



UNSTOPPABLE: Stonewall Christians

On the Road Again – Acts 14:1–28

Tim Badal | October 7, 2018



We're continuing today in our series called "Unstoppable," from the book of Acts. Last year we did the first 13 chapters of the book of Acts under the heading "Unfinished." We're picking that series up as we look through chapters 13–28. These focus on the life, ministry and mission trips of the Apostle Paul, which we've placed under the heading "Unstoppable."

Today we're covering a large portion of Scripture—28 verses—in Acts 14. We'll see a redundant pattern in Paul's ministry. He and Barnabas go into a city, they preach the gospel to people, some believe and others don't. Those who don't get upset; those who do are on fire for the Lord. Sometimes Paul and Barnabas have to leave the city; sometimes they stay for a period of time.

Even though this is a pattern, Luke has written these things under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for a purpose, so we need to draw out some conclusions from what at times seems to be a broken record. Let's read Acts 14:1–28:

Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. ² But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³ So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. ⁴ But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. ⁵ When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, ⁶ they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, ⁷ and there they continued to preach the gospel.

⁸ Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, ¹⁰ said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. ¹¹ And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. ¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, ¹⁵ "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. ¹⁶ In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." ¹⁸ Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

¹⁹ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. ²⁰ But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. ²¹ When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

²⁴ Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. ²⁵ And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, ²⁶ and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. ²⁷ And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ And they remained no little time with the disciples.

When I was growing up, at some point in my high school days I was given a nickname. Nicknames are used to tell a little bit more about a person. All of you probably know my last name is Badal. At some point, I don't remember when, I started getting called "Bad Al." My friends liked it, so instead of "Tim," Bad Al was it. My mom didn't like it, saying she wasn't a fan of the name Al and didn't like that I was called bad. But my teachers said, "If the shoe fits, wear it." Since I was one bad character, it worked for them. They even began to call me Bad Al in the classroom. Hopefully most nicknames aren't derogatory, but they often can reveal more than we want them to.

Still, my favorite nickname in all of human history is the nickname "Stonewall." Thomas Jackson was a general in the Confederate army and fought on their side, even though as a God-fearing man he abhorred the evil of slavery. It had to be difficult fighting against the country he loved, although I'm not sure about his politics. In his own words, he was a Southerner who did not sympathize with slaveholding and the slave trade.

Jackson worked his way up from the Virginia Military Institute to the Confederate's general corp. He was a Brigadier General at the Battle of Manassas, the first battle of Bull Run in northern Virginia. It was one of the first major battles of the war in 1861 and he was known before that battle as Thomas Jackson. But forever after that he would be named Stonewall. Even on his tomb it says, "Thomas Stonewall Jackson."

Where did he get that nickname? In that Battle of Bull Run at Manassas, the Confederacy was losing badly. Retreats were happening everywhere. A neighboring general who had called for his people to stand fast, then watched them run in fear as the battle raged on, pointed over to a high place on the battlefield where Stonewall Jackson was standing. That general called out to his troops, "I want you to stand like Jackson is—like a stone wall, impregnable, immovable in the middle of hardship and struggles. Stand fast. Don't run. Don't give up your place, even when the going gets tough."

Acts 14 is a picture where I think Paul and Barnabas could earn the nicknames of Stonewall Paul and Stonewall Barnabas. This should remind us to stand fast and press on. President Calvin Coolidge shared these words about persistence and forbearance under difficult circumstances:

Press on! Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.

Based on Acts 14, we might conclude that persistence and determination are something that the modern church has given up on. Yet God calls us over and over to a life of perseverance and grit, of sticking with it even when the going gets tough. Jesus told His disciples that in this world they would have trouble (John 16:31–33). No matter what the TV preachers tell you, in this world we will have trouble.

Jesus also told them, "The reason you can persevere is that I have overcome the world. So take heart—the battle has already been won." We can be confident and remain steadfast through trouble and tribulation because we serve a God Who has overcome it all. Even in the middle of the battle, we are safe.

