

***** Endurance and Conflict *****

The Life and Ministry of Paul—part 6

July 31, 2016

DAY 1: Attitude Adjustors

1. When suffering happens, we need more than just platitudes to anchor us. We need truth that allows us to endure.
2. What fortifies us are the promises of God. They act as our “attitude adjustors.”
3. Last week we saw how the apostle Paul walked back into the city of Lystra after having survived being stoned.

The “ability” to “keep going,” to endure is one of the hallmarks of Christian maturity.

4. Let’s look at Paul’s own advice for learning to endure through suffering. As you read each of today’s verses, underline what strikes you most. Jot down notes under each verse(s).

Romans 5:3 More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

1 Corinthians 15:57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

2 Corinthians 4:16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. ¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Timothy 2:10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory. ¹¹ The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful -- for he cannot deny himself.

2 Tim. 4:5 ...always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry.

4. What struck you most from Paul’s advice regarding endurance? What “anchor” will you remember?

DAY 2: A realistic view of the Christian life

1. Barnabas and Paul returned back through the cities they had first visited.

Acts 14:21b Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ...

2. Amazingly, these were some of the very places where they had met with gigantic persecution, death threats, death plots, and a stoning!

3. Why would they return to those places?!?! Why would you go back to those places?

4. Here's a summary of what Paul and Barnabas told the new converts when they returned to the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch!

Acts 14:22 ...strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

5. If you had been returning to teach the young converts, are these the three most important things you would have told them?

6. They also helped the young churches get organized.

Acts 14:12 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

7. An "elder" and "pastor" come from the same Greek word. We usually think of "elder" as teacher or leader, while we think of "pastor" as shepherd.

Acts 14:24 After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, ²⁵ and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. ²⁶ From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.

8. This is the end of Paul's first missionary journey! If you had been Paul and Barnabas, how would you have reported back about your missionary journey?

Acts 14:27 On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

9. How does Paul report back? What's striking about his report?

DAY 3: Desertion:

1. Relatively early in the first missionary journey, young John Mark, Barnabas' cousin, leaves Barnabas and Saul and returns to Jerusalem.

Acts 13:13 From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

2. We're not told why. Homesick? Illness? The physical exhaustion? We're left to speculate.

3. Whatever it was, Paul took it hard. From Paul's perspective they were on a God-appointed mission that required a high level commitment. Paul felt like John Mark had abandoned them unnecessarily.

4. This is what the military would call "dereliction of duty."

5. What is perplexing about situations like this is how two people can see the same situation so differently! One of my mentors is famous for saying, "People do what makes sense to them."

6. Barnabas and Paul were left in the lurch. They were already traveling by foot, carrying their provisions with them. Ahead of them was a trek over mountainous terrain. They "youngster" with strong legs and a strong back. Deserted.

7. Even the people who seem the most committed to the mission sometimes bail. Sometimes there are good reasons and sometimes there are terrible reasons.

8. This doesn't just happen on the mission field. It happens in every church family. Sometimes, God sends people out, like Paul and Barnabas. Sometimes, people leave for legitimate reasons. Sometimes, people leave looking for greener pastures, and sometimes people leave because of disappointment with a church or pastor, broken and unresolved relationships, or worse.

9. Have you ever felt the sting of someone leaving? What thoughts did you have? How did you try to reconcile the competing thought of love for someone, and yet the separation you wish had not occurred?

DAY 4: Conflict

1. In Acts 15, Paul heads to Jerusalem to help make an important decision. After his return...

Acts 15:36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."

³⁷ *Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them,*

³⁸ *but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.*

³⁹ *They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left. ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.*

2. There are some things you just wish you didn't see in scripture. This is one of them. These two men were so instrumental in launching the gospel into the Gentile world, yet they came to loggerheads that they simply could not agree on such a momentous decision.

3. Even the best missionaries are still human. Even the best of Christians are still human.

4. As disappointed as we are to see this, it is also very instructive to us! There are reasons the Spirit of God chose to include this in scripture. Can you think of one or more reasons this incident is included in scripture?

5. People have honest disagreements about:

___ People,

___ The compilation of a team (or a mission team)

___ Decisions

___ "Judgment calls" regarding character and commitment.

___ How to deal with difficulties.

___ How to plan for likely future scenarios.

6. Have you had any recent honest disagreements about any of these items? How have you dealt with these disagreements?

7. In every disagreement, there is more than one viewpoint. Usually, each viewpoint has some validity to it. This disagreement had two equally valid viewpoints.

Barnabas (John Mark was also his cousin): "If anyone believes in grace, we do! How can we not give John Mark another chance to prove himself?"

Paul: "We are not inviting someone to a picnic where his presence or absence makes little difference. We are in need of men who are mature enough and committed enough to persevere through all kinds of difficulties. He left us in a lurch."

8. How did this disagreement get resolved? Look back at Acts 15:39-40

DAY 5: How to think about conflict; How to respond; How to build relationships

1. We usually don't get very far until someone works really hard to understand the viewpoint of the other, first.

Proverbs 18:2 A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.

2. Romans 12 contains some great verses that pertain to building good relationships, responding in bad relationships, and how to think about your responsibility in relations.

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

¹⁵ *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*

¹⁶ *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

¹⁷ *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.*

¹⁸ *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

¹⁹ *Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

²⁰ *On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*

²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

3. What struck you most about how to:

a. Build good relationships?

b. Respond in bad relationships?

c. Think about relationships? What's my responsibility? What's not my responsibility?

4. Maybe you relate to Paul, having been abandoned in some way, or let down when you were really depending on someone. That kind of pain can turn to resentment and bitterness over time. There are times when you just have to kneel at cross, look into the face of the One who died for you, and tell Him about your pain. The One you're talking to knows what it's like to be abandoned, let down, and skewered. He understands. Only He can heal the wounded heart. We exacerbate our own pain when in our heart we insist that people treat us better. That is something to let go of at the cross.

5. What is your biggest take away from this week's devotions?