

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ know there is a cost to following Jesus.

SCRIPTURE

ACTS 14:19-23

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

After being stirred up by the Jewish leadership, the crowds at Lystra stoned Paul. Keep in mind these crowds were the same people who thought of Paul and Barnabas as gods (Acts 14:11-12). Paul, as Saul, had been on the other side of a stoning when Stephen was martyred (Acts 7:58). Some believe that Paul literally died from this stoning and point to this event as when Paul visited the "third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:1-4). Whether he actually died or not, Paul's quick recovery was a miraculous one. The courage he gathered to get up and walk back into the city that had just tried to kill him is equally as impressive.

Check out the **Teacher Prep Video** for this lesson: <https://vimeo.com/817793635>



FACILITATOR NOTE: We're giving you a lot of teaching material. Don't feel like you should cover everything here. You know your group better than anyone. Choose the material that will best fit your students and skip over the rest.

OPENING

PRAYER

1-2 minutes

Start your small group by asking the Lord to bless your discussion and time together.

OPTIONAL: Give students an opportunity to lead the prayer.

OPENING QUESTIONS

3-5 minutes

- How was the week? What's the best thing that's happened? Anything major going on?
- Would you rather never have to do anything your parents tell you to do or earn \$10 every time your parents tell you to do something, but you always have to do everything they say?



EXPLORE

EXPLORE GOD'S WORD

3-5 minutes

The work of the Gospel can get complicated. Paul and the other early church missionaries teach us a lot about obedience and our responsibility in sharing the Gospel. The message won't always be easy to deliver, nor will it always be happily received. Our job is to share the Good News nonetheless since *disciples of Christ know there is a cost to following Jesus*. Paul was nearly killed by a violent mob, but his mission would not be deterred. We can't force people to accept Jesus, but we can definitely tell them about him. Obey the call and trust God to do the rest!

Read Acts 14:19–20 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- **Why do you think this group of Jewish people was so aggressive toward Paul?**
The Bible doesn't explicitly say, but as we read in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel had a problem turning away from God to worship false gods. It's possible that the angry response the missionaries received came from Jews who were worried this was another pitfall that would turn faithful Jews toward false gods.
- **Why do you think the text makes the note "the disciples gathered about him" (v. 20)?**
It's an important notation because it lets us know Paul was not alone! There was a faithful church forming, despite the negative public opinion and opposition.
- **Share about a time you experienced a strong reaction (positive or negative) after sharing the Gospel.**
Answers will vary, and it may be that some students don't have any experience sharing the Gospel. Remind your students that we aren't responsible for how people respond to the Gospel. That's between them and the Lord. All we can do is point them to Jesus.



Say something like: It would've been easy for Paul to just be grateful to be alive and give up such dangerous work. But despite almost dying, Paul wouldn't be deterred. He carried on preaching about Jesus to all who would listen. Following God in obedience will take us through difficult times, but it will be worth it in the end!

Read Acts 14:21–22 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- **If you were in Paul's position, what would you do after an angry mob attacked you?**
Answers will vary. Think about the honest, human emotions many of us would go through!
- **Why do you think Paul and Barnabas told the disciples, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (v. 22)?**
Early Christ-followers were very familiar with persecution; following Jesus was not a popular thing. This message to the disciples was a point of encouragement that there is a destination at the end of the suffering—the Kingdom of God!
- **Does hardship make you feel closer to God or farther away? Why?**
Answers will vary. Consider sharing your own experiences!



Say something like: Many Christ-followers in the early church suffered and died because of their faith. Paul and the other disciples preached a central message alongside the Gospel—the path to entering the Kingdom of God will go through hardships. It's just part of living like Jesus.

FACILITATOR NOTE: If you have extra time, go through the next set of questions. If not, skip to the Connection section.

Read Acts 14:23 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- **Why do you think it might've been difficult for the apostles to leave their church plants in the hands of others?**
Paul and the other missionaries put a lot of work into forming churches for new disciples. It was likely hard for them to leave those churches in the hands of relatively young Christ-followers when they left to continue their work elsewhere. But they entrusted these churches to God!
- **How do you think Paul and the other apostles measured success in their ministries?**
The early church saw converts come to the faith, sometimes thousands at a time. I'm sure they were excited by the large numbers! However, their main concern was sharing the Gospel with as many as they could reach. Their success came from their own faithfulness to the mission. God did the rest.



Say something like: These missionaries confidently left their church plants behind because they had put their trust in the Lord. God leads the church, not people! Learning to trust in God is the mark of a good leader.



CONNECT & APPLY

CONNECTION

5-7 minutes

Show your students how Scripture connects to their lives: Use the example below OR share a personal story of how you have followed God's call through hardships and found the strength to get through.



Example: Do you know about Kerri Strug in the 1996 Olympics? Kerri was a standout gymnast, leading the American team to compete for a gold medal. Toward the end of the event, the U.S. team needed a 9.5 on the vault to win the gold. On an earlier attempt, Kerri twisted her ankle when she landed. She was in tremendous pain. She limped to the starting pad for her final attempt to give the U.S. team one last shot at winning the gold. With gritted teeth, Kerri miraculously landed her vault on one leg, earning a 9.712 and the gold medal for Team USA. Through the pain, Kerri gave all she had for her team!¹

- How are you prepared or unprepared to persevere through pain, hardship, and rejection for the sake of the Gospel?

Give students a bit of time to reflect on this question. Odds are they haven't had to suffer much for the Gospel yet. Get them to consider why the Gospel is worth enduring suffering when the time comes. Have your own answer ready to share to get the conversation going.

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

2-3 minutes

Disciples of Christ know there is a cost to following Jesus.

Use the *Mark of a Disciple* to reinforce the lesson and challenge students to apply it to their lives.

APPLY IT

5-10 minutes

Hardship is part of a life that follows Jesus' example. Sometimes faith will take you into very difficult circumstances and call you to make sacrifices. How can you prepare yourself for positive and negative reactions that will come from sharing the Gospel?



Be specific:

- What are you going to do?
- When are you going to do it?
- Is there someone who can keep you accountable?



FACILITATOR NOTE: Allow students who are comfortable to share their plans for application. This may encourage or spark ideas for other students, plus add a level of accountability.



CLOSING

PRAYER

2–3 minutes

Take a moment to ask for prayer requests. Take time to let your students pray for each other's applications in the upcoming weeks. Spend some time praying for willingness to follow God's call and trust his leadership. *Write down any prayer requests mentioned and ask your students about them at your next meeting.*

MEMORY VERSE

Send the memory verse graphic included in your download to your students later this week to keep the conversation going.

"Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.'" Matthew 16:24–25 (ESV)

NOTES

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¹ "Kerri Strug," Olympics.com (International Olympic Committee), accessed February 23, 2023, <https://olympics.com/en/athletes/kerri-strug>.

