

“Successful Soul Winning” Dr. J.B. Buffington

Take your Bibles now and turn to the book of Acts. I'll read the entire fourteenth chapter. Acts 14:1-28: 1 *And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.* 2 *But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.* 3 *Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.* 4 *But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.* 5 *And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them,* 6 *They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:* 7 *And there they preached the gospel.* 8 *And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked:* 9 *The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,* 10 *Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.* 11 *And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.* 12 *And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.* 13 *Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.* 14 *Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,* 15 *And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:* 16 *Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.* 17 *Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.* 18 *And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.* 19 *And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.* 20 *Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.* 21 *And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,* 22 *Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.* 23 *And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.* 24 *And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.* 25 *And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:* 26 *And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.* 27 *And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.* 28 *And there they abode long time with the disciples.*

In chapter thirteen, we saw the first missionary candidates and the first missionary message as they moved out from Antioch. The citadel of mission activity was moved from the city of Jerusalem with its prejudice to Antioch where the vision of nationalities allowed them to go out and in and preach the Gospel. This is still a continuation of the first missionary journey, and I want to call my message “Successful Soul Winners” or “Successful Christians” and show you some lessons that come out of this particular chapter. There's much in this chapter that I do not have time to deal with, but there are about six things that I want to deal with this morning, and I will have to deal with those very briefly.

In verse one, there are two words that stand out: *And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.* They so spake that a multitude believed in Christ, and I call this, as I summarize that verse, the earnestness in presenting Christ. To be a successful Christian, to be a successful soul winner, there has to be the fervency and the earnestness in presenting Christ. They *so spake*. In the thirteenth chapter in verse

forty-eight, you have sovereignty: *And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.* In chapter fourteen verse one, you have free will. These folks did not haphazardly give out the Word of God. In giving out the Word of God, you cannot rely on sovereignty; sovereignty is God's business. And there are those who go to see those sovereigns that say, "It doesn't make any difference what I do or how I act that they'll be saved." No, Paul said: *I endure all things for the elect's sake that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.* These folks so spake that it moved men and women to trust Christ, and you and I are to present Christ from the depths of our being to men and women who are lost in sin. And they so spake that a multitude believed. There was fervency and earnestness in presenting the Lord Jesus Christ. It came from deep inside their hearts and lives and came because of the reality of their own conversion. If you've never been saved, then you have nothing to present to lost men and women. You have no fire on the inside. You have no burden on the inside. You have no desire on the inside to see people saved; but if you've been saved, and you present Jesus Christ, then you do so out of the fervency and out of the conviction and out of the reality of your conversion experience. This I know: one day I was lost; today I'm saved. This I know: life was different over there, and it's different today. *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* And we speak as believers. If we're going to be successful believers, we have to speak with authority and certainty and reality that we know what we're talking about. We've experienced what we're talking about. We know what salvation is; we know the reality of the Christ who died on the cross and rose again. And He becomes a living Savior. They *so spake*. As we present Christ, we have to present it in the reality of our own experience.

Then they *so spake*, I'm sure, because of a knowledge of the lost condition of all people. Sad to say, sometimes Christians forget where they were. They forget their lost condition. They forget where God found them. They forget how involved they were and how blind they were and how troubled they were and how dead in trespasses and sins. They forget the plight of lost men and women. Do you understand that all men and women, boys and girls without Jesus Christ are lost? They are lost to God. They are lost to His service. They are lost to goodness. They are lost to Heaven. They are lost to the hereafter as far as any good coming to them. They're lost. And we need a new vision of the lost condition of men and women. If some way, some how we could pull back the lid underneath our feet and we could hear the screams from the chasm of hell below that is in the heart of the earth -- if we could hear that, we would be reminded again that every boy, every girl, every man, every woman without Jesus Christ is lost. They *so spake*. When you understand the lost condition of men, you cannot speak haphazardly or half-heartedly. Would you half-heartedly cry for men to get out of a burning building? Would you half-heartedly cry for help when you saw somebody drowning? Would you half-heartedly summon help when you saw one in danger of losing their life? Not on your life! Why? Because you could see the danger and the lost condition of men, women, boys, and girls. I preached a funeral yesterday of a young man who was twenty-three years old. My, my, twenty-three years old -- so young to die, but young people die. Teenagers die. Children die. Grandmas and Grandpas die. If they're not saved, then what? They go to hell. That's without fear of contradiction. They are lost, lost, and they spake because of the fact that they were conscious of the lost condition of men.

