

## Digging Deeper: Acts 14:21–28

Sermon Series: The Journey

Week 1

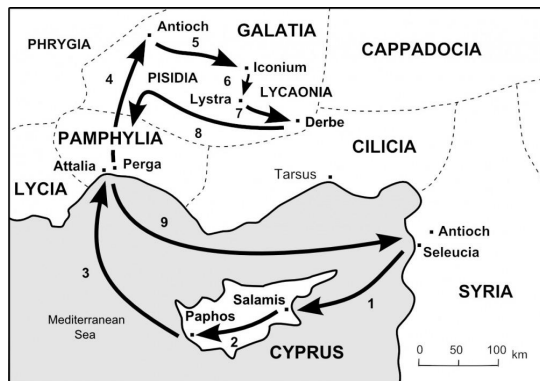
### Introduction

The passage (Acts 14:21–28) before us has some important insights for us as we observe how the early church through Paul and Barnabas recognized the vital importance of not only evangelism, but growth and maturity in discipleship. Read the passage each day as you go through this guide.

### Day One

#### Retracing your steps

After Paul's commissioning (Acts 13:2) Paul begins his first missionary trip going through Antioch (Syria), Seleucia, Cyprus, Perga, Pisidian Antioch (Galatia), Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and returning to Antioch (Galatia).



A couple of reasons you should look at this map for the purpose of this study is to note there are two Antioch's. The first the starting point in Syria and the second in Galatia. The second reason is to note that the city of Derbe which becomes a turn-around spot for Paul and Barnabas is much closer to the Antioch where Paul and Barnabas would end their trip. Why is this noteworthy? To me it indicates that they recognized the importance of retracing their steps.

They had spent time in synagogues and preaching, even performing a miracle by healing a man who was lame from his birth (Acts 14:8-10). This created a confusion in this pagan city as this miracle was attributed to Paul and Barnabas as if they were gods (Zeus and Hermes) who had come to their city. In refuting the claims of them being a god, Paul and Barnabas shared the good news of the gospel (Acts 14:14-18) to

no avail. Jews from Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra and convinced the crowds against Paul and Barnabas which resulted in the stoning of Paul who was drug out of the city and left for dead. He was not! Hard to tell if there was a miracle of Paul being raised from the dead here but certainly he rose as if from the dead and returned to the city and in all probability resumed sharing the good news. The next day he left the city for Derbe.

It was at Derbe where Paul and Barnabas laid out their plans to retrace their steps back through the many cities where they had preached and saw people become followers of Christ. We need to ask ourselves why and further what the implications are.

Paul and Barnabas had just seen that many people had just recently thought of them as gods rather than messengers of the gospel. These missionaries could not afford that falsehood to take root in cities they had just visited. So, while it was easier to return to their starting point by the closest route, they retrace their steps all the while teaching and encouraging.

What can this teach us? I suspect all of us need to remind ourselves of those with whom we have shared the gospel and realize perhaps we need to retrace our steps with them as well. We dare not forget the importance of follow-up when we share the gospel.

So, here's a couple of questions to think of:

Do we value the follow-up as much as the presentation of the gospel?

Is there someone you know who has accepted the good news but could possibly benefit with a follow-up from you?

Do you think it would be valuable in your prayer time to ask God if there is someone in your sphere of influence that would benefit from your *retracing the steps* and be built up in their faith? Putting it another way, whom could God lay on your heart to be a blessing to by *retracing the steps*?

## **Day Two**

### Strengthening the disciples in anticipation of hardships

Paul and Barnabas left the city of Derbe and went back to the cities in which they had seen many become followers of Christ and Luke (the writer of Acts) tells us the whole purpose of retracing their steps. The vital follow-up as the disciples knew the possibility existed of persecution and perhaps even death as Paul had just experienced himself (Acts 14:19,20). These new believers needed to understand that being a follower of Christ did not exempt them from hardships and persecutions, rather it almost guaranteed it.

