in a sense unfulfilling. Now I don't want you to call up the people that I'm gonna minister to this summer and say, "Remember you'll be ministering in the flesh." I'm working on it, but you know I said to the Lord, beginning to pray about this, "Lord, I have to be somewhere where I am dependent on you where I can't go in there knowing I've got a winner." I mean sometimes I come to preach here and I am scared because I said, "You know I work on that, Lord but it didn't fall together. It isn't there. I don't understand just how to put it together and where you're gonna put the emphasis" and I just pray a lot and I get down on my knees in my office before I get over here and I just really pour out my heart to the Lord and I come in here and it's over and God really blessed us.

Other days I work through it and it's terrific, and I get done and I say, "That's good. That is gonna get 'em. That'll be a hot item on the table." And you know what? You come in here and nothing, zilch, nothing, and you go away and again you just say to yourself, "You know, dumbo, one of these days you're gonna learn."

But you know you learn in the ministry that you can't function on your own strength. You can't do it. It is Divine power or it is nothing. I mean the Spirit is the only energy the Word has then really operates, and Paul knew this. Everything he did he did in the energy of the Spirit and he tried to get it across to everybody. In Ephesians 3:16 he says, "I pray that you might be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." See? He knows that's the only way. Then he says, "That you might be filled with all the fullness of God. Then you'll be able to do exceedingly abundantly above all you can ask or think according to the power that works in you but the power doesn't work until you're strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man, not in your own strength." You can't go out and minister on your own strength. Divine Power. Well, I don't want to get into that. We covered that two weeks already.

The fourth point that we saw in terms of features of a really successful work is humility. This is so basic. Remember that after Paul's power, the power of God through Paul had been exhibited and he healed the man and the guy jumped up and walked? Well it was a temptation for pride. Everybody in town in verse 11 just couldn't believe it and they said, "The gods will come down to us in the likeness of men. Gods are here! Hermes and Zeus or Mercury and Jupiter" and they were going to worship. Well Paul and Barnabas heard about it in verse 14 and started tearing their clothes and screaming about blasphemy and in verse 15 said, "What are you doing? We're men of like passions with you. Cut this out." They didn't want any exaltation. They were humbled. That's a great quality. You can't beat that.

Jesus said that, "When a false prophet comes along he seeks his own glory. When a true prophet comes along he seeks the glory of Him that sent him." They didn't want anything for themselves. They said, "We're trying to turn you to God" verse 15, "not to us. We want you to know God" and they described the God of whom they spoke. Well you know whenever you start getting proud you just have to keep remembering what you were. Isaiah 51:1 where he says, "Whenever you think you're something, remember the hole of the pit from which you were digged." Solomon said, "Before honor is humility and whoever humbles himself God is going to absolve." I tell you, humility, that's a tough one but that's a basic.

Paul expressed his attitude toward humility in 1 Corinthians 15:9. Just listen to this. He says, "I am the least of the apostles." That is not hypocrisy. That is real. He's honest. You say, "Paul, why would you feel like that?" He says, "I'm not even fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. I know the hole of the pit from which I was digged. You couldn't have gotten into a deeper hole in a deeper pit than I was in. I was killing Christians. I'm not worthy to be an apostle." Then he says this, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace, which was bestowed upon me was not in vain. I labored more abundantly than they all." You say, "There you go, Paul, bragging" and he says this, "Yet not I with the grace of God that is in me." Everything was God. God got him out of the hole to begin with and God ministered through him. Paul didn't want any glory and neither does any successful servant of God.

There's a fifth thing that we've studied and just continuing to review here, and that is persistence. Another great feature of successful effort is persistence. You couldn't stop Paul. I mean the guy was just absolutely unstoppable. They tried to stop him in verse 19 with about as strong an effort as imaginable. "There came certain Jews from Antioch and Iconi" and by this time he's in the town of Lystra and he's moving on. "Persuaded the people in having stoned Paul. Threw him out of the city supposing he'd been dead." They stoned him. You think well, that'll fix him. Not really. Verse 20 says, "He rose up, went back into the city and the next day went 30 miles to Derbe." We talked about last week the unbelievable characteristic here. How could this guy possibly get up from being stoned until he was obviously in their eyes at least dead, walk back in town and the next day go to Derbe, and what did he do when he got there? "He preached all over the place", verse 21. You say, "When does

he rest?" He doesn't know the meaning of it. He is persistent.