They *so spake* also because of a knowledge of the only way of salvation. Now, in our United States, we've gotten so smart that everybody has equal rights. God doesn't have any rights, and we've gotten so smart that we think, "Well, everybody can approach God any way that they want to, and God will take anybody on any terms." But I'm sad to say, it's not so. There's only one way for people to be saved -- that's people in China; that's people in Australia. The Bible says . . . *for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.* We've gone to bat for individual rights; we think that God doesn't have any rights, and we can go to hell and ask God to go to Heaven any way that we so choose. No sir, there's only one way for people to be saved. And these men, these two apostles, were speaking to men who did not know the Gospel and had not heard the Gospel. They knew they were lost, but they knew that they had the remedy -- the only remedy. Do you understand, believers, that Christ is the only remedy for a Jew, that Christ is the only remedy for a Gentile, that Christ is the only remedy for a Muslim and that if they get saved, they have to get saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? *Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.* And that's the reason that we must go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. If not, their blood

is on our hands. They cannot hear and get saved unless they hear of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are a lot of folks who sit in Baptist pews that do not believe that. You can't get saved by your lodge. You can't get saved by your church. You can't get saved by your earnestness and by your sincerity. You can only get saved by the Door. *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.* That's not bigotry; that happens to be fact. The only way God can receive sinners is through what He did on Calvary's cross where God's righteousness was satisfied. Jesus paid the sin debt and removed it so a righteous God could forgive sinners without doing violence to His righteousness. And He could give mercy to sinners on the grounds of righteousness being satisfied. They *so spake* because they knew that they had the only remedy for lost men and women. They *so spake*. The great object of their preaching was to get folks to believe. Now, it's strange, somehow, somehow, we may present Christ with the attitude, "You can go home and think about it." You don't find that in the book of Acts. They called for an immediate decision. "Do you mean to tell me that somebody can get saved who's never heard of Christ the first time they hear it?" Yes, these folks had never heard, and a great multitude were converted to Christ that very day. We have the idea now, "They've got to soak awhile; they've got to go home and think about it." But these folks were Jews, and they were pagans. And on the spot, they *so spake*, and they expected sinners to get saved whenever they presented Christ. If we're not careful, we'll go soul winning, and we'll not expect anybody to get saved. We present Christ and not expect anybody to get saved. If we do not expect them to get saved, we will not present it in such a way that will make them want to get saved, and we'll not "so speak" in order that people may come to know Christ as personal Savior. Oh, they *so spake*.

They spake convincingly. They spake persuasively. They spoke tenderly. They spoke passionately. They *so spake* that those who rejected had to do something with it. Felix trembled. And Agrippa said: *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.* Oh, the power of the tongue to reach people for Jesus Christ, the power of the Word, and oh, the power of the Word coming from a heart that was warm. The necessity for being a good Christian and being a successful soul winner is how you present it. They *so spake* that a multitude believed.

Would you consider, secondly, look down at verses two through four. *But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.* And then, they were going to assault them and use them despitely. And here's the word "boldly." They kept on speaking boldly. The second qualification of successful Christians and successful soul winners is a holy abandonment to their ministry. They spake *boldly*. In other words, they just wouldn't quit. If you're going to be a soul winner, you can expect folks to slam the door in your face. If you're going out to get your feelings hurt, you won't be a soul winner long; but I'll guarantee you, the Devil's going to hurt your feelings. And we leave our feelings behind. If you want to take your feelings, you leave them behind when you go soul winning because the Devil will make sure that he ruffles your feathers the wrong way. Why? Because you're invading his territory. These folks spake boldly despite opposition. The minds were evil affected to them. And in my mind, I think about the Jerry Johnson Crusade that was held in St. Petersburg. A woman newspaper reporter attacked Jerry with all of the passion of her heart. And the headlines, I mean, all you could hear was pizza -- using pizza to get people into religion. And she plastered -- I have the copies in my office -- she plastered the papers. There was nothing positive that came from her lips. Oh, how she attacked him and attacked him and attacked him. Why? He was invading the territory of the Devil. Sad to say, unbeknown to that woman, her son died of a suicide Monday when that crusade began, and they did not find him. She didn't know her own son had committed suicide until five days later. Here was a young man trying to head off young people from committing suicide, and she fought him desperately; yet, her own son committed suicide. Now, you're going to have opposition. This world belongs to the Devil. It's under his dominion. He's the god of this world, whether you like it or not. He's the god of America; he's the god of the former Soviet Union. All the ills can be traced to his dominion. He is a god of this world; and as long as you do not tamper in his business and invade his territory, he may not bother you in that particular way, but he'll bother you when you invade his territory trying to "rescue the perishing, care for the dying." You should expect opposition. Some of our young people -- they're probably sitting here today -- have gone home and

