

# Qualities Of An Effective Servant

**Introduction.** In 1972, NASA launched the space probe Pioneer 10. The satellite's primary mission was to reach Jupiter, photograph the planet and its moons, and beam data to Earth about Jupiter's magnetic field, radiation belts, and atmosphere. Scientists regarded this as a bold plan, for at that time no Earth satellite had ever gone beyond Mars. But Pioneer 10 accomplished its mission and much, much more. Swinging past the giant planet in November 1973, Jupiter's immense gravity hurled Pioneer 10 toward the edge of the solar system. By 2003, 30 years after its launch, Pioneer 10 was more than seven billion miles from the sun.

But all of those accomplishments meant nothing without data being transmitted back to scientists on Earth. Perhaps the most amazing fact of all this is that those signals emanated from an 8-watt transmitter, which has about as much power as a bedroom night light. Engineers designed Pioneer 10 with a useful life of just three years, but its tiny 8-watt transmitter accomplished more than anyone thought possible. God can use someone with 8-watt abilities. God cannot use, however, someone who is unfit.

Admittedly, the lengthy narrative of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:1-28 contains no explicit teaching on God's requirements for effective service. It does, however, present two highly qualified and effective servants — Paul and Barnabas — who modeled five qualifications necessary for all who would proclaim the gospel.

## ***I. Boldness (vv. 1-7)***

- A. Iconium was a cultural melting pot containing native Phrygians whose ancestors had occupied the area from ancient times, Greeks and Jews who dated back to the Seleucid period, and Roman colonists who had arrived more recently.
  - 1. As it had in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:45, 50), the preaching gradually polarized the population of Iconium.
  - 2. The New Testament equates unbelief in the gospel with disobedience to God (John 3:36; Romans 2:8; Ephesians 2:2; 5:6; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 4:17).
- B. Boldness is that essential quality of confidence and courage, without which nothing significant can be accomplished for the cause of Christ. Boldness is what enables Christians to persist in the face of opposition (Proverbs 28:1; Daniel 3:16; Acts 4:19-20, 29; 2 Corinthians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:2).

## ***II. Humility (vv. 8-18)***

- A. In Greek culture, "humility" was a word of contempt. The Greeks saw man as the measure of everything. Therefore, to be low on the social scale, to know poverty, or to be socially powerless was seen as shameful. Only seldom in classical Greek do these words have a positive tone, commending an unassuming or obedient attitude.
- B. Along with power and results in the service for Christ comes the temptation of pride. It is often difficult to acknowledge that the results stem from God's power, not human ingenuity and ability (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

- C. Humility is the supreme spiritual virtue because it gives God His rightful place (Judges 8:23; 1 Kings 3:7; Mark 1:7; James 4:6, 10; 1 Peter 5:5-6; Revelation 4:10).

### **III. Persistence (vv. 19-21)**

- A. The Jews were outraged at finding the two preachers proclaiming the gospel again. Some of the same people who wanted to worship Paul as a god now turned on him. Their fickleness is reminiscent of the people of Jerusalem who hailed Jesus as the Messiah then a few days later called for His execution (Matthew 21:8-9; 27:22).
- B. After being stoned, most would have taken some time off to recuperate, but not Paul.
1. The next day he went to Derbe, a 40-mile walk. The trip, for one in Paul's condition, must have been excruciatingly painful.
  2. Since the door for ministry was temporarily closed at Lystra, he simply moved on to work elsewhere. Nothing daunted him, not even being stoned nearly to death (2 Corinthians 11:25; cp. Philippians 4:11).
- C. He was persistent, committed to making the most of his time (1 Chronicles 16:11; Psalm 37:24; Acts 13:43; Hebrews 6:10-11). Perseverance as a Christian entails a ceaseless warfare against the forces of darkness (Isaiah 58:1; 62:6; 2 Timothy 4:2).

### **IV. Caring (vv. 22-23)**

- A. The great commission is not merely to gain professions of faith but to nurture that faith to maturity. Paul and Barnabas were merely following the example of Jesus when He was moved with compassion by the crowd and taught them (Mark 6:34).
- B. Paul and Barnabas focused on four elements:
1. They confirmed them — this meant to cause someone to become stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in attitude or belief (1 Thessalonians 3:10).
  2. They encouraged them (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12)..
    - a) They wanted them to continue in the faith. They were not to fall away back into Judaism or paganism (Hebrews 10:38-39).
    - b) They wanted them to enter the kingdom of God. But the way to the kingdom of God is not an easy one (Hebrews 10:32-33).
  3. They organized them — these were long term arrangements via elders for their continued growth (Acts 20:28).
  4. They commended them — they had done all they could for them; this attitude acknowledges the Lord as the head of the church and the source of all truth (2 Timothy 1:12).

### **V. Reverence (vv. 24-28)**

- A. Paul and Barnabas apparently had not preached in Perga the first time they were there (cp. Acts 13:14). Leaving nothing undone, they proceeded to do so. They were committed, no matter what their circumstances, to fulfilling their calling.
- B. The church at Antioch was no doubt overjoyed at the return of their two beloved workers. Their work had been very successful.

1. Some may have boasted of all they had done, of the churches they had planted, the number of converts they had made, and the miracles they had performed, but not Paul and Barnabas. They kept all their accomplishments in the proper perspective.
2. They saw themselves as instruments through whom God had accomplished His purposes; and all the glory went to Him. That is an essential perspective for a servant of the Lord (Exodus 19:16-24; Isaiah 45:9; John 15:8; Romans 4:20; 2 Corinthians 4:13-15).

**Conclusion.** Through their boldness, humility, persistence, caring, and reverence for God, Paul and Barnabas had been used to accomplish much for the kingdom. Those qualities still mark those who walk the path to effective service. An unknown proverb says, "The measure of a life ... is not its duration, but its donation."