


A Five-Day Devotional Journey
July 6 - 12, 2008

Acts 14:1-28

Stand up! Upon your feet! Straight!

Literal translation of Paul's words to a crippled man in Lystra

Stand Up

1 The apostles stayed there a long time

Read. Acts 14:1-7 NLT

The same thing happened in Iconium. Paul and Barnabas went to the Jewish synagogue and preached with such power that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers. Some of the Jews, however, spurned God's message and poisoned the minds of the Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas. But the apostles stayed there a long time, preaching boldly about the grace of the Lord. And the Lord proved their message was true by giving them power to do miraculous signs and wonders. But the people of the town were divided in their opinion about them. Some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. Then a mob of Gentiles and Jews, along with their leaders, decided to attack and stone them. When the apostles learned of it, they fled to the region of Lycaonia—to the towns of Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding area. And there they preached the Good News.

Think.

- Why does Paul keep going to the synagogues first? What reception does he find at the synagogue in Iconium? What results did he initially see? How does this compare with his experience in Antioch of Pisidia?
- How did Paul and Barnabas respond to the intense hostility against them? How did God back up their message? What effect did this have on the opposition and on overall public opinion about Paul and Barnabas? What was the final outcome? What did Paul do?
- Why was there such opposition even in the midst of "signs and wonders"? Why doesn't the miraculous end the debate and hostility?
- When it comes to sharing Jesus with others, who do you naturally reach out to first? Why?
- How does Paul and Barnabas' experience in Iconium affect your personal view of evangelism? Does it encourage you? Scare you? Sober you? Or what?

Pray.

Lord, give me beautiful feet to share your good news — feet that will lovingly stand and not run as soon as it gets difficult to share your life and message with others.

Live. Identify three people with whom you can share Jesus.

Lystra was proving to be a hard nut to crack.

Rome had made the city a colony decades before, and vestiges of Greco-Roman culture and refinement were visible everywhere. But the people remained who they were: people steeped in pagan superstitions and in worship of the gods — particularly Zeus and Hermes, who by local legend had visited their area centuries before in the form of men. Only one home out of a thousand had opened its doors to them — an old couple whose reward was to have their home transformed into a temple while all the other inhospitable homes were destroyed. It was a mistake this population was determined not to repeat. The temple of Zeus before the city stood awaiting their return.

And in their city streets now stood two Jewish missionaries — Paul and Barnabas. They preached, but were finding it hard to break through the dialect and culture of the area. And then Paul saw it in the eyes of a crippled man. He might not understand his words, but he saw that glimmer of faith, of hope — a mustard seed. And Paul called it forth. "Stand up!" In a healing reminiscent of the lame man before another temple's gates, the crippled man sprang up like a torrent just waiting to be unleashed. And now the dam burst, the entire town swept into a sacrificial frenzy. They were certain the two gods had returned after all. Missionaries suddenly find themselves in a sea of bowed bodies — people bowing to *them*. And now Paul and Barnabas stand up, tearing their own garments in horror and then, leaving Jewish mooring of Torah and Prophets, they point the feverish crowd directly to creation and through creation to Jesus. The majority were more confused than convinced, but a small number of disciples formed around the apostolic crew — including a young man named Timothy.

They would listen and learn and live what they and every Christ follower since must understand: that discipleship at its heart is standing up in a fallen culture, not politely accommodating or tolerating or coddling it; that it's being light in dark places, being salt in tasteless earth.

2) Looking straight at him

Read. Acts 14:8-13 NLT

While they were at Lystra, Paul and Barnabas came upon a man with crippled feet. He had been that way from birth, so he had never walked. He was sitting and listening as Paul preached. Looking straight at him, Paul realized he had faith to be healed. So Paul called to him in a loud voice, "Stand up!" And the man jumped to his feet and started walking.

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in their local dialect, "These men are gods in human form!" They decided that Barnabas was the Greek god Zeus and that Paul was Hermes, since he was the chief speaker. Now the temple of Zeus was located just outside the town. So the priest of the temple and the crowd brought bulls and wreaths of flowers to the town gates, and they prepared to offer sacrifices to the apostles.