told mother they got saved. They stayed out half of the night before they got saved, and now they come to the crusade and come home at 8:00 at night! One young lady's mama got all over her because of the fact that she stayed at church until 8:00 and ridiculed and laughed at her. Do you understand that when people get saved, their own parents become an obstacle to them? Do you understand that your lost brothers will oppose your conversion experience? Do you understand the folks that you used to run with will try their best to entice you back into the world? And you must understand that this is natural; join the crowd. That's not something funny. Over in 1 Peter, Peter said, *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:*

How sad when mom and dad let their children choose whether they want to go to church or not. Then when they get saved and make a profession of faith, they go home and tell mom and dad; and mom and dad say, "Well, I don't think you're old enough to know what you're doing." And yet they allowed them the privilege to decide whether they wanted to go to church or not and think they're old enough. And when they get into trouble, they think they're old enough; but when they try to do right, they say, "You're not old enough." Hey, that's the opposition of the enemy, and what do you do? You're to keep on. They kept on speaking boldly despite the opposition from the Jews and the Gentiles and then the division. Jesus said this, and it hurts; it hurts. *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father. . .* Now, He does not mean that the Christian is against his daddy; but He means your stand for Me will make your daddy turn against you and the daughter against her mother and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. *And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.* Oh, how sad to live for the devil, and then get saved and go home and expect those at home to clap their hands and rejoice and say, "Hallelujah, my wayward child has been saved." They will not rejoice. They'll try to discourage you. Why? They're not saved; they're still on the devil's side. Hey, behind those who oppose you is the devil. You must understand that: it's the devil behind mama; it's the devil behind daddy; it's the devil behind brother; it's the devil behind the wife; it's the devil behind the children; it's the devil. You must understand that. You must keep on.

Wherever Jesus went, He divided. John 7:43: *So there was a division among the people because of him.* Do you understand why they don't want prayer in the school, why they don't want creation in the school? Behind it is the god of this world that does not want truth in the schools; he wants lies in the schools. And we're fighting Satanic power in order to wreck the lives of men and women, boys and girls. Persecution -- oh, they're going to run you out of the city. Misrepresentation -- they'll call you a fool, saying, "I don't mind you being saved, but I don't want you to be a fanatic." Do you know Christians are never as fanatical as the world? Why, there are worldly people who say, "I don't want to be a fanatic." Last night, they spent every dime that they had, and they came home early this morning with a black eye and a bloody nose and nothing to buy groceries with. They'll go back to work tomorrow and tell what a blast they had. Christians don't do that. Christians don't go to church and put the whole check in the offering plate. Christians don't stay out til 4:00 in the morning down at the church. Christians don't do that. The world says being a Christian is being a fanatic. No, it's not being a fanatic. The world's a fanatic, but they don't know that they're fanatical. And would to God, that we were fanatical in the right sense. Opposition -- you can expect it. If you're saved, you're not going to have it easy. There's opposition; there's persecution; there's misrepresentation. Jesus said in Matthew 5 these words: *Matthew 5:11-12: Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.* You must understand that men and women, boys, and girls, if they're not saved, they are going to oppose you. They're not going to clap their hands. If you expect them to clap their hands and cheer you on, you're badly mistaken, and what a shock to a new convert when he finds opposition in the place where he expected to have encouragement. I think of a daddy. I led his young son -- he was a neighbor -- years ago. I led his young son, twelve or fourteen years old, to the Lord. And I went down to the home for the boy to tell his daddy. The daddy was a professing Christian, and I wanted to kick him in the seat of the britches. I didn't but I wanted to. And the little boy came in, and he was aglow; he was radiant. He said, "Dad, I got saved." And Dad didn't say a thing. He didn't walk over to him and say, "I'm glad." He didn't pat him on the back. He didn't even give a holy grunt. And, oh my, I said,