Now last week I went over that and somebody said to me, "John, you avoided the issue of the verses." I said, "Well what's the issue?" and they said, "Was Paul dead or wasn't he?" And we just kind of kidded about the fact that there's a big debate about whether Paul was dead and he was resurrected from the dead or whether this was just a time when he was nearly dead and he was revived. Now that's not a big point in one sense and yet in another sense it is an important point so let me speak to it. This is a footnote, free for nothing, just doesn't come with the message. I'm adding it. Anyway, do I believe Paul was dead and resurrected? I just have to say I don't think so. I do not think Paul was dead.

Now some people connect this with the time when he said, "I knew a man of 14 years who was caught up into the third Heaven" and all this thing and they think this is when this happened when he died for a little while and went up. I don't think you can connect those two. There's no way you can connect them scripturally because they don't connect. Obviously you'd just piece them together arbitrarily but I don't believe he was dead and I'll give you some reasons why I don't believe he was dead. Number one reason is the word "supposed" or "supposing." It says there, "Having stoned Paul drew him out of the city supposing he'd been dead."

Now the word "supposing" is the word "namidsoe". Now this word is an interesting word. It has two meanings. The first meaning is to have a custom, like it was a custom to do this or it was a custom to do that, but the second meaning is to suppose something. It is very obvious when it is used to mean accustom and when it is used to mean supposing. It is obvious from the context of any passage where it appears. Now it is used to mean supposing many times in the New Testament. Far and away the vast majority of those times - get this - it means to suppose something that is not true. Got that one? That's the key to the interpretation. Far and away, in fact I think only two or three times, it is used otherwise. It is used far and away to mean to suppose wrongly and that is its use in the Book of Acts.

For example, Matthew 5:17. Let me just share this with you because I think this is kind of an important point just to show you how the language is a help in interpretation. People say is it important to know Greek? Well it is helpful believe me. Verse 17, "Think not that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets. I have not come to destroy but to fulfill." The word "Think" is namidsoe. "Are you supposing that I come to destroy the law? Is that a right supposition? No. I am not come to destroy but to fulfill." So again, namidsoe is used in terms of supposing something that is not true.

Matthew 10, another supposition, verse 34, then we'll go to chapter 20. "Think not, suppose not that I've come to send peace on Earth. I came not to send peace." Again, they're supposing something that is what? That is wrong. They're supposing that he came to send peace. He says, "No. I came to

send a sword."

Chapter 20 verse 10 is again another use of the word and we'll just look at that one quickly just to give you something to bounce off of. "But when the first came they supposed that they should have received more." Remember the deal about the wages that were paid to the people at work that day? "They suppose but they didn't get more. They supposed wrongly again." Now in Luke 2:44 it is used by Luke the same way. Now you come to the Book of Acts and how is it used there? Chapter 7 verse 25 talking about Moses. "For he supposed his brethren would've understood how that God by His hand would deliver them but they understood not" so they're accused again supposing something that is wrong. Chapter 8 verse 20 Peter said to Simon who tried to buy the Holy Spirit, "Because you supposed the gift of God may be purchased with money, your money perished with you." Again he supposed a wrong thing.

Well Acts 16:27, Acts 17:29, Acts 21:29, verse Timothy 6:5, all those passages use it in the sense of supposing something that's wrong. Now watch this. Then you go back to verse 19. "They stoned Paul, threw him out of the city, supposing he had been dead." The dominant use of the word is to suppose something that is not so. So on the basis simply of that dominance it would seem most likely that he was not dead. They were supposing it rather than it being so. Second reason, if he was dead they wouldn't need to put the word "supposing" in there, right? They'd just say, "Having stoned Paul they drew him out of the city because he was dead" so you don't need to have the word "supposing" if the guy is dead.

In fact watch this. If it was a miracle of resurrection - hang on to this thought - if it was a miracle of resurrection then putting the word "supposing" in there takes away the power of the miracle, doesn't it? Because you could say easily, "Well, it wasn't really a miracle." They only thought he was dead, so if the Spirit was trying to get a miracle across to us a miracle of resurrection, He would not have put the word "supposing" in there.

Third reason, the Holy Spirit is not in the business of minimizing resurrections. If this was a resurrection of the Apostle Paul I think you would have a lot more said about it that is said there, especially in the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts is dominated by a careful explanation of miracle after miracle after miracle. For the Holy Spirit to do a miracle like that and not make it clear means that the very purpose of the miracle is disallowed. What is a miracle for? A sign that points to the truth, but the sign there is so small you can't even read it, and the Holy Spirit is in the business of making billboards. If this was a resurrection of Paul you'd have a lot more information about it than just there, and Luke is in the business of making clear cut, precise statements about miracles.

