

When to Stay or Go

(Acts 14:1-7)

Introduction

1. Series: Jesus accelerates us by the Holy Spirit to grow deeper through His family, wider in our impact for the gospel.
2. 3 premises:
 - a. Service without Jesus = "Religion"/Pharisees.
 - i. An attempt to merit God's favor or salvation through our works apart from Jesus.
 - b. Following Jesus without service = Selfish
 - i. A consumer mentality ("What can I get?") instead of responding to grace with thankful action.
 - c. As we honor Jesus by serving others (ministry/mission), you will have obstacles & opposition (cf. John 15:20).
3. Background: God's focused, intentional, missional movement of the gospel into the Gentile world (cf. Acts 1:8).
 - a. Purpose of Gospel: Jesus brings outsiders together into His family, Kingdom & eternal life (cf. Eph 3:6).
 - b. When we experience obstacles/opposition as we serve God (at church, work, home), should we stay or go?
4. Big Idea: In hardship, endure in ministry/mission for Jesus, until He tells you that you're done.

In opposition, stand firm over the long term [Acts 14:1-3]

1. [1-2] Positive & negative responses to the gospel
 - a. Paul & Barnabas were driven out of Pisidian Antioch to Iconium, and could have been discouraged.
 - i. Iconium: Along Roman imperial highway; sits on high plateau over plains; cold/barren; civilized city.
 - b. [1] Pattern: Preaching to Jews (people familiar with God & the Old Testament Bible) about Jesus.
 - i. Give them the chance to respond to the gospel & join them in God's movement/ministry/mission.
 - ii. Many Jews & Greeks (non-Jewish God-worshippers) respond by believing in Jesus.
 - c. [2] But unbelieving Jewish religious folk try to undermine the gospel & its messengers.
 - i. Religious folk feel their man-made rules/traditions to earn righteousness & salvation are threatened by the message of grace.
 - ii. They poison unchurched people against these "outsiders" & question their intentions.
 - d. How do Paul & Barnabas respond? When should we stay in the face of opposition?
2. [3a] Stand firm for the long term to encourage/equip responsive people.
 - a. Instead of backing down or running away from opposition, "they remained for a long time."
 - i. Why? To encourage/equip responsive people (cf. 14:1) & train them into church leaders.
 - b. Principle: As we serve Jesus & the gospel, when we encounter opposition, stand firm over the long term.
 - i. Goal: We should stay to encourage/equip responsive people into self-sustaining disciples/leaders.
 - ii. Your ministry: At church, work/school, home, other marketplace relationships/ministry.
 - c. There are times we serve God & minister to others, yet feel discouraged by obstacles/opposition.
 - i. Application: Are there people around you who are responsive & need discipling? Stand firm.
3. [3b] Stand firm for the long term to witness God's power & blessing.
 - a. In response to their faithful endurance, Jesus unleashes His power through them to do the miraculous.
 - i. Broken bodies healed; broken minds freed; broken hearts renewed.
 - ii. Freedom from sin, addiction, demonic bondage, the past, brokenness.
 - b. Principle: When we trust & obey Jesus to serve Him/others in opposition, we witness God's power & blessing.
 - i. During times that ministry is hardest is when we experience God's power the most.
 - c. Converse: We may never see God's miraculous power in/through us because we give up too easily when we meet obstacles/opposition.
 - i. We tend to take the path of least resistance.

- ii. We need to build up endurance in Christ by facing painful opposition (cf. Rom 5:3-5).
4. Application: Practical tips to stand firm over the long term.
- a. Sabbath: Worship & rest.
 - i. Not simply killing time or watching TV until your eyes bleed.
 - ii. Being filled by God & through the ways He has designed you (filling activities).
 - iii. Many serve out of their emptiness instead of from the overflow of God filling us up.
 - b. Good friends to offer encouragement/accountability (e.g., “That’s great!” or “That’s crazy!”)
 - i. Ministry is not meant to be done alone (e.g., Jesus sends disciples out 2x2 ;cf. Luke 10:1)
 - ii. At The Crossing, when God gives you a dream for new ministry, you’re required to build a team first.
 - c. Think of ministering to people in terms of “experiments.”
 - i. When you’re trying an experiment, it’s OK to not get it exactly “right”, or even to fail.
 - ii. It removes pressure of performance, failure or burn out.
 - iii. It allows God to be God, and in charge of the fruit.