“Man, don’t you have any sense at all? Don’t you understand what this young boy just told you? And you stand there, and you don’t open your mouth, no word of encouragement. How sad!” Pour a bucket of water on a boy whose little heart was aflame with the joy of the Lord, and it was real. I lived beside that boy, and I know what happened in the days and weeks and months that came after. It was real, and oh, your heart is filled with joy. You go home to tell your loved ones you got saved, and they don’t rejoice about it. They frown about it, and they complain about it. They watch you; and every time you make a mistake, they’ll say, “I thought you were a Christian.” “Oh, I thought you were a Christian.” Hey, it cuts you like a sword. These folks kept on. Holy boldness -- they spake with boldness. Now, hey, you just keep on and keep on and keep on and keep on; and the thing is, God will allow you to touch your own if you live for the Lord. I mean, God will allow you as a witness to get your loved ones saved. You’re the only light in the house; understand that. Stay with it. Jerry Johnston got saved, and what? His whole family got saved. He was a drug addict. He got saved; then his mom and dad got saved. Then his brothers got saved. He was the first one. And if you’re saved, you’re the only light in that home; so let your light shine. Let it shine; let it shine!

The next thing is found in verse seven and verse twenty-one. Look at verse seven of Acts chapter fourteen, a constant recognition of their message. Now, what is the soul winner’s message? What’s the Christian’s message? The devil will get you side-tracked if you’re not careful. The Scripture says in verses six and seven: *They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the gospel.* Verse twenty-one: *And when they had preached the gospel to that city...* The whole thing is a constant recognition of their message. Their message was a message — the Gospel. When you’re going out, you’re not going out preaching social reform; you’re preaching the Gospel. You’re not going out and representing a political platform; you’re to go out to preach the Gospel. Don’t get side-tracked; that’s not your mission. Preach the Gospel. Don’t talk about anything else. Refuse to get side-tracked. The devil will get you side-tracked. Jesus went out, and He dealt with the woman at the well of Samaria. Oh, how He tenderly moved her from her sin to Himself. He offered her a drink. *Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.* Oh, that got her attention. She came to that well to draw water, and then He came a little closer and said: *Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.* Now watch, watch, watch, watch. That woman’s trying to get Him off her back. She said, “Our fathers worship in Samaria, and you Jews worship in Jerusalem. I don’t know where to go to church.” When the devil gets you with some question like that and begins attacking and dealing with other churches, he’s got you hooked. You stay off that; you’re to preach the Gospel. And when a person gets saved and God the Holy Spirit comes into their heart and life, then you can talk about spiritual matters and spiritual things, and they’ll understand them. But don’t get onto that. I got side-tracked in the last two or three months on an issue; I didn’t intend to and said I would not. A man asked me a question, and I said, “I don’t deal with that.” And he just kept going, and I said, “If I deal with it, you won’t understand it; you’re blind; you’re deaf. You can’t understand.” He insisted, and I told him, “Sure enough, just like I told you, you wouldn’t understand; and your problem’s not that. Your problem is you’re a sinner; you’re lost, and your only hope is Christ. You must come to Christ.” They knew what their message was; and when you go out into the world, you have one message to present to the world -- the Gospel. It’s not social reform. What’s wrong with the world? It’s not social problems. What’s wrong with the world? It’s sin. It’s not skin problems; it’s sin. It’s not social problems; it’s sin. It’s not poverty problems; it’s sin. It’s not alcohol problems; it’s sin. It’s not political problems. There’s one thing wrong with society — it’s sin. When a man gets saved, you’ve solved most of his problems. Hey, if a man has animosity in his heart toward another race, when he gets saved, he gets rid of that. When God the Holy Spirit comes into his heart and life, brother, that solves the race problems. And my, oh my, you go down the ladder, and you’ll find out that when a person gets saved, you’ve solved his problem. He’ll be the citizen that he’s supposed to be. He’ll be the dad that he’s supposed to be. She’ll be the wife that she’s supposed to be. His life is changed now. You try to make him change without the new birth, and you’re wasting your time. You can’t pass enough laws to make people love one another. You can side all you want

to, but you can't pass enough laws to make somebody love somebody else. No sir, you will have love for somebody else when God's love comes into your heart and not until then. These folks stuck to their message, a constant recognition of their message. *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* He came to Rome; he said: *So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.* Oh, Rome, with its power, and he said: *For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* Down at the city of Corinth, they gloried in their wisdom. He said, "I didn't come to you as a scholar; I came to you trembling, and all I had was the Gospel of the Son of God." That works; it works in the capitol of logic, and it works in the capitol of power. I'm ready to preach the Gospel. That's the only thing that gets people saved. You had better stick to preaching the Gospel; you had better stick to that. And they knew the Gospel.