The persistence we see in Acts 14 was about them dealing with a medical issue or a relational issue. It wasn't even the challenge of maintaining holiness in their lives. Rather, the theme we find in this chapter was their persistent, bold proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I think Luke realized that this would be something his readers would struggle with.

Twice in this passage we do see Paul and Barnabas fleeing a difficult situation. We might wonder if their persistence was lacking in those cases. But there are times and situations when we should run and not stay to preach the gospel. In both places in this passage where we see Paul and Barnabas leaving, they were about to be killed. That might be a good reason to get out. We might conclude that we've been given a "hall pass" to flee and let that part of a mission go when that happens.

But let's honestly think back over our past week. Very few of us were on mission for Christ and none of us received death threats or were having rocks thrown at us to the point of near death. When and if that happens to you, you have your pastor's permission: "Run like the wind!"

Yet the dominant theme in Acts 14 is “they remained,” “they continued,” “they went on,” “they returned.” They fulfilled their mission. Verse 28 concludes, *“They remained no little time with the disciples.”* They never quit nor gave up. Over and over again we see them persisting through good times or bad. Whether the gospel was received or was thrown back in their faces, they continued to faithfully preach the truth.

So what excuse, what distraction, do we have that keeps us from proclaiming the gospel these men loved so much? Why isn’t the gospel that near and dear to us? What keeps us from proclaiming this message in a place where we enjoy so much freedom and have so many opportunities?

Before I look at three characteristics of what I want to call “Stonewall Christianity,” let’s review where we’ve been in Acts. In Acts 13, everything starts in the church in Antioch, Syria. In verses one to three, the church had gathered together for worship and fasting and prayer. During that service, the leaders were clearly told by God to send out Paul and Barnabas. They didn’t know where they’re going or how they would do it, but they knew they had been called.

They first went to the port city of Seleucia and then across the sea to the island of Cyprus. They landed in Salamis and began to preach across the island, ending up in Pathos. There we’re told that the governor of the land, Sergius Paulus, heard about them and asked to hear more from them. They met with him and, in the process, ran into the false Jewish prophet Elymas Bar-Jesus. Because this man sought to blind the eyes of Sergius Paulus, Paul struck him blind.

After preaching through the area, Paul and Barnabas decided to leave the island. But at that point, John Mark, who was with them, decided he was not up for more persevering. We aren’t really sure why he left, but he decided not to go on. So Paul and the others went on to Pamphylia, to Perga, Italia, then they went on to another Antioch, called Antioch Pisidia, where they continued to preach the gospel.

Now in Acts 14:1 we find them moving on to Iconium, in the region called Lycaonia. After that they went to Derbe and Lystra, then they turned around and returned to these same cities. These are real places we can visit today, although most of them are just ruins rather than functioning cities. Through all these travels, they proved to be Stonewall Christians. When the going got tough, they remained steadfast, continuing to preach the gospel.

Let’s look at three things that characterize what I’m calling Stonewall Christians, because God is giving the same call to us.

Stonewall Christians are committed to the cause.

We were told in Acts 13 that Paul and Barnabas had been set apart by the Holy Spirit to do a certain work. But what was that work? Was it relief work? Building houses? Serving soup at the homeless shelter? No, they were specifically told to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. All those other efforts are good things that we should take part in, but the number one purpose we have as followers of Christ is to proclaim the excellencies of Him Who called us out of darkness and brought us into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).

Here’s why. Anybody can build a house or serve soup. While we should do these things, we must never set aside the main focus of our lives as Christians, which is to be holy so that we can share the gospel with all who will listen—something only we can do. Others won’t share the good news of Jesus Christ if they don’t believe it, so it’s on us. But far too many of us have not done this in years—perhaps because we aren’t fully equipped. What does sharing the gospel involve?

Knowing what it is.

The cause to which we must be committed is spelled out no less than three times in Acts 14:1–7. Notice in verse one that they *“...spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.”* Their conversation moved people to believe in Jesus Christ. Then in verse three we read that they remained for a long time, doing what? *“...[S]peaking boldly for the Lord.”* They spoke as weak vessels, but look at what the Lord did: He *“bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.”*

Third, in verse seven, as they went throughout all these cities, *“...they continued to preach the gospel.”* They kept with their mission. This is the lesson for us in Acts 14: we must persist in the preaching of God’s Word and the proclamation of the gospel. If we don’t, people won’t hear it and be saved. Paul and his friends knew what their mission was.