I mean he goes on and on about the guy who was crippled in verse 8. If there was a miracle of a crippled man walking that took up three verses you can believe the resurrection of the Apostle Paul would take a few more than it does down there. You say, "Well then you don't think it's a miracle." No,

I didn't say that. I think it's a miracle that a guy stoned one day is taking a 30-mile hike the next day. That's not a miracle of resurrection. That's a miracle of restoration. All right. That's a footnote; back to the message.

Persistence. He was persistent, up and at 'em again. Persistence is a fabulous quality. Couldn't deter him. I was reading this week some of the life of Robert Morrison of England who set his heart on going to China as a missionary and he studied Chinese in England and London. In 1807 he came to New York to get a ship around the Cape to go to China and he tried to get passage on a ship and he couldn't' get it because China didn't accept foreigners and nobody wanted to haul him over there and have to haul him all around because they couldn't unload him in China. Finally he booked passage and he landed in China. He got off, went in a warehouse, stayed in a French warehouse in the city of Canton near the docks and stayed there for six months. During those six months he learned to cook Chinese food and to dress in Chinese clothes and to kind of adapt himself in Chinese culture and he spent the time studying the Cantonese dialect. Preaching was illegal but he gathered over the next months and years a little group of people around him, never more than 10 in private, in hiding, and behind closed doors he endeavored to instruct them. Seven years after he landed in Canton he baptized his first convert. That's persistence, seven years.

Finally working all day and night, day after day, month after month, he finished the Book of Acts, translated it into Cantonese, and he succeeded in having it printed but an argument arose among the craftsman, Christian craftsman had a fight. They were the craftsman who by hand chiseled out of wood every character for his Book of Acts, and he was further going through the New Testament, and they had a big fight and the fight was so blatant that the authorities found out about it and put a stop to all his printing, and all the effort of all those months was halted. The printing was stopped; no more copies made, no future printing, no future preaching. He was forbidden from all of it. Say what did he do? He persisted, which is what he should've done, stayed on the job because he believed God was in it. He mastered the language and listen to this, he translated the entire Bible into Cantonese, a massive work.

He also accomplished a six-volume Chinese/English dictionary so that missionaries would not only have the Bible but they'd have the dictionary to learn the language. All of this in early 1800's, 27 years of a loneliness and self-sacrificing persistence, and he paved the way for every missionary that ever gave the Gospel to a person who spoke Cantonese since, and today there's an academy in free China Taiwan and it's called Morrison Academy and we haven't forgotten because he was persistent. Never preached to big crowds but he was persistent, and Paul was persistent.

And you know what the key to persistence is? Remember what we talked about last time? The key to persistence is maximizing every opportunity. You see, you're running along, opportunity, opportunity, opportunity, obstacle. What happens? There's an opportunity behind that obstacle. Did you know that? Behind every obstacle is an opportunity, and the determination is whether or not you want the

opportunity bad enough. If you do you'll push through the obstacle - persistence, time, vying up every opportunity.

Paul said in Colossians 4:5, "Redeeming the time, buying up the _____ opportunity." What do you do with your time? Boy, supposing that you have a life of 70 years, which could be accurate for many of you, 70 years. Now if you took every minute of that time and added it all up, how would that life be broken down? This is just looking at life in a sense of total time spent. Three years of those 70 would be spent in school. That's total time. Eight years in entertainment, six years in eating, for some of us. Hmm. Five years in transportation, four years in conversation - that would vary too - fourteen years working, three years reading, and twenty-four years of sleep. How much time for God? Eight years in entertainment.

If you came to church every Sunday for the service and you prayed five minutes in the morning with your Bible and five minutes at night and lived 70 years you would've given God five months. Not much, is it? Time. What are you doing with it? How persistent are you? How persistent are you in maximizing every moment? Idle moments. Hmm. You're gonna account for those.

Romans 13:11, "And that knowing the time" - Paul lived like Andrew Marvel. He said he could always hear time's winged chariot hurrying near. Paul was racing the clock. He was racing time all the time. He says, "And knowing the time" imagine his whole life looking over his shoulder just pursuing, "Knowing the time it is high time to awake out of sleep." Some Christians are as good to God asleep as they are awake. They don't do anything either way because they're spiritually asleep, so when they're physically awake they're spiritually asleep.