Now, what is the Gospel? Some folks say they are full Gospel. There's not but one Gospel, and it's full. And here's the fullness of it. Now if you add anything to it, then you're tampering with the Gospel. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: . . . *how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: .*" My friends, that is a Gospel that's all about Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. That is the Gospel. And that's the Gospel that converts men and women, boys, and girls -- *for it is the power of God unto salvation; to every one that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* These folks understood what their message was when they went out among mankind.

Quickly, let's look at verses fourteen and fifteen. There are many things I'd like to say about this incident in Lystra; but when they came to Lystra, this man was healed. And those pagan Greeks were going to worship him. They were going to offer a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. Look at Paul and Barnabas when they saw that. "14 *Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, 15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:* Here is a display of genuine humility. "Oh my, worship them." "Hey, no, no, we're mad like you are; we're not to be worshiped." Oh, they were shocked. They rent their clothes and stopped them in holy indignation. There's nobody on the face of God's earth to whom you're supposed to bow down. That's at the lodge or that's at Rome or anywhere else. A man is not a man of God who will let you bow down as an act of worship at his feet. I don't care where he is. Simon Peter is supposed to be the first pope, and Cornelius fell down in front of him. And Simon Peter said, "Stand up, I myself am also a man. So, stand in front of me. I'm a man." John was caught up from the isle of Patmos into Heaven and saw the book of Revelation. In the 22nd chapter, the angel, had spoken unto him. He fell down to worship, and the angel said, "Don't do that. Worship God." Paul and Barnabas said, "Don't worship us. We're not worthy of that. Worship God." Did you know that there is a whole lot of idolatry today? Man, you think about the sports world. And, I'm sorry to say, but there's a whole lot of idolatry by those who hoop and holler in the sports world. There's a whole lot of idolatry that you give attention and earnestness. You pour out your energies to a football player. You'll get on fire. You never got on fire like that for God. Hey, have you ever stood and clapped and yelled "Yeah" for Jesus? I'll root for the Cowboys and for the Dolphins. That's idolatry. In the matter of the pulpit, nobody in the pulpit is to be worshiped. The man in the pulpit is not above you. He is your brother in Christ. There is no hierarchy in the pulpit. There's no such thing as a clergy and a laity. The devil invented that. You're all brethren. Hey, do you understand that? I am no better than you; I'm a sinner saved by grace. I'm made of the same clay that you are, just like you are if you're saved. I'm a sinner saved by grace. These folks with abject humility don't worship the laws. There's a lot of worship in church services. There's a lot of worship in areas. You look at the paper. You hear the claims. They don't say it in words, but there are a lot of other religious leaders. They're saying, "I'm number one." I would like it to be said about my ministry what was said of those who heard Charles H. Spurgeon. They went away saying not "what a great preacher" but "what a great Savior." That's the purpose of preaching. There was no man born of a woman greater than John the Baptist. A newspaper went down to the Jordan to interview this man that was turning the world upside down. The reporters came up to him and said, "Are you