Ask yourself when was the last time you actually shared the gospel with someone? Did you tell them that when you received Christ you experienced forgiveness of your sins and cleansing from unrighteousness—and they can experience that as well? Far too many of us in our country rarely if ever share the gospel. We are failing at the very mission God has called us to. Why? I think it

may be because we've bought into some lies. We need to remember that lies come from the devil and we must not fall prey to his deceptions.

Lie #1— "The reason I'm not sharing the gospel is that's the job of pastors and missionaries." Well, that makes no sense at all. We're going to watch football today—at least some of us will. Imagine if during the huddle the quarterback says, "Here's our mission—to get the ball into the end zone." The team says, "Yep, we got that." They get into their stances and the quarterback yells "Omaha" 14 times, like Peyton Manning did. He hikes the ball, then he watches as everyone else on the team simply stands up and stares at him. What would happen to that quarterback? He would go out in a body bag.

That's what happens when people buy into the lie that pastors and missionaries are the only ones who are to preach the gospel. And you wonder why pastors and missionaries are leaving the ministry in droves. We all should be working together to get to the goal. We should all be on mission for Christ. But when the ball gets hiked and it's time to preach the gospel, we fold our arms and let the ones who are preaching take the full weight of the world against them. That's a travesty from the pit of hell. Nowhere in the Bible does it ever make a distinction regarding who is to preach the gospel.

This discussion came up in small groups this week and I got reports back from the leaders. The groups asked, "Why are we talking about this? This isn't for us." Baloney! If it's not for us, then we're a country club, folks. We might as well close this place up if we're not on fire for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This gospel is the only hope in the world and if you're not going to share that hope, then get out of the way. Don't call yourself a Christ follower, because that's what Christ followers do. We share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world and if we're not doing that, we're just playing a game. And I'll tell you the One Who's not interested in our game. It's God. The Bible makes it clear that God sent Jesus to seek and save that which is lost (Luke 19:10). If He didn't have us here for that reason, we would have been raptured a long time ago. We're here for a purpose: to boldly proclaim the gospel. It's not for pastors and missionaries alone. Should we lead it? Yes. Should we be passionate about it? Yes. But we're all to be working toward the same goal.

Lie #2— "We have to wait for the perfect time." You're one step farther in the process—you don't believe the lie that it's not for you. You accept the responsibility and I love that. That's a great first step. Yet you're waiting for this magical time when the sky opens up, a beam of light falls on you, and a voice from heaven says, "Now witness to Tom." Well, who's Tom? "The man standing right next to you." This guy? "That guy." "Okay, God, got it. Perfect time. I'm ready."

When I was young, I watched the girls jump rope on the playground. They would jump with one rope, then to really freak out the boys, they would jump a second rope. They called it Double Dutch. I don't know if Dutch people everywhere jump with two jump ropes. Being an overweight kid, I didn't get anywhere near a jump rope. Too much bouncing. But I watched from afar. There was a girl in my class in elementary school who would always say, "I'm next! I'm next!" The jumping would start, and the girls would sing songs—which freaked out the boys something fierce. We didn't understand. But that girl who wanted to jump would never actually jump in. She'd stand there ready to go, but in spite of the encouraging calls from the other girls, she never jumped.

Christians, if we're really honest, we can be the same way when it comes to witnessing. We're waiting for the right feeling, or that light shining down from the Lord, or that voice, "This is Tom—you need to witness to him." We see opportunities, but we always pull back, then we give up. The bell rings and we go back into class. But we keep telling ourselves, "When the next opportunity comes, I'll do it." If that's where you are, you've bought into a lie and you're not on mission for Christ and His Kingdom.

Lie #3— "This isn't the right place to do it." What we're assuming is that there is a right place to preach the gospel. That sounds really, really good. "Yeah, there are good times to share the gospel and there are bad times to share the gospel."

