

"REALITY CHECK FOR A FULL LIFE"

(Acts 17:1-15)

(Chuck Swindoll)

By the time Paul arrived in Thessalonica (17:1), he had hit his stride as an evangelist and church planter. He was in his element; the hardships merely formed part of the landscape. His experiences those first months in Greece illustrate at least three principles anyone in ministry would do well to remember.

First, *determination is at the heart of any great achievement.* There's nothing magical about Paul or any of the other biblical characters. They were people who knew their callings and pursued their divine purposes with determination. Paul was beaten and jailed in Philippi, he was mobbed and forced out of Thessalonica, his steps were dogged in Berea where he was hurried out of town, then he was dropped and left in Athens all alone—but he stayed strong. He saw each hardship as a small price to pay for the impact he would make in each city. They kept running off the apostle, but he kept leaving churches in his wake, whole communities of reproducing Christians.

Second, *rejection is to be expected when you share the truth.* Don't be surprised when people reject the truth. I know it doesn't make sense. Why reject what is true? But people regularly reject truth. They'll tell lies about you and then call you a liar. Unfortunately, truth rarely attracts large numbers of people. Proclaiming truth draws a remnant who will give their lives for the Lord while drawing enemies like a pack of angry dogs. That's why godly leadership requires courage, tenacity, resiliency, and most of all, humility. A proclaimer of God's truth isn't a politician and can't worry about image or applause, polls or popularity; rather, the proclaimer must be content to present the truth, recognizing that personal rejection is the most likely outcome.

If Paul got rejected while sharing truth, you can be certain it will be no different for you. When you accept this fact of ministry, personal rejection loses its sting.

Third, *appreciation is seldom expressed at the right time.* You will never find Paul cornered by a group of people from Thessalonica or Philippi or Berea saying, "Hey, man. Thanks. That was great stuff you said back there. And thanks for taking that beating. Thanks for upholding the gospel. Thanks for standing firm when everybody else was walking away." If you're waiting for that, then forget about becoming a good leader. You'll fold. Your reward will rarely come to the form of appreciation. Instead, you will feel a closer connection with your Master, who suffered and knows all about your suffering. You will also experience life more fully because you'll be living your purpose. And when you persevere and stand before your Creator, the reward for your faithfulness will be great.

