

Acts 081
The Power of Perseverance

Acts 14:16-20a

October 1, 2025

Dr. Andy Woods

Well good evening, everybody. If we could take our Bibles and open them to Acts 14:16. We are continuing on with our verse-by-verse teaching in the Book of Acts on Wednesday evenings.

Acts 1:8 gives us an outline of the Book of Acts. Jesus instructed the disciples to be His witnesses in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12), and then the remote parts of the earth (Acts 13-28). That last part is the largest section of the Book of Acts that we just started working our way through with Paul's first missionary journey into southern Galatia (Acts 13-14).

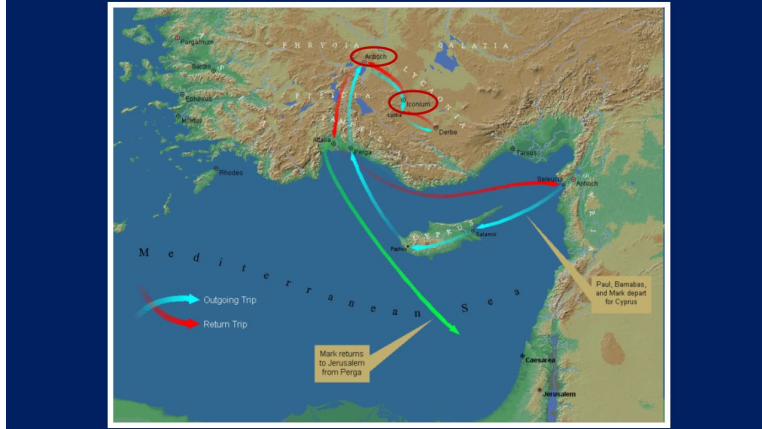
Structure (Acts 1:8)

- Jerusalem (Acts 1-7)
- Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12)
- **Remotest part of the earth (Acts 13-28)**
 - 1st missionary journey (Acts 13-14)
 - Jerusalem council (Acts 15:1-35)
 - 2nd missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22)
 - 3rd missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:17)
 - Trip to Rome (Acts 21:18-28:31)



He was commissioned, he and Barnabas, initially with John Mark, to leave Syrian Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). From there they traveled to Cyprus and had a ministry there (Acts 13:4-12). They hit the coast of modern-day Turkey, and they had a ministry in another Antioch called Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13-52). Then from there they move to Iconium, which we studied a couple of weeks ago (Acts 14:1-7). They went on to Lystra (Acts 14:8-20). We were about halfway through his ministry in Lystra last Wednesday.

The ministry in Lystra starts with a healing where they healed a man lame from birth (Acts 14:8-10). Then the inhabitants of Lystra, who are obviously unregenerate pagans, unbelievers. The unsaved, unregenerate pagans start to worship Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:11-13). Once Paul and Barnabas figure out that these people are worshiping them instead of God, because they performed this healing under God's power, they tear their robes, which is a very serious, solemn action. They tell the heathen to knock it off (Acts 14:14).



They start to give them a message. They use this as a platform to give a message (Acts 14:15-17). This is the first message that we have of anything in the Book of Acts to a non-Hebraic, non-Jewish audience. Everything that we have read so far in the Book of Acts—even the conversion of Cornelius, who was at least coming to Israel to seek God—is pretty much pro-Israeli, pro-jewish. Even the initial places that Paul and Barnabas went on the first missionary journey, into Pisidian Antioch, they went into a synagogue. That was Jewish. Now, for the first time, we have a message coming from the apostles to un-Jewish, unsaved, unregenerate heathens who know nothing about Hebrew Bible. That is the significance of what is happening in Acts 14:15-17.

They ask him a question, "What in the world are you guys doing worshiping us?" (Acts 14:15). They say, "We are just servants and men. We are of like nature, like you." Then they call them to repentance, which basically means to change your mind—changing your mind from heathenism to placing your faith for your salvation in the true God. At the end of Acts 14:15-17, they start explaining who God is.

How would you explain God to somebody that has no Christian or biblical understanding of God? That becomes the benefit of what is being taught here. You might have people in your life or in your work place that are heathen to the core. They do not know anything about God. Where would you even start? You would not really start with the Bible if they do not have any respect for the Bible. You could start with the Bible, do not get me wrong, but there is a Bible that they do have, which is creation. That is called general revelation.

That is where Paul and Barnabas start. They explain that God is living (Acts 15:15). We do not worship a dead savior. We worship a living Savior who rose from the dead, ascended back to heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the father. He is not taking time off; He is active in ministry, from the Father's right hand in a priestly ministry called the Melchizedek priesthood.

