

CHANGE IS GOOD: Building Excitement for Life Transformation

"CHANGE OF PACE" ACTS 14:1-7

This Week's Core Competency

Giving Away My Faith – I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes. Ephesians 6:19, 20 *Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

Bill Hybels has written a helpful book on giving away your faith called *Just Walk Across the Room*. The title is derived from a story he tells in the opening chapter about a fellow who walked across the room at a social gathering to speak to another man who was standing alone by the far wall. Their initial conversation led to future conversations that led to a friendship that led to talking about faith. "One week, I even took the opportunity to ask him about his beliefs," the man said. "I'd been a Christian as a kid but had left God, left the faith, left it all because the church my family attended was so racially prejudiced. I wanted no part of that Christianity. When the tables turned and I was on the receiving end of his faith story, he patiently described why he'd given his whole life to this person named Jesus Christ. I couldn't believe

Devoted followers of Christ acknowledge that what God treasures first (and there is no close second) is people.

-Bill Hybels

how easily the conversations evolved—and how respectfully and sensitively he conveyed his love for God. Despite our deep-seated religious differences, we were becoming fast friends."

Their conversations about spiritual things went on for some time; ultimately the man put his faith in Christ. He described what happened this way. "There finally came a day—I remember being home alone when this happened—that I felt totally compelled to pray to God. I knelt beside my bed, told God everything I was feeling, and in the end gave my life to Jesus Christ. And in the space of about a week, that single decision changed everything in my world! Every single thing."

The book calls the giving-away-your-faith life, "Living in 3D." "When effective walk-across-the-room people interact with others in their world, they: Develop friendships—by engaging in the lives of people around them; Discover stories—before sharing their own story and God's redemptive story; and Discern next steps—by following the Holy Spirit's directions" (60). In a nutshell, they make talking about spiritual things a natural part of their lifestyle. Unlike the person who told me, "I try to avoid talking about religion and politics," they look for opportunities to turn conversations about everyday things into conversations about spiritual things. These conversations don't necessarily include sharing the gospel—not that that's a bad thing—but some of them do. And they don't necessarily end with

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someone giving his life to Christ—not that that's a bad thing either—but some of them do and others do later. Having spiritual conversations is like sowing seed. The more you sow the greater the harvest. Sure some seed will fall on hardpan and some among sandburs. Some will be snatched up by grackles. But some will germinate, take root, and produce a crop yielding a hundred times what was sown. So if you want to increase your harvest, sow more seed—have more spiritual conversations.

A Situation for Discussion

Melissa doesn't care much for the people she works with. She gets along with them all right and works cooperatively enough with them; she just doesn't like being around them that much. She's offended by the philandering of her office manager, struggles to take direction from her inexperienced supervisor, and is fed up with the wrongheaded political views of the finance person in the cubicle next to her. Then there's that guy in sales. She's sick and tired of his filthy mouth. She can't stand his dirty jokes but can't avoid overhearing them either. To make matters worse, the way he lives turns her stomach. On the other end of extreme, is her new-age-spirituality office friend. They stumble into conversations about spiritual things every now and then, but the conversations are usually short because her "friend's" spirituality makes no sense to Melissa. However, the *piece de resistance* is her sloughing team member, the one who's always trying to pawn her work off on others. She really gets Melissa's goat. Needless to say Melissa doesn't hang out with these people because as far as she's concerned, she has nothing, absolutely nothing, in common with them. She's not into irreligious people or religious people either if their religious views are very different from her own.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Acts 14:1-7

1At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. 2But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and

wonders. 4The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. 5There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. 6But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, 7where they continued to preach the good news.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Bracket "Iconium" in v. 1.
- * Underline "as usual" in v. 1.
- * Circle "synagogue" in v. 1.
- * Circle "Gentiles" in vv. 1, 2.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 2, 6.
- * Circle "minds" in v. 2.
- * Box "so" indicating *result* in v. 3.
- * Underline "miraculous signs and wonders" in v. 3.
- * Circle "mistreat" in v. 5.
- * Bracket "Lystra," and "Derbe" in v. 7.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Why do you think Paul and Barnabas went first to the Jewish synagogue as they journeyed from town to town? (Cf. 13: 5, 14-15)
2. What were Gentiles doing at the Jewish synagogue?
3. Explain the *contrast* introduced in verse 2.
4. Clarify what it was exactly that some Jews "refused to believe" (v. 2). (cf., 13:23-41, esp. vv. 32-41)
5. What does the relationship of verse 3 to verse 2 indicate to you about Paul and Barnabas?
6. Identify the *source* of the apostles' boldness in Iconium.
7. Miraculous signs and wonders done by Paul and Barnabas served what *purpose*?
8. The Jews who plotted against the apostles were determined opponents. How so? (Cf., v. 19)
9. **Discussion:** Talk about what can be learned about Giving Away Your Faith from this passage.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Narratives by definition tell stories. More often than not, the problem with biblical stories is not understanding what they mean but understanding what they mean to us. What's to understand? Stories have characters, plots, and settings. Take the story told in Acts 14:1-7. Paul and Barnabas along with a larger number of unnamed citizens of Iconium are the characters. The story calls its *protagonists* "apostles" because they had been commissioned by the church in Antioch to take the gospel to "the ends of the earth" (Ac 1:8)—more specifically the cities in Asia Minor. Its *antagonists* are found among the Jews, Gentiles, and God-fearers to whom the apostles proclaimed the gospel in Iconium.