It was Keats who was haunted by the fear that he might cease to be before his pen had gleaned his teeming brain and he did. He says, "It is high time to wake out of sleep for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." In other words in terms of the future aspect of salvation Christ coming. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast out the works of darkness, put on the armor of light and let's get it on! Let's get it together! Let's get going! Time is chasing. No more wild parties, drunkenness, desire for forbidden beds, shamelessness, strife and envying and all that stuff. It's time to get rid of all that." Persistence. James said, "What is your life?" It's what? Vapor. Here for a little time, vanishes away. Ever seen the vapor rise off the tea glass? That's your life. Grab it. Time is the only chunk of eternity you have. Grab it. Persistence.

So the qualifications we've already seen - gifts, boldness, divine power, humility and persistence. Now let's look at the three for today. Follow-up is the first one. Oh, this is so good. I want you to get this 'cause this is something you can pass on. This is basic principles. Another thing that makes for a great effective Christian service is a commitment to follow up what you begin. It's so basic. Verse 21, "And when they had preached the Gospel to that city" their work in Derbe, that's the farthest post they go, "They then had taught many. They returned again to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch." They could've

gone from Derbe straight back to Antioch or Syria, just hopped over the wilderness. They went all the way back through every city they'd been in and retraced their steps. Why? They believed in follow-up.

They went all the way back. Why? Because the Great Commission is not to make people Christians, it's to make them what? Disciples. So it was dangerous to return. I mean they'd been kicked out of every town they've been in and it was taking their life in their hands but they believed so much in follow-up that they took their life in their hands.

They went back to the town where they'd been stoned, they went back to the towns where they'd been thrown out and their lives had been threatened. They went back fearlessly because they believed in follow-up. Sure it was dangerous. It was dangerous to go back but it was more dangerous for those new babes not to have meat and milk so they went back. I love that verse 21 'cause that teaches follow-up. Don't ever lead anybody to Jesus Christ that you're not willing to nurture.

Now what is follow-up made up of? Four things and these are timeless things that I still think if any of you are discipling somebody here are the four things you're gonna have to learn on. This is a very important area. First thing is confirmation, and I don't mean when you were 12 and got a new suit kind of confirmation. Verse 22, "They went back to all those cities confirming the souls of the disciples." Stop there. The first aspect of good follow-up is confirmation. Now the word "confirming" comes from a Greek word that really is made up of two words _____. It's made of "epi" which means a pawn and "sterics" which means a prop or a support, and when they went back they went back to prop up the disciples.

You know a new babe can't stand up, right? It's like a new little baby. They just flop and lie there, and when you start to teach them to walk you've got to lift them and prop them up and hold their little arms and wiggle them around and get them to kind of get the feel of what it's all about and away it goes after a while but that's exactly the way it is as a Christian. You've got a baby and the baby is gonna have to be propped up. This word, _____ is used four times in the Book of Acts to talk about propping up new believers. Acts 15:32, 15:41 and 18:23 in here, and it talks about each case of propping up the new believers. So they went back to prop them up. Literally it means to strengthen them, to help them to stand on their own, to be strong, and that's the goal for every Christian minister, isn't it?

I mean the churches, Grace Community Church, Roscar Boulevard and all that, we're here because we believe in this. If we didn't believe that this was necessary we would all just be running around making converts and running and running and running and we wouldn't need a church. We wouldn't need you to come here to learn the Word if you didn't need to be propped up but you need to be strengthened, and we're here not only to lead you to Christ but to strengthen you and feed you and nourish you and nurture you so you grow, and I'll tell you if a person has any other view of the ministry he's got a wrong view. We always say, "Oh, isn't it amazing? They were so brave. They went to carry the Gospel and they were willing to give up their lives." Yeah, well did you ever know anyone

who was willing to give up his life for follow-up?

They did. They went back to the cities and it was hotter that time than the first time and they did it just for follow-up and then you say, "Well they're already saved. I mean let's play it cool. They're gonna get to Heaven and then they get instant maturity." They were so committed to follow-up they'd spend their lives if need be just to follow up some people already saved. Boy, that's some kind of commitment. Beautiful.