These disciples had to strengthen these new believers. While we do not have the words or acts of the disciples in their strengthening of these believers, we do know that they were effective as these new groups of believers as leaders grew from within each body of believers (Acts 14:23). These new believers had to be grounded in the truth of God's purposes even during hardships

*"For Paul, everything grew in the field of God's new world. His gospel was rooted in Jewish creational monotheism; his gospel proclaimed that in Jesus the Messiah a whole new creation, a new cosmos, had come to birth; his gospel articulated the truth about the world, about its creator, about all human life; those who believed this gospel formed the community in which that truth came to life." -- N.T. Wright in Paul and the Faithfulness of God*

Some great questions for us to consider:

As God's word is the primary source of strength of believers, what do I need to do to adequately prepare myself for this task? (Here's an obvious hint: become a scholar of the Word!)

What should I commit myself to today that will help me become an effective teacher to others? What opportunities are available to me through my church to help strengthen other believers?

Who do I need to contact to make myself available for this privilege?

### **Day Three**

#### Encouragement to remain true to the faith

*"When Paul wanted to encourage Christians he did not say their breakthrough was around the corner, he helped them to make sense of their suffering in light of the coming reign of Christ. If we suffer with him, we will reign with him." -- Esau McCaulley*

Paul's focus in his encouragement was for believers to remain true to the faith. In every generation and culture there are always competitors to one's faith. In Paul's day some of those competitors would include the worship of other gods, the pressure of society or culture or even doubt in the power and reality of the gospel message which Paul had given them. As we look at these competitors, we must recognize these competitors are just as real today.

Questions for today

What is a competitor for true faith in my own life? If you struggle for an answer, ask God to show you what competition you need to guard against for your faith.

Write down what you believe to be the difference between *encouragement* and *strengthening*. What are the significant differences?

Who is God placing on your heart that needs encouragement from me today?

What am I going to do about it?

## **Day Four**

### Prayer and fasting for committed elders

Paul and Barnabas give us insight to leadership within the church as they retrace the steps of their missionary journey. Leadership first required these leaders to those who trust was in the Lord. It is apparent that trust in the Lord would be obvious to not only the church but to Paul and Barnabas who had come to their community with the message of the gospel.

We also see the reliance on prayer and fasting for direction on whom the leadership should fall. This was a serious decision for the church. Popularity within the community or personal charisma were not the characteristics the church needed. Among those considered, trust in the Lord and a desire to follow God's direction through prayer and fasting were essential.

In this short recounting of this missionary journey God chooses to reveal in His word that trust in Him is paramount for leaders. Perhaps there were even some who knew of Barnabas' gift to the church earlier and recognized you couldn't buy leadership within the church; it is earned through demonstration of trust in the Lord.

Questions for our consideration:

How have our leaders demonstrated trust in the Lord within our church?

What are some constructive ways for the church to engage in prayer and fasting in the selection of its leaders?

If we recognize the need for prayer and fasting in the selection of our elders, do you believe prayer and fasting is needed for our elders as they serve the church?

Make a list of elders within our church and include them in your prayer time on a regular basis.

## **Day Five**

### Celebration of open doors

The return home to the sending church (Antioch of Syria) was undoubtedly a joyous time. Their missionaries of the good news, Paul and Barnabas, were reporting of the work God had done through them. Let's look at this closely.

First, they reported the work was completed. They finished their task! There was nothing left undone. They had evangelized, they had disciplined, they had organized

churches! It is no wonder the people of the Antioch church kept Paul and Barnabas there for an extended time. They heard the stories of God's grace to the people and cities which their missionaries visited. They heard the stories of God's grace to Paul and Barnabas. And they heard the story of God fulfilling one of the promises he had given to the world with the birth of his Son! (See Isaiah 42:6), Luke 2:29-32, Acts 13:47)

Note also to whom they gave the credit or praise for this work being done – God. It was God working through them that accomplished the task. It doesn't seem Paul and Barnabas are sharing the spotlight here. God gets the glory. God has opened the doors!

Think on these things:

When was the last time you gave God glory for using you?

What was the reaction of those with whom you shared God's working?

How can we help each other to give God praise for his work within us and through us?