Let me paint a picture for you. The building is on fire. You know that, but the other people in the building don't know the building is on fire. People end up dying because of the fire and others will say, "You knew about the fire." Yeah, but I just didn't think it was the right time to tell people about it." That seems moronic, doesn't it? But that's what we're doing.

We too often think, "Well, I surely shouldn't share the gospel at work—that's not the right place to do it. I might lose my job." I get a religious freedom newsfeed on my email from a legal firm that follows these things. I can tell you they've encountered a handful of cases where people have actually lost their jobs for sharing Christ. It can really happen. But in a country of 300 million people, my email hasn't been shut down with all those cases. Is there a chance you could lose your job? Yes, there's a real chance—depending on what kind of job you have. But there's also a chance I can walk out of here, get into my car, and a tree could fall on me. Does that mean I don't go to the parking lot?

Let's get real, folks. There are things we need to be worried about. The Bible says the Kingdom of God is found through tribulation. Paul reminded people of that reality. But there are many opportunities to be had, so the right place to share the gospel is everywhere, every time.

We just saw a picture of our students who have gone to a place on their school property to pray and study God's Word. Why in the world the church didn't give that picture a standing ovation I'm not sure. That is what we should be doing as Christ followers. We should be as bold as our kids. They are running the same risks you and I do in our offices. Their friends might abandon them. But we're not worthy to carry those students' sandals for what they're doing. We can say, "Great, kids! Keep it up!" It's a cancer on us, a pox on our house, that we, as the mature Christ followers we believe we are, don't have that kind of courage.

What is our mission? To preach Christ.

Lie #4— "Because I find it difficult, it must not be in God's plan." You're saying, "I'm willing to do it, but the second I get opposition, I'm done, God. It's just not working." Let's deal with this logic quickly. Every week, one of the students in my home comes to me and says, "School is hard, Dad. I don't want to do it." Do you know what I say to them? "It must not be God's will. I don't know why these teachers are making it so hard on you. You might as well stay home, son. It's surely not God's will."

Then I come home and say to Amanda, "Work was really a pain today. I'm in need of a vacation." Amanda could respond, "You know what? Just quit your job. It's not God's will that you do it, because it's hard and God doesn't want you to have a hard life." Baloney. God says, "In this world you're going to have trouble. It's going to be difficult." No. It's God's will that we suffer and endure hardship like a good soldier.

Those are the lies. Are you buying into one of them?

Who does it include?

Who does our mission include? Who are we to be preaching this gospel to? Notice all the different groups of people who are mentioned in Acts 14: Jews, Greeks, Gentiles, common folk, nameless individuals, the church hierarchy, the religious establishment. There were people who feared God. There were people who worshiped other gods such as Zeus and Hermes. There were people who were open to the gospel message. There were others who were dead against it.

Who did Paul and Barnabas preach to? The same people we need to preach to: all of them. The gospel is for everyone. So don't reduce your idea of who needs the gospel and who doesn't need it based on your socio-economic group, your nationality, your background or your prejudices. Paul and Barnabas didn't just seek out the Jews in these cities. They proclaimed the gospel to all, because they knew the gospel had been given to everyone.

What does it involve?

Paul and Barnabas woke up every morning viewing every interaction as an opportunity to share Christ. Now, did they always preach a full sermon? No.

My dad is phenomenal at this. My dad moves every conversation toward Jesus. I don't care where it starts, he gets there somehow. We were doing some work on a building we own and had an architect there. We were just talking architect stuff. We could tell by the way this guy talked there was no way he was a Christ follower. I was talking about where to put this beam or that beam and my dad stopped us. "Enough talk about the building! Can we not just stop and realize that without the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, we'd all be lost?" I'm thinking, "Are you kidding me?" I felt like dragging Dad out of the building. The guy responded, "What did you say?" Dad said, "You're all about making sure the foundation is right—but is your foundation right?" I was thinking, "Oooh, not bad. That'll preach."