Think.

- What did Paul see in the crippled man that led to the healing? What do you think tipped Paul off?
- How did this miracle affect the townspeople of Lystra? What conclusion did they reach about Paul and Barnabas? What did they prepare to do?
- How regularly do you find yourself really seeing people — seeing what's inside them, sensing faith or a divine touch on their life? What is the key to this ability?
- When most recently have you been radically misunderstood? What happened? What did you do?

Pray.

Lord, open my eyes to see others, to look intently and naturally (without freaking them out). Help me to see and call forth faith in those around me.

Live. Make a point of really seeing people today.

4) He got up and went back into the town

Read. Acts 14:19-23 NLT

Then some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowds to their side. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of town, thinking he was dead. But as the believers gathered around him, he got up and went back into the town. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

After preaching the Good News in Derbe and making many disciples, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, where they strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them that we must suffer many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God. Paul and Barnabas also appointed elders in every church. With prayer and fasting, they turned the elders over to the care of the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

Think.

- How could the people who had just been ready to worship Paul be so quickly convinced to stone him to death?
- What would you imagine the mood was in that circle of believers standing around Paul's body? If you had been in that circle, how would his suddenly getting up and walking away have affected you? Why does Paul go back into the town? How do you think that affected the people of Lystra?
- Leaving Lystra, where does Paul go now? What did he do? What message did he have for new believers? What support did he put in place for them?

Pray.

Father, you are the God of resurrection, of new life when all seems lost. Give me that reality as a deepening anchor of hope in my life.

Live.

Go out of your way to encourage a fellow believer today.

3) Turn to the living God!

Read. Acts 14:14-18 NLT

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard what was happening, they tore their clothing in dismay and ran out among the people, shouting, "Friends, why are you doing this? We are merely human beings—just like you! We have come to bring you the Good News that you should turn from these worthless things and turn to the living God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. In the past he permitted all the nations to go their own ways, but he never left them without evidence of himself and his goodness. For instance, he sends you rain and good crops and gives you food and joyful hearts." But even with these words, Paul and Barnabas could scarcely restrain the people from sacrificing to them.

Think.

- How did Paul and Barnabas respond to the crowd's intentions? What was the point of tearing their clothes? How does this contrast with Herod's response in similar circumstances back in Acts 12?
- What did Paul say to the people? How would you summarize his message? How had God "witnessed" to this culture? How effective was Paul's speech?
- How do you think you would have handled this or a similar situation? In leading people to the Lord, how do you know when to put a stop to things and when to quietly let them happen and deal with more directly later?
- In what specific ways recently has God left you evidence "of himself and his goodness"?

Pray.

Father, help me to see the evidence of your goodness all around me — and let me have a joyful heart!

Live. Give thanks for specific instances of God's goodness to you.

5) They reported everything God had done

Read. Acts 14:21-28 NLT

Then they traveled back through Pisidia to Pamphylia. They preached the word in Perga, then went down to Attalia. Finally, they returned by ship to Antioch of Syria, where their journey had begun. The believers there had entrusted them to the grace of God to do the work they had now completed. Upon arriving in Antioch, they called the church together and reported everything God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, too. And they stayed there with the believers for a long time.

Read. 1 Corinthians 15:58 Message

With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort.

Think.

- What did Paul and Barnabas do upon their return to Antioch of Syria? What was the essence of their report?
- Which of the following best describes how you feel about your work in ministry and in the church: Worn to a frazzle? Idle? Waiting for an assignment? Productive? Frustrated? Or what?
- To what extent do you share Paul's view of our work as Jesus followers stated in 1 Cor. 15:58? How does this statement encourage you? In your experience, what tends to make the "work of the Lord" seem like a waste of time or effort? How can this be turned around?

Pray.

Lord, keep ever before me the eternal impact of the smallest acts of faith in this world. Teach me to rest, to celebrate, and then launch me out again in your time and way.

Live. Celebrate what God has done in & through you this past year.