I can understand how people would just get burdened about leading people to Christ and be willing to give their lives to preach the Gospel but I don't find too many people giving their lives to follow up on the saved. They were willing, and that's - in Ephesians 4 he says, "The work of the ministry is to perfect the saved that they might grow up into the fullness of the stature of Christ." That's what we're supposed to be doing. Dear old Paul in Colossians 4, he spent all his time praying that the saved might grow up. Peter says, "Grow in grace. Every minister worth his salt is one who concerns himself with follow-up, the nurture of the believers." You tell me what is the one agency that gives spiritual strength? What is it that we must give people that they may grow? The Word of God. Desire the Word and they may grow thereby.

And you know in 1 John 2:14 he says, "And I write unto you, young men because you're strong." How'd you get strong? Watch. "The Word of God abides in you." That's the key to strength. In 2 Timothy 3 he says, "The Word of God is given to us, inspiration has granted it to us, all Scripture inspired by God for correction, doctrine, instruction, that the man of God may be what? Perfect, thoroughly furnished, grown-up, mature, strong." That's basic. So when they went back and confirmed that doesn't mean they had a little service. That means they taught the Word. They gave him props. You know the props that hold us up? The Word. My dad always says, "You can't make it unless you have an invisible means of support." That's right. You've got to have the strength of the Word to prop you up. People say, "Christianity is a crutch." You'd better believe it. It's a crutch but man, once you get to using those crutches can you go. Woo!

So confirmation, now to begin with this is where follow-up starts. What does confirmation then boil down to? Teaching doctrine, teaching principles, giving them props. That's basic. The second aspect of follow-up that every Christian servant needs to remember is exhortation. Now you can give them the doctrine but you don't stop there, right? You don't say, "Well we've had our doctrine for this morning. Goodbye." You say, "What are you going to do about it?" And then you whammo and you get in there with the charge and all that, and that's what's in verse 22, "Confirming the souls of the disciples and then exhorting them."

You know what exhorting means? It means to push a person toward a certain kind of conduct. It means to say, "Now here are the facts. Now go do it!" I'll always think of that time when I spoke at that college and the guy says, "Just give us the facts. You don't need to exhort us." That guy didn't

know what he was talking about. Of course we need to exhort. It's a challenge.

Listen to what Paul says, 1 Thessalonians 2, "We were gentle among you." That's a good thing to remember in your exhortation. You don't want to be like a bull in a china closet. "Gentle as a nursing mother and we being affectionately desirous of you we were willing to impart unto you not the Gospel of God only but our own souls." We just gave ourselves. That's part of it, isn't it? Follow-up, giving yourself. Verse 9 he says, "We labored and travailed, laboring night and day" and the idea here is a painful work, just excruciating, agonizing in follow-up, and verse 11, "As you know how we exhorted and encouraged and charged every one of you as a father does his children that you should walk worthy." That's not teaching; that's exhortation. Exhortation is teaching's companion. Here's the doctrine, now go do it! That's exhortation. Exhortation is important, isn't it?

If you were to take apart my messages, some of you may do that for dinner Sunday-to-Sunday but if you were to take it apart analytically you would find that it's made up of two things - teaching and exhortation. I tell you a principle and then I usually get all fired up and tell you to go do it. That's how you follow up, so exhort them. Urging them to a kind of conduct.

Paul says in 1 Thessalonians we just read, "You're gonna have to follow up. I'm gonna encourage you and I'm gonna exhort you and I'm gonna charge you to do these things." That's part of follow-up. Now he says here two things that they needed to be charged to do, two things they needed to be exhorted to do, and these are basic again to any kind of follow-up we do today. One, that you continue in the faith. Whenever somebody first hears the Gospel and the seed is planted, what's lingering right away? The birds to take the seed and Satan snatching the seed. How can you always tell a true Christian?

Paul says, "I want you people to continue. I want you to be for real Christians." Boy, so many people hear the Gospel and they just kind of fade out. That's tragic, and so Paul says, "I exhort you, continue in the faith." And of course this is basic. Whenever you lead somebody to Jesus Christ this constant challenging and encouraging. Sure the world is alluring and you've been there a long time and you've come to Christ and everything hasn't changed and there's certain things that maybe you expected and they didn't happen that fast but continue in the faith and God will vindicate Himself! Believe Him and remain to be an abiding branch, and Jesus says, "If you continue in My Word you prove that you're for real."