This might be the problem some of those in our small groups were having. When they hear the word "preach," they're thinking about what I'm doing. I'm teaching the Word of God and I've been gifted to do that. Not everybody's gifted to teach in this way. I've received this gift from God and I'm thankful for it. I wouldn't presume to say next week, "Okay, it's someone else's turn," so that we have a revolving door of preachers. That's not what I'm saying.

These disciples spoke to the people in such a way that it pointed them to Jesus. All I'm asking you is are you having conversations that are pointing people to Jesus? It doesn't mean you get to the Romans Road every single time—that will come. Are you telling people of the experience you've had in trusting Jesus as your Savior? Have you told them how God has brought you through trials and difficulties by His grace and mercy? Are you showing people these things?

It's been said that witnessing is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. People are hungry for the gospel. Can you tell them where you found spiritual food? "You're in need of food—here's where you should go." We have to do these things, but where do we gain the ability and fortitude we need? You will never proclaim something you have zero confidence in.

Stonewall Christians are confident in Christ.

The Badals are in search of a new car. I sent Amanda, her father and my son to look at a car yesterday. The nice thing is we're not sure what we're going to get. But I told Amanda, "Go look at this car and see if it's what you want. You can say, 'My husband's not here and I can't make the decision without him.'"

They looked at the car and it didn't start. Amanda said, "The choice was really easy after that." The dealer couldn't push her, because he couldn't get the car started. That's a hard car to sell. I don't know why it didn't start, but it didn't. So I asked her what he said. She said, "He really didn't have a sales pitch after that." Why not? Because he had zero confidence in the product he was trying to get us to buy.

I think one of the reasons we fail at evangelism is we are not convinced ourselves that Jesus is all He says He is. If He was, we'd tell the world about it. That's the secret. That's the goal. That's the desire. "Man, I have been changed by the blood of Jesus Christ. I am not the same person I used to be and because of that, I'm going to share it with the world." When was the last time you went to a great restaurant or watched a great movie? You told the world about it, right?

Jesus died for your sins, took away eternal damnation in hell from you, placed you in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing under heaven, and you can't get your mouth open to proclaim that? I'm going to admit that I'm in the pew with you right now. We are not as enthralled with Jesus, and we are not as confident in Jesus, as we should be.

Paul and Barnabas were confident, and they changed the whole countryside. Not everyone—don't get me wrong. It's not like they spoke and everyone agreed. They had people get angry with them. But their confidence in Christ gave them some things, and here's what confidence in Christ will allow you to do.

This confidence sees God on the move.

We will never see our mission as being unstoppable until we see God as unstoppable. We will never attempt great things for God unless we see God as truly great. We will never be on the move for God unless we believe with our whole being that God Himself is on the move.

You see, our confidence is based solely on Him. In other words, what we believe about God impacts what we do in the world. If we don't think God is all that enthralling to us, we won't act enthralled about Him in the world. If we don't think God is satisfying, then we won't proclaim that God will be all-satisfying to anyone else. If we don't think God can truly change lives, then we're going to pick and choose whom we share the gospel with. Surely that hardened criminal, surely that person living in debauchery—they can't change, because God can't change them. But when we see God on the move, then we will go to places where there are helpless and hopeless causes. We'll preach the gospel, and we'll see lives changed. Where do we see this in Acts 14? Look at Acts 14:8: "*Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked.*" Luke has presented this man to us as hopeless. Three times he says it: he was crippled, he could not use his feet and he had never walked.

What Paul could have done is what we do: we walk away from those who are hopeless and turn to those who, humanly speaking, we think might be open to the gospel. But Paul saw this man and looked intently into his eyes. It says that Paul saw his faith. I don't know how Paul did that, but I've noticed at times that when I'm in step with God, I can sense spiritual things taking place.

I think the Spirit of God was on Paul and he saw something only God would reveal to him. He looked at that man and said, "You need to get up and walk. You need to believe what we're preaching." The man did and was healed! Part of the reason we're not proclaiming Christ is we're like that girl waiting for an opportunity, but not looking at God. We should be looking to God Who is on the move everywhere, but we're just not looking for what He's doing.

