

Acts 14

Sticks and Stoned

Learning Objective(s)

- Explore how God displays His grace in our daily lives.
- Examine how we sometimes misattribute God's goodness to other things.
- Encourage one another to continue to spread the Gospel even in the face of opposition.

Pray for your time together as a group.



Do you feel like you've ever suffered for doing something good?

Read Out Loud: Previously In Acts

The book of Acts shows how the Holy Spirit – working through early Christians – helped spread the Gospel and build the global church. The book also introduces us to the Apostle Paul – one of the Church's first missionaries, and one of Christianity's most important theologians. Up until this point in Acts, we've seen Paul – who was once a harsh persecutor of Christians named Saul – convert to Christianity and become one of most vocal advocates. Paul becomes friends with another strong Christian leader named Barnabas, and the two men set off on their first missionary journey, aimed at spreading the Gospel of Christ to both Jews and Gentiles. However, this journey is not without its trials and, as we will continue to see, Paul faces staunch opposition.

Part One: Revival of the Fittest

Read Out Loud: Acts 14:1-7 (NIV)

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.



Verse one states that Paul and Barnabas spoke in such a way that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. Do you think it takes a special gift to spread the Gospel?

Possible Answers: It doesn't take a special gift to speak truth. Everyone has different gifting's, and some people are more naturally suited to speak to large crowds than others. However, our comfort level

shouldn't dissuade us all from spreading the gospel among those with whom we have influence.

Reference: 1 Peter 3:15.

? Verse three talks about how God's miracles "bore witness" to Paul's message of His grace. How has God confirmed His grace in your own life?

Leader's Note: Encourage your group to share their personal experiences.

Possible Answers: The Holy Spirit works to give us peace in our lives, confirming that we are all children of God (Romans 8:16-17). God also works in all our lives in a variety of different ways. At different times, He may speak powerfully through prayer, daily devotions, fellowship, friends, dreams, or miraculous moments in our daily lives. He also shows Himself through creation and we can be driven to praise Him when we realize how He's shown Himself to us this way.

? How can we use these personal displays of God's grace to help spread the Gospel today?

Possible Answers: Reminding ourselves of God's work in our lives on a daily basis should help us stay focused on His promises and truth and help us grow excited to share His treasure with those we love. When we walk in the spirit not in the flesh, we better trust and meditate on God's faithfulness. When sharing the Gospel with friends, family, or acquaintances, we can know that God will continue to speak to them and bear witness to the words they've heard from us.

Part Two: Papa Does Preach

Read Out Loud: Acts 14:8-18 (NIV)

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.

? Why do you think that the people of Lystra mistook Paul's miracle as a sign that he and Barnabas were gods?

Possible Answer: Because the people were of a culture that had many gods, and they didn't want to give up the beliefs they were comfortable with (i.e. Zeus) even in the face of a more logical truth. They may have also been internally deceived because they were afraid to go against their culture and the crowd.

? Much like the people of Lystra mistakenly attributed the work of God to their own gods, how do we sometimes miss the work God is doing in our lives or attribute it to other things?

Possible Answer: We are prideful. We want to believe that we have it all together and that we are successful because of the work we do or our innate abilities. We may also feel skeptical or attribute God's miracles to coincidence or luck, which might show a lack of faith in God. However, God is sovereign and ultimately the source of all good things.

? How can we guard our hearts and our church from this type of destructive persuasion?

Possible Answer: A daily devotional and prayer life helps us stay focused on God and recognize His work in our lives. Scripture memorization also leads us to consistently recognize His truths (encourage your groups to start with Psalm 16:2). Additionally, fellowship with other believers helps us stay focused on God even when we feel weak.

Part Three: Rock Bottom

Read Out Loud: Acts 14:8-18 (NIV)

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

Stone Cold Execution

According to numerous first-century sources, a typical stoning in first century Judaism looked like this: At least two eye-witnesses to the accused person's crime had to be present, then the accused's hands were bound behind them and they were pushed, face-first off a drop-off that was twice their height (or more than 18-feet in some accounts) before the two witnesses thrust a heavy rock into the accused's chest. If the victim wasn't dead by this point, anyone who believe they were guilty was free to pick up a stone and throw/drop it on the person from the top of the pit. Whether the accused lived or died during this process was believed to be left to God's judgment. Without question, these stoning's would have been extraordinarily painful and often resulting in lifelong scarring, if not death.

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.

? What might Paul have thought, when he realized those seeking to stone and kill him, were pursuing him from town to town?

Possible Answer: We don't know for sure, but he was likely very discouraged. He may have feared for this life and worried that false teaching was gaining momentum and could spread to new towns, hindering his ministry. He might have even questioned his use in the ministry or felt like quitting at times. However, God's grace and encouragement outshone all those fears and gave him renewed purpose.

Read Aloud: Acts 4:29-31 shows how Peter, John and their friends had previously prayed for strength in the face of opposition:

"And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."

? After reading the passage from Acts 4, what do you think encouraged the Jews to continue preaching – even in the face of strong opposition?

Possible Answers: They had prayed for strength to continue earlier in Acts and were being supported by God in their ministry. The Holy Spirit was their source of strength. Verse 3 states that God bore witness to the word of his grace – all the things Paul and Barnabas were talking about, and they were probably encouraged by God's support in their lives.

? Why do you think Paul decided to return to the places that had rejected him and even tried to stone him the first time he preached the Gospel?

Possible Answers: His love for God and people. Paul displayed the fruit of the Spirit as he spread the Gospel. Paul returned to the areas in which he had shared the gospel to remind new believers of the truth and to encourage them in their faith. It was clear that he wasn't simply checking off places to visit but truly had a love for the people.

? Have you ever tried to share the Gospel but walked away hurt from the experience? What happened?

? Verse 22 says that, after being stoned, Paul encouraged the disciples “to continue in the faith.” What can we do to fill ourselves with the same level of endurance and courage to spread the Gospel?

Possible Answers: Focus on the Spirit and the Gospel first to gain the fruit. Then share out of an overflow that the Gospel gives us. Though one needs determination and perseverance to share God’s word in the face of conflict or even danger, the Gospel requires love as a messenger or it’s a clanging cymbal.

For Discussion and Accountability

? How does God “bear witness” or testify to His faithfulness in my life?

? How might being better aware of God’s work in my life on a daily basis encourage me to further the Gospel?