Continuing is so important. 1 John 2:24 he says, "Let that therefore abide in you, which you have heard in the beginning. If that which you have heard from the beginning remains in you, you should also continue in the Son." This is the promise that He has promised us even eternal life. In other words, eternal life is to those who continue, and those who continue are those - watch this - who hold on to the Word, and don't let Satan snatch it away. So you always want to say to a new Christian, "I've taught you doctrine and you can have it all in your head but hold to the faith. Hold to the faith."

In fact, Jude said, "You're really gonna have to earnestly contend for the faith. Fight for it." New babes, Satan tries to rip it away. The second thing he says, not only exhorting them but continue in the faith, this is beautiful, "We must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom of God." A guy is going along in a pretty happy go lucky life, just winging it. All of a sudden he gets saved and he realizes he's in a war. He's saved, he's come to Christ, there's peace and joy, blessedness, and the guy gets saved and wham, smash, bam. I mean Satan belts him from every angle and problems that he can't even believe and all kinds of things begin to trouble him and the guy doesn't know what's going on so immediately when dealing with a new Christian you must exhort him to anticipate _____, which is tribulation, trouble.

Get ready, my friend. You got saved, Satan's coming, and he's gonna unload, and I don't think we're fair with a new believer unless we tell him that. They need to be exhorted about the fact that tribulation is part of it. All that live Godly are gonna be suffering persecution and you're gonna contend for the faith. You're gonna fight for it.

"You entered the Kingdom of God" it says in verse 22 and God _____ enemy of Satan's kingdom, didn't you? And it's a war and you're in it. That's why we put together this little booklet to help the Christian understand his battle and how to win it 'cause it's battle. It's war. The whole system is against the Kingdom of God and when you enter the Kingdom you are one of the enemy of Satan and his hosts, and so people need to be exhorted to hang on and continue in the faith. From God's standpoint salvation is secured eternally by sovereignty. From the human's viewpoint it is secured visibly by continuance and so he says, "Get ready for trouble. It's gonna come." But I'll tell you something, and I've said it before, if you don't have trouble you don't have victory, right? And who wants to live a life where there's no victory? What a dull life. You say, "Yeah but there's no battles." That's dull. I mean everybody wants to win. There's got to be a contest if there's gonna be a winner.

The third feature of follow-up, not only confirmation and exhortation but thirdly follow-up that is man's organization. If you've led a bunch of people to Jesus Christ you not only want to deal with them as individuals, you want to deal with them as a group because they are a group. In verse 23 when they had ordained elders in every church it says, "They not only cared for confirmation and exhortation but they made sure that they cared for the area of organization." You know the Lord expects the things to be done in the church, it says in Corinthians, "Decently and in order. The Lord has designed that the church be ruled by men called elders, and that the church be served by men called deacons and women who function as deaconesses, and that these people be these ministers and leaders of the church."

This is the design of God. They therefore carried out God's design. They ordained elders in every one of those churches, though there was a church in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe. All of them had elders. Isn't that beautiful? Now that'll show you the extent to which Paul must've stayed around

teaching those people because they had to be mature enough to be recognized as elders according to the qualifications of the Scripture. They hadn't been revealed yet but certainly in the mind of God revealed to Paul.

Organization. Now notice the interesting thing here, the ordained elders. Now elders are to rule in the church. Often the question is, "What kind of church government do you believe in? I believe in the kind of church government where the elders rule the church. You say, "Well does that mean that they just dictate?" No it doesn't. It means they're sensitive to the people and answerable to God. Now I want you to notice something that's interesting here. It says they ordained elders. Now Paul and Barnabas did this. In the early church the apostles did the selection and the evangelists. Remember Paul wrote to Titus and said, "Ordain elders in every city"? So you see he kind of handled the official ordination but notice the word "ordained", very interesting word in the Greek.

The term originally meant, "to select by a vote of raised hands." Now people have always said, well, should a church vote on its leaders? The word progressed from that meaning and by the time Paul wrote this it meant simply to appoint or choose but it had a lingering significance of the raised hand idea, and incidentally it is used one other place in 2 Corinthians 8:19 and there it definitely does mean the idea of a congregation selecting. So the word means "to choose then with approval of the people by raised hands." You know that's probably how they did it.

Paul and Barnabas looked and found those men that they felt - obviously they would be the ones to determine initially who the nominees would be or who are the ones selected. They perhaps picked out the ones they saw the most manifestation and maturity in and then they presented them to the people for the approval of the people. Now I believe that that's how the church should be handled, that leadership in the church should be selected by the evangelist who founds the church in the case of missions or in the case of an ongoing church by the pastors there. They should handle initially the looking about and selecting men who qualify Biblically then to present those men for the approval of the people, and I feel that that is what is indicated here, and elders have a tremendous responsibility, a tremendous one.