The plot unfolds in the following sequence of events. After being expelled from the region around Antioch in Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas go to Iconium about ninety miles away. There they do what they had done before. They find the Jewish synagogue where they preach the message of the Lord's grace, the same one they preached in Pisidian Antioch. They outspokenly proclaim "God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus as he promised . . . The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by

raising up Jesus . . . Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses" (Ac 13:23, 27-32, 38-39).

The response to their message was mixed like it had been before. They spoke so powerfully that a large number of Jews and God-fearing Greeks believed. But the Jews who obstinately "refused to believe" stirred up the Gentile citizenry and poisoned their minds against the apostles. Nevertheless, the apostles persisted in their preaching in spite of this growing opposition emboldened by the miraculous signs and wonders that the Lord did through them to confirm the truthfulness of their gospel. In a matter of weeks the Iconians were divided. Some sided with the unbelieving Jews and others with Paul and Barnabas. In the end, the two had to flee to Lystra and Derbe, two cities eighteen miles south and fifty-five miles south-southwest respectively. But as history repeated itself, the gospel spread further due to the persistence of the apostles and the persecution of their opponents.

The story is easy to understand. What it means to us is more difficult. Sometimes it helps to think in terms of an *upper story* and a *lower story*. The *upper story* is concerned with the bigger picture, what God is doing in the world to bring salvation to Jew and Gentile alike. It Acts the *upper story* is about the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth. The *lower story* is concerned with characters and incidents along the way. Often it's from the *lower story* that we infer the relevance of the narrative to us.

The Upper Story

The resurrected Lord confirmed the message of his grace in Iconium by enabling Paul and Barnabas to do miraculous signs and wonders so that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

The Lower Story

The gospel spreads due to persistence and to persecution—the persistence of faithful witnesses who refuse to be silenced and the persecution of formidable opponents who compel them to take their message to others.

day 4 **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Give Yourself Some Good Advice Based on the Message of this Passage.**
 - o Belonging
 - o Becoming
 - o going Beyond
- **Pick a verse or verses from the passage to memorize or think about this week.**
- **Relate the message of this passage to any of the following:**

- **Home Group Discussion** (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group)

Bill Hybels makes the following observation in his book *Just Walk Across the Room*. "Statistics—as well as my own empirical observations—reflect that shortly after a Christ-follower makes a faith decision, contact with people outside the Christian faith actually decreases. Business meetings are used solely for tackling the task at hand instead of being leveraged for cracking open previously dead-bolted doors, spiritually speaking. Family functions are seen as platforms to take relational backbiting to a new level instead of being treated as opportunities to make some spiritual headway. Errands are run with one eye on the clock and the other on the to-do list, with zero consideration given to the needs of the clerk standing at the checkout or the person filling the prescription. This trend spirals downward year after year until Christ-followers face their dying day and realize they have become completely insulated in an evangelism-void vacuum. They lament the fact that at the hour just before they meet God face-to-face, they are at their all-time evangelistic low. And here's what sobers my heart: rather than an isolated case or two, I believe that this is the path of nearly every average Christian" (62). Talk about what he said and the extent to which you agree or disagree with him.

“Change of Pace”

(Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 1 **Iconium** "Paul and Barnabas move to a city on a high plateau over the plains, Iconium (v. 1a), sitting at an altitude of 3,370 feet. It was a culturally mixed city. The missionaries are traveling the well-known Roman commercial road known as the Via Sebaste or Royal Road . . . Iconium was in the central part of what is now Konya province in Turkey, a rugged, somewhat isolated location on a plateau in the steppes of central Turkey. It was a ruling center in the region (Schnabel 2004: 1111). Strabo (*Geogr.* 12.6.1) describes the region aptly as cold, bare of trees, with scarcity of water, while the town is well settled" (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 469).
- v. 1 **as usual** See 13:5, 14, 44. "When Paul and Barnabas came to Iconium they followed the same procedure as in Pisidian Antioch, visiting the Jewish synagogue and proclaiming the gospel there" (F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, NICNT, 287).
- v. 1 **synagogue** "A synagogue was a place for Jewish prayer and worship, with recognized leadership (cf. Luke 8:41). Though the origin of the synagogue is not entirely clear, it seems to have arisen in the postexilic community during the intertestamental period. A town could establish a synagogue if there were at least ten men. In normative Judaism of the NT period, the OT scripture was read and discussed in the synagogue by the men who were present (see the Mishnah, *m. Megillah* 3-4; *m. Berakhot* 2)" (the NET Bible, **sn** 29 on Ac 6:9).
- v. 1 **Gentiles** Lit., "Greeks" (cf., ESV, the NET Bible, NRSV, NJB) "The Greeks here are likely God-fearers and/or proselytes, since they respond at the synagogue (Schneider 1982: 150)" (Bock, 469; cf., 13:26).
- v. 2 **Gentiles** The Gentile populace of the city in general, in contrast to the God-fearers like Cornelius (10:1, 2, 22) referred to in verse 1.
- v. 3 **So** Cf., "therefore" (NKJV, NASB). "So" seems odd or out of place here after the reference to opposition in verse 2. The NJB handles the problem by putting verse 2 in parentheses, which seems reasonable since it interrupts the flow from verse 1 to verse 3. "This conjunction is a bit of a problem. It may suggest that the time in which the opposition arose (v. 2) provided further opportunity for preaching. Or it may indicate that the opposition was an evidence of God's working in the hearts of the people (cf. 1 Cor. 16:8-9), thus leading to further preaching. Probably the latter is to be preferred" (Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, 391). Cf., "In my translation I opt for a term with an equivalent force: 'Still.' Despite the opposition, they remain for a long time and speak boldly for the Lord (Acts 4:13; 9:27)" (Bock, 470).
- v. 3 **considerable time** Cf., "a long time" (TEV, NRSV, NLT). Harold Hoehner suggests four or five months, October A.D. 48 to last of February 49 (H. Wayne House, *Chronological and Background Charts of the New Testament*, 131).
- v. 3 **signs and wonders** Cf., 2:19, 22, 43; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6; 15:12; 19:11; 28:9. "The preaching was attended by miraculous signs, of a kind which confirmed the apostolic witness in the eyes of the people. Later, when writing to the converts of Iconium and the other cities evangelized at this time in South Galatia, Paul appeals to the mighty works performed by the power of the Spirit in their midst, as evidence that the message of faith, and not the preaching of the law, was the gospel approved by God (Gal. 3:5)" (Bruce, 287). "The Lord is the key source of the activity. It is he who 'bore witness' (Acts 13:22; 15:8; 20:23). He supports the work of preaching the gospel" (Bock, 470).
- v. 4 **divided** The English word "schism" is related to this Greek verb, *eschisthe*, meaning "to split" or "to divide." The non-canonical Acts of Paul contains a famous description of the apostle in its telling of this incident in Iconium. "One Onesiphorus, a resident in Iconium sets out to meet Paul, who is on his way to the city. 'And he saw Paul approaching, a man small in size, with meeting eyebrows, with a rather large nose, bald-headed, bow-legged, strongly built, full of grace, for at times he looked like a man, and at times he had the face of an angel'" (Bruce, 288).
- v. 4 **apostles** The term is used with a broader sense than the Twelve. "Paul used the term regularly to refer to his own commission as an emissary of Christ. He applied the term to others as well: James, the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:9; 1 Cor. 15:7), Andronicus and Junias (Rom 16:7), and an unnamed group of whom he distinguished from the Twelve (1 Cor. 15:7; cf. 15:5). In Acts, Luke used the term in a restricted sense, which denotes only the Twelve who were eyewitnesses to Jesus' entire ministry. Acts 14:4, 14 are the exceptions to the rule. Perhaps Luke indicated here that Paul and Barnabas were delegates of the Antioch church, commissioned by them for their missions. Perhaps it indicates Luke's awareness of the wider application of the word and that he here slipped into the more customary and less specialized usage" (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 311)
- v. 5 **mistreat** "Harass,' 'molest,' or 'physically intimidate' gives a good sense of this term" (Bock, 471). "It does not seem to have been a question of official synagogue stoning since the Gentile populace was equally involved with the Jews. The whole picture seems to have been one of mob violence rather than expulsion by the city officials, as was the case in Pisidian Antioch (13:50)" (Polhill, 312).

Connect the **FAMILY**. During this series, Bible stories appropriate for children will be used that complement the adult teaching.

Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

Have a progressive dinner with your family. Begin at the dinner table, then take your plate to the living room floor, picnic style. Finally, finish your meal standing at the kitchen counter. Sit down and read Acts 14:1-7. You changed your location but still kept eating the same good food. Paul had to change his location, but he still kept sharing the same Good News.



Pray it!

Pray God's will for your child by praying scriptures. Insert your child's name in the blanks as you pray.

Father, I pray for _____ that whenever she opens her mouth, words may be given her so that she will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel. Eph 6:19

Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

Giving Away My Faith – I tell others about Jesus to help with God's work.

Memory verse – "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." Ecc 3:11

Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

- * Who stirred up the people against Paul and Barnabas? Why did they do that?
- * How did the Lord confirm what Paul and Barnabas were preaching in Iconium?
- * Why do you think the people were divided?
- * What did Paul and Barnabas continue to do after they fled Iconium?

Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

Missionary families have a lot of change in their lives in order to give away their faith and share the gospel. Pick a missionary family to pray for this week. Write them a letter to thank them for what they do and tell them how you give away your faith at home.



Challenge

Kids preschool through sixth grade receive a prize for completing a Connect the Family activity.

My family completed at least one Connect the Family activity this week.

Child's name _____ Parent's signature _____

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.