the Christ?" He said, "No." "Are you Elijah?" "No." "Are you one of the Prophets?" "No." "Well, what sayest thou of thyself? We've got to write something." John said, "I'm number one." No he didn't say that. He said: *I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. There cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.* He said there's one coming after me that I am not worthy to even untie His shoes. That's the one that you're to follow. When the crowd left John the Baptist and went to the Lord Jesus Christ, they tried to stir jealousy in John the Baptist's heart. He said, "Did not I tell you that I was not the Christ? He's the Christ. Behold the Lamb of God." He said, "I'm not the bridegroom; I'm the guest. He's the one to be worshiped." Oh, what a need to vapor some humility. *Pride goeth before. . . Only by pride cometh contention.* . . Churches have been torn apart because of the loss of humility. Everybody is number one. You can't have everybody number one in church. There's only one that's number one, and that's the Lord Jesus; He's number one! I consider again; here's another mark of a great Christian. They gave God the glory. Look at verses 21-22: *And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.* Here was a concerned follower. I can't imagine having converts and no concern to follow them up. There's something wrong. That's as wrong as a mom and dad that have children and leave them in the hospital and go home and then say, "You know, I had fifteen children." "Well, where are they?" "I don't know, but I had them." New Testament Christianity was interested in conserving the harvest. New Testament Christianity was not only concerned about getting people saved but also concerned about disciplining the believers in that day. Why? That they may live for God. It's no glory; it's no glory if you got fifty folks to walk the aisle on Sunday and you cannot find them next Sunday or next week. That's no glory to God. Christians need following up. Oh my, in this day, how desperately they need it. He said they could confirm the disciples, and that's not an act that we call today by some church. The word means to strengthen them. A person gets saved. Would to God that we could put one on one. I would to God every believer was concerned about that and when somebody got saved they'd say, "Hey, would you be this person's buddy and watch him and watch him and watch him?" We lose so many. They never grow because of the fact that we have a handful trying to take care of the multitude. That's impossible. A new convert needs one on one to help him to get on his feet. That's a desperate need in all Christians. You are needed. And so, confirming to the disciples. And secondly, exhorting them. That means to urge them, "Come on now, brother. Come on, brother. Come on, sister. Come on, young man. Come on, young person." They need somebody to encourage them. You're not going to get it anywhere else unless Christians encourage them. You're not going to get it. And then thirdly, informing them. You say, "This will kill the crowd." No, it won't. You're not to tell them this: "Young people, you trust Jesus Christ and you'll never have any more financial problems. You'll never be sick again. You'll have two cars. You'll have two swimming pools. Man alive, you'll never have any defeat again." That does not happen to be so, and that's not reality. Paul said that they spent time telling them, "Hey, your going to have a rough time, but we march through many tribulations here on our end of the kingdom of God." Tell them the facts. We're in a warfare. You call a Christian a sissy. You have invaded Satan's territory if you think that happens. It's a battle. They came and said, "Now, I want to encourage you to keep on. I'm trying to strengthen you, and I want you to know you're going to have many (not just a few) tribulations. That word tribulation is the word we get our word pressure, physical pressure, mental pressure, public pressure, home pressure, true pressure, pressure, pressure, pressure. A Christian is somebody who lives under pressure in a supernatural strength of the will and the Word and the power of God. If all you're concerned about as a Sunday School teacher is standing before the class and teaching that class, you're not a teacher unless it's, "Oh, my, my I want to get into the home. I want to find out their problems. I want to find out what their life is like. I want to meet their problems by teaching." If you don't get out and know them in their homes, you'll never know what their problems are, and you'll never stand before the class and deal with their problems. All you'll deal with is wrote memory of Scripture and not come to grips with the issues of the boys and girls and the men and women who hear you. You have to have concern for them. Now, they went back to follow up in the place where they almost lost their lives; their concern for young converts was more than their concern for their lives. I think about that concern for them. Look at verse twenty-three now. *And when they had ordained them*

elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. Brother, they established a local church. Now, a local church is not a luxury; it is a necessity. The way to conserve this in the converts is to get them involved in the local church. It is a necessity. It is God's ordained method for reaching the world. Paul preached in key cities. He could not evangelize the whole city. He preached in key cities. People who got saved were banded together in churches. Ordained elders were over them, and they taught them to evangelize their city. That's what we're supposed to do in Lakeland while we're supporting missions around the world. We're supposed to evangelize the city of Lakeland. Get out and evangelize, evangelize, evangelize. The church at Thessalonica got the message. Listen, as Paul writes to them and says: *(1 Thessalonians 1:8) For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.* He said, "I don't need to even come to your city. You've done the mop up process." That's what Christians are supposed to do. The local church is a place where they're taught and instructed and fed and prayed for and watched over. He built local churches. If we lose the Philippines and communism takes over, brother, those who band together in local assemblies are the ones that will stay with it. The others will be gone. That's God's method.