Some of us - I'm an elder in Grace Church. That's all I am. I just happen to labor in the Word and Doctrine. I have no more right to rule. I have no more to say than any other elder, and the elders that we have, some are in the Word and Doctrine and some are in the area of ruling and not so much in studying and teaching as we and there are both kinds in the Bible, the New Testament, but when we meet together there's no decision ever made by our elders that is not made unanimously. There's only one Spirit, and if there's a disagreement then somebody's out of touch with the Holy Spirit, and then it becomes a matter of prayer, and nothing is ever done in Grace Church by the elders that is not done in complete agreement among all of us because each of us is responsible to the Lord and to the congregation. We want to be sensitive to what the Spirit is saying.

And so elders have a very important place and a church has a plurality of such elders. We praise God for the ones the Lord has given to us. "Their job is to watch for the souls of the flock" according to 1 Peter 5. "They are to rule" 1 Timothy 5. "They are to labor hard among the flock, working diligently, buying up time." 1 Thessalonians 5:12 says that. "They are accountable to the Lord for what they do with the flock", Hebrews 13. "They are to pattern their lives after Jesus. They are to be firm but gentle. They are to teach the Word and feed the flock. They are to admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted and help the weak, and on top of that be patient with everybody." First Thessalonians 5:14. It's not easy. For your pastors and your elders. They're the same. Pastor, elder, bishop, presbyter, all the same thing.

Well when they had ordained elders in every city, and look how they did it, they prayed with fasting. Boy, that's a serious business, you know? Remember what Josiah said? "Like people, like priest. Nobody ever goes higher than its leadership" so they prayed with fasting, concentrated prayer, and I think people when you talk about fasting that's where fasting really becomes what I think God intended it to be when you're so lost in prayer over some spiritual battle or some spiritual issue that food becomes insignificant, and they poured out their hearts before God in prayer because they knew they had a critical decision in every town they went to. If they chose wrong leadership Satan could destroy what they had begun. Prayer and fasting.

So follow-up demanded confirmation, exhortation and organization. Now here comes the last point of follow-up. This is so good. I just really get blessed 'cause I can relate to this. Wow, this is good. The end of verse 23, "And add prayer to fasting. They commended them to the Lord on whom they believed." You know the last thing in follow-up is commendation. Confirmation, exhortation, organization and commendation. You know what's so neat about that? You know when you've done everything you can do to follow somebody up and you've given them all the doctrine and all the exhortation and you've even functioned as you should administratively and given them an organization to function with. You know what it all boils down to you finally have to do? Say, "Lord, it's your problem." You always come to that, don't you?

You know I've spent myself on some people and I get down to the last and I say, "God, I've done everything I can do." I'm giving this one over to the head of the church, Jesus Himself. You have to do that, don't you? You remember what Paul did? He spent three years telling all the Ephesians doctrine. They must've been so fat and sassy on doctrine it was unbelievable. They must've had spiritual indigestion. It's just so much. He says, "Three years I've been feeding you doctrine. I've been exhorting you, I've been loving you, I've been crying, been warning you" and he gets all done with this and he's gonna leave and he says, "Now I'll tell you" verse 22, chapter 20, "I commend you to God!" and he walked out. I'm glad that that's the final knot on the string of follow-up, aren't you, that it's God's? I'd hate to have it end by saying, "Now if you haven't done what needs to be done you're gonna get zapped by a divine lightning bolt." Ooh. Final disposition is God's. Just give 'em to God.

Give 'em over to God.

Well those guys went all the way back and did all that follow-up. We'll just look at this one quickly and we'll be done - commitment, the seventh. You say boy, they must've been tired. Tired? How about bruised? How about weary? How about overdone physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually? How about wiped out? I mean they had had it. It's just unbelievable what they had gone through, and this had been going on for at least a year and a half untiringly. Now they're going back home. They finished. They're going home. Gonna have to cross the Taurus Mountains again with all the robbers and all that stuff and fast rivers. Oh, brother.