Years ago, I read *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby, a modern classic that you ought to read. In that book, Blackaby says, "Find out where God is moving and get there." That means we must be on the lookout. Where is God moving? What is God doing in my office place? What is God doing in my school? What is God doing in my neighborhood? In my family? What troubles are people facing? What fears do people have? You need to be "reading the tea leaves," exegeting your community and asking, "How can I bring the gospel to these people?" God will give you the opportunities. He will show you that even in the most hopeless of cases, the gospel can bring hope.

Paul heals the man and the people freak out. “This is great! The gods Hermes and Zeus have entered our city and we’re going to worship them.” The priest comes and says, “I’m going to kill a cow and we’re going to put garlands on you. You are gods and we want to worship you.” What do Paul and Barnabas do?

This confidence stays humble under the spotlight.

A situation like this happens in one of the Star Wars movies, if you remember. I think it’s *Return of the Jedi*. The guys get captured by the Ewok—which are cute little teddy bear creatures. They have their spears pointed at the group of good guys. They come to the conclusion that C3PO, the android, is one of their gods. He understands their language, he’s shiny and they’re thinking, “This is our god.” So they release him. But all of his friends are left. Luke Skywalker—who has Jedi power—says, “You’ve got to fix this. You’ve got to make this work.” So he levitates C3PO. Now the Ewoks are freaking out. Now the gods are mad, and he’s going to be angry. So what do they tell C3PO? “Tell them you’re a god, so we get released.” There’s a saying, “It’s good to be king.” That’s true, but it’s better to be god.

Paul and Barnabas could have used this for an opportunity. They could have gotten anything they wanted. They could have demanded anything from the people. These folks were locked in to anything they would say. But what did they do? They ripped off their clothes, probably to show that they were flesh and blood. “Look, we’re no different than you.” They screamed, “We are not God! We’re just like you, but we’re here to proclaim a message. We are witnesses of the one true God, Who has saved people from their sin. He has given you all kinds of good things, like rain and bountiful harvests. He’s brought us here to tell you about Him.”

A lot of us in our workplaces, our athletics and in the arts—whether in school or at work—are an accomplished group of people. For that I’m thankful. Many of you have received accolades and recognition. I know you’re good, but at no point do I expect that someone will mistake you for a god. Even when people don’t think you’re a god, there is a tendency for you to not have confidence in Christ but confidence in yourself. In Philippians 3:8–11, Paul said that he had more reasons to be confident than anyone, but he considered those reasons to be rubbish. We need to be careful not to let our egos get in the way. Ego, by the way, is an acronym for “edging God out.”

When praise comes our way, we need to do what Paul and Barnabas did. “I’m just like you. I appreciate the nice sentiment, but like you, I’m a sinner in need of God’s grace. There is a God and I’m not Him. Thank you, but let’s get to Jesus.” Paul and Barnabas remained humble.

This confidence remains strong amidst the storm.

After almost being worshiped, Paul and Barnabas experienced whiplash. The Jews came from Iconium and told the people in Lystra, “These guys are trouble. They’re not gods—they’re demons. They’re blasphemers.” They riled up the crowd. It was kind of like Christ’s experience between Palm Sunday and Good Friday, when one day the crowds were worshipping and praising God, but the next day they wanted to crucify Him. The people in Lystra went from worshiping these guys to wanting them dead. They stoned Paul to the point that everyone thought he was dead, then they dragged him out of the city. But Paul got up and soon went back into the city. He didn’t give up and go home to Antioch. He left town for a short time, preaching Christ in Derbe, but then he went back to the cities where he had been, including Lystra, where they had wanted him dead.

This is strong confidence in Christ. Paul was not concerned about what men could do to him. We should also ask, “What can people do to me? What can people do if I stand up for the truth? What can they do if I take a stand for Christ?” They can do a lot, but nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

Stonewall Christians are completing the course.