Now, I want to say something in this for moms' and dads' ears. Would you hear me now? This is an observation of over twenty-two years in one place. I want you to get this, local church. Your boy or girl is either school-centered or church-centered. Their friends are at school and church. I think back through the years of the ways to get friends. For instance, there are adults who come this morning who will not pick up any friends tonight. You have to come to some other service to find friends. In the Sunday morning service, everyone's interested in going home or to the restaurant or to the nursery. The way you get friends is in a Sunday school class. Now, that's so small, you'll get friends there. You say, I can't get any friends at church. Okay, come to the youth meetings. Here's the observation I want to say, "How sad for Christians to be involved in a local church, but you never tap their children for Christian ministry because they didn't make them come or bring them to the youth activities." Now, here's an observation: In my mind I've thought over; I've asked others, and I cannot remember, but I do not know anybody -- I've been here over twenty-two years -- I do not and I cannot recall to mind anybody who is serving in some position in a local church unless they used to attend the youth activities. You lose them. I want my children involved in serving the Lord after I leave; hey, they'll not amount to what they ought to unless they're hooked onto the local church. Now, that does not mean that everyone that you send to the youth department, the youth activities, gets involved. No, no, but I'm saying this: the ones that do get involved were in the youth department, and those who did not go to the youth department are not involved. They come to church, and they're spectators. Now, that's an observation of over twenty-two years. In the center of their life is their school friends. The church ought to be the center of your life. Why? It's the church that builds; it's the church, the church, the church. It will do more for your young people than school will ever do. School doesn't turn out mission volunteers and all that; they don't do that. That comes from the youth department. I want to say, if you want your youth to be involved in active Christian service, then you get them in the youth activities. You let them make their friends there, and they've got friends there because they've met their friends there. Unless you do that, they'll come to church, and say, "We don't have any friends." And you'll lose them to school friends, not folks who are dedicated to building the local church. Now, that's an observation. I cannot think of one who is either teaching a class or serving the Lord -- I do not know of one who is actively serving the Lord in a local church -- that did not first come through the youth department. Now, you can chew on that. I chewed on it for a long time. That's important.

Now, let me close, verses twenty-six through twenty-eight, they headed home. *"And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. 27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. 28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.* They recognized their obligation; they left the local church in Antioch while folks were praying and fasting and laying their hands on them and commending them to the Lord and upheld them in prayer while they were gone. When their missionary activity was over, where did they go? They headed back home from

whence they had been recommended to the grace of God. That's what we do with missionaries today. They're sent forth by the local church. When they come home, they give a report to their local church. Why? That the church might rejoice. We give in our annual faith promise missions conference stock holders reports. I tell the missionaries they must give me a report of their baptisms and souls saved and so forth. The folks who've prayed and the folks who've given and the folks who've upheld you, and you've written home, and we've prayed for you, they deserve a report. Why? Because the church sent them out and we give, and if it doesn't do that, you'll not get to the mission field without the local church. You won't make it; you can't get there. These folks came back out of respect to recognize that their anchors were in the local church, to recognize it was they who commended them and they who sent them, and they who the Holy Spirit sent them. When they came back home -- oh, the rejoicing! I was at Miss Dobson's yesterday, and she told about a young fellow who's here this morning. And, oh, her heart's so filled with joy. She said, "Just to think that I had a little part in his life!" Do you understand the joy that comes to a man or woman's heart and life when he's had a part in getting somebody saved -- on the mission field, here, or down the street? There's no joy comparable to that, other than salvation -- the joy of knowing that you had a part in their salvation. That's one of the joys in Heaven. Paul said to the Thesso-lanicans, the church at Thessolonica, *Are not ye our crown of joy at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ*. He said, "Man, in heaven, when we stand and we find and discover the people that have been saved and touched by our lives, it will be joy, our crown of joy. Hey, church today, the news comes back, and we rejoice and want to send out more. When news come back, we send out more. These folks recognized their responsibility and their respect to the local church. Now, here are marks of a successful Christian and a soul winner.

New converts, are you listening? You'll not amount to much as a Christian -- I didn't say you couldn't be saved. If you're careless about the local assembly, you'll not get very far. You'll soon be back to the old crowd if you do not get involved and get into God's house. It's not a luxury but a necessity. And Paul appointed overseers (elders). Why? To preach and to feed the flock. This is a necessity. Don't neglect it.