Verse 24, "After they had passed throughout Pisidia and went back through Antioch, came through Pisidia, they came through Pamphylia, which is a little area on the coast, and when they had preached the Word in Perga they went down to Attalia." You know they came to Pamphylia and before they went the last 18 miles to the little port of Attalia, what did they do? They preached again. You say, "The guys are out of their minds. Why don't they take a rest?" Commitment. They preached the Word. You say, "You're crazy! Why don't you just relax?" People wonder sometimes, "Why do you study? Why do you do this? Why do you expend yourself?" They say to missionaries, "Why do you give yourselves like that?" And I love what Paul says. He doesn't take any glory. He says, "I'm very dedicated. I love the Lord." Give them all that super pious kind of thing.

1 Corinthians 9:16, "For though I preach the Gospel I have nothing to glory of. Don't pat me on the back. Why? Necessity is laid on me. Whoa is unto me if I preach not the Gospel. Paul says, "If I don't preach the Gospel I get sick. I just do this so I don't have to live with a messed up conscious. Don't pat me on the back. I do it because I have to do it. Whoa is unto me if I preach not the Gospel. He called me to do it. He told me to do it. What do you expect me to do?" Let me tell you something, people, that's the test of your commitment. Not what you do when you're healthy and when you're relaxed and when you're refreshed but are you just as committed wiped out for the ministry that God has called you to do? Some people are looking for the littlest excuse to get off the hook of doing what they know they ought to be doing, not these guys. They had every reason not to preach in Perga. Commitment says I don't care what state I am. I'm gonna do what God called me to do. Whoa is unto me if I preach not the Gospel. I don't know a lot about that but I know a little about what he feels like.

Now the last of the eight qualities and the capital of all of them, praise to God. So these guys came back, it says in verse 26, "They sailed to Antioch of Syria" the different Antioch where they started, "Where they'd been commended to the grace of God for which the work they had fulfilled." Stop right there. I can imagine them on that boat going across the Mediterranean. I'm sure everybody on the boat got evangelized 15 times over but anyway, they finally got to a little port just near the city of Antioch. Can you imagine when they hustled up the hills and arrived at Antioch and nobody had heard from them for a year and a half to two years? These are the two most beloved people in the church and they arrived and they probably looked emaciated and scrawny and scarred all up from

beatings with rods and whips and stone. I mean they were a mess, and they arrived and what a joyous time. Can you imagine what a joyous time? You probably say, "I bet they had a testimonial banquet. Probably gave them a little plaque that said, 'For successful missionary effort above and beyond the call of duty, Paul and Barnabas." No such thing. Verse 27, "When they come and gathered the church together they reviewed all that they had done." Is that what it says? Oh, it doesn't say that. All that God had done with them. You know what they saw themselves as? Tools. God was the master carpenter.

They just said, "Hey, you know what God did? God opened the door and God did this and we were there." That' all. That's all God wants anybody to do is be there and He'll do it all. It's when you start trying to do it in your own energy you get messed up. And there abode a long time with the disciples. They stayed and picked up their work of pastorate and it was then and during that time that Paul wrote back to the Galatians the letter of Galatians. They gave all the glory to God. That's so beautiful. Let me close with an absolutely thrilling footnote. Look at the end of verse 26. It says that they had sailed to Antioch where they commended to the grace of God "for the work which they" - what's the last word? "Fulfilled." I can't tell you what that word says to me. You know what it means? They did it. God said, "Go do it" and they did it. They fulfilled it. Most Christians God says, "Go do it" and they don't do it, but there are some Christians in the history of the church along the line and God says they did it. They did it.

If I came to the end of my life and if God said to me, "John, anything You want me to say I'd like to say" you know what I'd like Him to say? "John, you did it. I gave it to you to do and you did it." That's what I want here. Well - what? Done. I mean I want to do it. I like that. Paul came to the end of his life and says, "I'm ready to die. I did it. Finished the course, fought the good fight, kept the faith. Okay, Lord. I'm ready. I did it."

Boy, I'll tell ya, if we all did it what would be done? Do it, will ya? Whatever it is God is calling you to do, do it. You've got to have these characteristics - know your gifts, be bold, divine power, humility, persistence, follow-up, commitment, and give Him all the glory and do it. Applications are open incidentally for successful missionaries. If you'd like to apply, God is waiting. Let's pray.

Thank You, Lord. Thank you that throughout the history of the church some people did it. God help us to do it, whatever it is He gifted us and called us to do. We love You, Father and we want to give you all the glory for whatever is done. Praise you in Jesus name. Amen.

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