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WARM UP

What is the greatest compliment you've ever been given? How did it make you feel?

WORD

Read **Acts 14: 8-23**

From this chapter in Acts, we learn two ways to see how steadfast a person's character is. How a person is able to deal with praise and handle persecution are great indicators as to the strength of their character.

NOTES

1 Little gods?

¹¹And 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!" ¹²Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³And 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. ¹⁴But 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.

Acts 14:11-15 (ESV)

Paul and Barnabas receive the greatest compliments possible amongst the Greeks - being named as embodiments of their gods, Zeus and Hermes. However, rather than receive these compliments, Paul and Barnabas responded in utter sorrow, because they knew that the point had been missed. The objective was the Gospel of Christ, not the glorification of themselves.

- How do you respond when people give you praise for something that is far beyond what you deserve?
 - How can we deflect glory and give credit to God for compliments that are directed towards us?
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2 Stones Can't Break Me

¹⁹But 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. ²⁰But 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. ²¹When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²²strengthening 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.

Acts 12:4-11 (ESV)

Almost immediately after receiving and deflecting the praise they received, Paul finds himself being stoned, dragged and left for dead. Yet this would not detract him from continuing to do the work God had called him to do. With the help of the community of Jesus' disciples, he still went into the city to preach the Gospel, which resulted in many disciples being made. We can find encouragement in Paul and Barnabas that despite the attempts of assassination, they did not quit the mission God had called them to. We, too, should ask God for the steadfast resilience to never give up on what he has called us to do or be who he calls us to be.

- Have you ever been persecuted or falsely spoken of? How did you deal with it?
 - What sorts of things have attempted to shake your faith? How did you deal with them?
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PRAYER

- Pray for God's grace and humility in your life.
- Pray for grace to know how to deflect praise that belongs to God.
- Pray for the spirit of God's encouragement to ever be in your heart and life.
- Pray for the persecuted and their families around the world.