In verses 21–28, we see Paul and Barnabas finishing the journey God had for them. Whether good, bad or ugly, they kept pressing on. They arrived back in Antioch after visiting all the churches they had planted. We don’t hear anything about burnout. We don’t hear about scheduling conflicts. We don’t hear about discouragement. We see action, and we see thankful hearts. They’re excited. They get home and say, “Listen to all God has done in our lives.”

That’s what our church services need to be about. We should gather together and say, “Look at what God has done this week in my life!” But like so many churches, we find ourselves talking about common things. But these guys got together, and it says in verse 27, “...they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.” They had so much to talk about, “...they remained no little time with the disciples.” It took a while to share about all God had done. On the other hand, we’re ready to hit the doors as soon as I say amen.

For this to be possible, we need to make a choice.

We're entering a new week. Will we be on mission for God? We heard from Ben Hatton last week. He and his family live in a jungle, serving a group of people who have been unreached with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He said, "I love coming back home. I love and need the church. But Tim, can I ask you a question? Maybe I'm just out of it, but when did Christians get that thing?" I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "In our visit back, all I hear Christians talking about is their 'one thing,' but not Christ. It's their workout regimen, their health plan, their kids, their activities—all of these things. Where is the church talking about Jesus? Where's that thing?"

I was grieved, because most of my conversation with him had been about my things. Here's a guy who's on mission for Christ. He didn't ask the question to point out our problems. He genuinely wanted to know the answer. He's an outsider looking at this and trying to figure it out. He wanted to know where this one thing came from—the thing that's bigger than anything else. Whether it's our hobbies, occupations, vacation dreams or our housing decisions—all of this stuff. Why are we talking about that, when the one thing that is indescribable is the gift of Jesus Christ? Don't take my words too literally that you make me out to be a fool. Does that mean we can't talk about those things? No. But surely we can find some balance. Amen?

We're entering a new week and I'm just asking you to bring Christ and the gospel into your conversations. If it's been a ratio of zero Christ, 100% you, make it 1% this week. I'm not asking for 100%. Make it 1%, then the next week let's try for 2%. If it's 10%, let's get to 15%. If it's 50%, let's make it 60%. I'm not asking for a miracle. Maybe I should, but I'm not. What I'm asking in my own life is that I would preach Christ a little bit more this week than I did last week, and that it would grow from there.

For this to be possible, we need to cooperate with God.

God is on the move. God is opening doors. It says at the end of our passage that they rejoiced because God had opened a door. I want you to know that God has opened doors before you this week. Now, am I saying that God opens all doors? No. We're going to learn in a chapter or two from now that God closed a door. Paul even uses the phrase that God closed a door and he couldn't go through it. God opens some doors and closes others.

The problem is that as Christians, we are so not in tune with what God is doing that we ask, "Who left the door open—there's a draft?" I say this somewhat in jest. The door is an opportunity for us to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, but we stand in front of that open door and say, "I wonder what's in the hallway." Changed lives. Cooperate with God this week. Find the doors He's opened and walk through them.

For this to be possible, we need other Christians.

We'll talk about this more next week. But chapter 14 ends where chapter 13 begins, with the church. What's the job of the church? To strengthen the souls of the disciples. Verse 22 says they were *"encouraging them to continue in the faith."*

It's great that you bring your friends here to church, but if you think your friends are brought to church so I can save them or someone else can save them, then you're not on mission for God. The mission of God is that we will go out and be Christ's ambassadors, imploring the world to be reconciled to Him. What is the church's job? To equip you, to grow you, to nurture you and strengthen you, so you'll leave this holy huddle on Sunday morning, then with a righteous and wonderful fervor, you'll head out into far-flung places where you work and live, shining brightly in a dark world. We need to encourage you. We need to love on you. We need to strengthen, guide and serve you, walking you through that process.

I've dedicated myself to that end, so that this church can do the work I know you are capable of. I've seen it and I know it can happen. We are seeing people come to know Christ. We are seeing people being led to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And you have an active part in that. So continue the work, press on, don't give up. Maybe you've been on the sidelines for a while. Well, jump in, because God wants you to be part of it. It's a blessing to be in His work. Preach the gospel, then watch out and see what God does.