Only move on in order to fulfill Jesus’ calling [Acts 14:4-7]

1. [4-5] The opposition turns deadly
- a. [4] Despite the miraculous ministry of the apostles (“sent ones”), the city is increasingly divided.
 - i. Some believe the apostles because they experienced Jesus.
 - ii. Some believe the poisonous lies of the religious folk because they want to protect their way of life.
 - b. [5] Large number of Jews & Gentiles, including city politicians & community leaders, form a mob.
 - i. “Mistreat”: Insulting treatment through outrageous behavior; to shame; same word used to “mistreat” Jesus at His arrest (cf. Luke 18:32).
 - ii. Atmosphere of anger toward Jesus, His message & His representatives.
 - c. Threat: To execute them by stoning.
2. [6-7] When to go
- a. [6] They’re tipped off about the mob’s intent & flee the city
 - i. They move from civilized state of Phrygia to backwater, rural state of Lycaonia.
 - ii. Why? Out of fear? Is Paul developing a habit of running (cf. 9:25; 13:51)? Shouldn’t they give up their lives for the sake of Jesus & the gospel (cf. Luke 9:23-24; 2 Tim 2:11-13)?
 - b. It’s not the danger to their own lives, but the threat to the mission/calling Jesus gave them.
 - i. How do we know that?
 - c. [7] They continue their ongoing mission to preach the gospel in Lystra & Derbe.
 - i. They didn’t leave out of fear. They don’t go home; they’re not done; they haven’t given up.
 - ii. Their mission: Paul & Barnabas are set apart & sent out to minister Jesus to people (cf. 13:2).
 - iii. Jesus teaches His disciples: Yes, endure hatred for His sake, but sometimes when persecuted in one town, flee to the next because your work is not done (cf. Matt 10:22-23).
 - 1. When you’re no longer able to fulfill Jesus’ calling in one place, move on to the next.
 - d. Principle: Only move on in order to fulfill Jesus’ continuing calling/mission for you.
 - i. With the rise of collective rejection & death threats, they cannot continue ministry in Iconium.
 - ii. If Jesus called them to stay to suffer or even die, Paul is willing (cf. Phil 1:21).
 - iii. They can’t die in Iconium because Jesus calls them to minister to other cities/groups to complete the forward momentum of the gospel to the ends of the earth. They must move on.
3. Application: You need to be very clear on Jesus’ calling for your ministry.
- a. Otherwise, we waste our time, energy, resources, life on what seems like good things, but not God things.
 - b. What did God call you to? What & who has He given you a passion/burden for? What gifts, abilities & opportunities has He given you to serve, bless & tell others about Jesus?
 - c. To hear/know God’s will & be clear on His calling for you, you must engage Jesus regularly & daily.
 - i. Through study & meditation of His Word, prayer, & other spiritual disciplines.
 - ii. When that becomes clear, stay focused.
 - d. Assess: Do the obstacles/opposition prevent me from continuing to do what Jesus calls me to do?
 - i. If yes, then it is time to move on.
 - ii. Recognize if a situation positively or negatively distracts/prevents you from fulfilling that calling.

Conclusion

1. Encouragement: When it’s time to move on, it’s not the end of your mission or effectiveness for Jesus.

- a. Some feel discouraged or feel like a “failure” in an area of ministering to others for Jesus.
 - i. Fears/lies: “I can’t do it. I’m not good enough. Look how it turned out last time.”
 - b. Did you do what Jesus told you to do?
 - c. Then trust the sovereign God; the fruit is up to Him.
2. Did Paul & Barnabas fail in Iconium?
- a. They faithfully completed what Jesus called/empowered them to do: Establish the gospel/church in the region.
 - i. The collective city/people may reject them, but the message about Jesus has taken root, the Church is firmly established & ready to continue ministering to others there.
 - ii. Unseen fruit: The new believers in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra & Derbe have everything they need to grow, mature & become the Churches in Galatia (whom Paul writes to in the letter to the Galatians).
 - b. Paul & Barnabas moved on when they completed what Jesus called them to do there.
 - i. That is all Jesus asks of us; the results are up to Him.
 - c. Your job, by the power/courage of the Holy Spirit, is to stand firm in the face of opposition.
 - i. Not compromise your witness; tell the truth about Jesus & live out His character.
 - ii. When God gives you discernment that you’ve done all you’re supposed to do in one context & can only continue His mission/calling for you in another, do it.