

## FROM THE BEGINNING 2: BE ENCOURAGED

*Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. (Acts 14:21-22, NIV)*

**G**OLF IS NO EASY GAME. I have a friend who tried it a number of years ago and while he liked it well enough, he never got very good. Now he tells me he'll wait until he retires to pick it up again. Still, he recently regaled me with the story of the best shot he ever hit.

That's how hard golf is. Out of the thousands of shots we've hit, we can remember the one or two that were truly great or really fun. If golf were easy, we'd have too many good memories to choose from. We'd be looking for a deejay to set our highlights to music.

Some things, when they're hard, make us laugh. Golf makes us cry. It frustrates us and discourages us and causes us to declare, "I quit!" (though we know full well we'll be back tomorrow).

Unfortunately, faith can be the same way. For all the excitement of the new birth, our troubles don't disappear. We're still gripped by a besetting sin. Our old friends won't join the party with us. The work of the church just looks like so much volunteerism. And that guy in your small group who knows every nuance of Revelation won't shut up about his millennial views. *Must we go on?*

As the apostle Paul progressed through his first missionary journey, he faced militant detractors and honest doubters. By the time he looped back to the cities where he started, he had been both exalted as a god and stoned by an angry mob. Disciples were being won, but death was never out of the question. I don't know about you, but it would take a lot of encouragement to keep me going at that stage.

Yet it was Paul and his companions who did the dispensing of strength and encouragement. By now, Paul had lived many years in the faith. In his commitment, he encountered plenty of troubling disturbance, but he was all in.

Paul's hearers were in a different place. Their faith was only months old, as was the opposition that came with it. They needed to be encouraged to remain true to the faith, to their belief in Christ and devotion in following him. You might know just what they were feeling. The newness has worn off and the hard work has begun. Be encouraged. Take strength from Jesus. Walk on. Endure. The rewards will come.

**Opening questions** Who is your best encourager when it comes to golf? Have you found ways to encourage others in a similar fashion? • Do you likewise have someone who encourages your faith in Jesus?

**READING** Acts 11:19-23; Philippians 2:1-4; Titus 2:15

### Community of encouragement (Acts 11)

How does living in believing community support our ability to live out the encouragement we receive?

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### Looking to others (Philippians 2)

What practical actions does the encouragement of being united with Christ and comforted by his love inspire in us?

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### Well-rounded encouragement (Titus 2)

Paul wrote to Titus both to encourage and rebuke as a leader. How are these two acts different? How are they similar?

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