The best Book of the Bible to read on His current Melchizedek priesthood—sometimes called His present session—is the Book of Hebrews. It talks all about it. It is a ministry He is doing now, before national Israel repents, and He returns to gather His elect nation and take His seat on David's throne.

Christ has three offices: prophet, priest, and king. Prophet, First Coming; king, Second Coming; priest in the nasty now and now. We worship a living Savior. That is why we pray. Someone in the 1960s said that God is dead. I cannot remember who said that, but they are wrong. If God is dead, why pray? Because His hand is active in human history.

Not to digress too much, but America's founding fathers believed that God is alive and active. It was Benjamin Franklin that basically said, "We are not going to get very far with our Constitutional Convention unless we start praying like we used to pray during the American Revolution when God helped us." He obviously believed God was a living God. I do not know where he stood on every doctrine, but he certainly had great respect for Christianity.

Paul and Barnabas are saying, "God is alive." They also say in Acts 14:15, "He is the Creator." They actually do quote the Old Testament. They quote Exodus 20:11, which says of God, "[He] *made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them*" (Exodus 20:11). Notice what they are doing there: they are appealing to the Bible that unsaved people have, which is creation.

We pick it up there in Acts 14:16 where they start explaining God's patience.

"In the generations gone by He permitted all nations to go their own ways" (Acts 14:16).

The word for "nations" there is "ethnos," ethnicities. Before God sent His Son into the world, I think the point here is that He put up with an awful lot. He permitted the nations to do what they wanted.

Paul, in Romans 1:24-32, is making reference to this patience of God when it says, "God gave them over," (Romans 1:24); Romans 1:26, "God gave them over," (Romans 1:26); "God gave them over," (Romans 1:28). They did not want God, so God gave them up; God gave them over to themselves. He did not incinerate them, instantaneously. It is this track record of God that He is a very patient God.

It is interesting that Paul and Barnabas do not come in with a Rambo approach to ministry and say, "Turn or burn." They explain the patience and the forbearance of God. We know God is very patient because you cannot get more wicked than the world was pre-Flood—antediluvian, as it is called. Every kind of wickedness that can go on went on, including violence all over the world.

"Then the Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days will be one hundred and twenty years'" (Genesis 6:3).

That is a long time. That is about half the duration of the age of the United States of America. God let all this insanity go on for 120 years with these people involved in every kind of sin that can be imagined, before He finally sent judgment, because He is a patient God. God is being very patient right now.

Peter talked more about the Flood than any other apostle, which makes sense because what was Peter's occupation? He was a fisherman. Luke talks more about medical issues than any other writer because he was a physician or a doctor. Matthew talks more about money than any other biblical writer because he was a tax gatherer. God used the unique personalities of these biblical writers.

Peter, who spoke often of the Flood, says, even today, *"the Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness"* (2 Peter 3:9). In other words, "God, what is taking You so long to come back? The internet said You were supposed to come back on the 23rd of September, but You did not do it. What is going on?" The reason He did not is because He is patient (2 Peter 3:9).

That is not to say His patience will not get exhausted at some point, because it does, but Peter writes:

"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

I know why He did not come back before 1983, because 1983 was the year I would become a Christian, so He held up the whole show just for me. He held up the whole show just for you. That is how God is. He is very, very patient. Paul and Barnabas bring that up (Acts 14:16).

You go to Acts 14:17, and learn that they bring up the fact that God is a revealer. He is not one of these "hide the ball" kind of deities. He is into disclosing truth. The problem with man, though, is man many times does not want the truth, but that does not mean there is not a witness of the truth. He makes reference to that in Acts 14:17:

"And yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17).

The truth of the matter is that God is a God of disclosure. Even people that do not have a Bible actually have a Bible, whether they have cracked this book at all. Many of the truths found in this book have already been revealed to them in creation. It is what we call general revelation. When you are dealing with people that do not have a Bible—do not read the Bible, do not respect the Bible—you start with the Bible that they do have, which is general revelation and creation.

Here is the difference between general and special revelation. Examples of general revelation would be nature and something called conscience, where the law of God is written into the hearts of people, even if they have never read the Ten Commandments. Psychologists are all upset. "The problem with human beings is they feel guilty all the time." There is a reason they feel guilty, They are guilty, because there is something called conscience (Romans 2:14-15) written on their hearts, and they instinctively know right from wrong.

I have used this example before, but if you have two kids or two grandkids, tell kid A, "Take out the trash and you get to go to Dairy Queen." Tell kid B, "If you take out the trash, I will take you to Disney World." Kid A will say, "That is not fair." Then you say, "Why do you think things are supposed to be fair?"

How do you instinctively recognize unfairness? Because conscience is put into people where they can recognize unfairness and injustice, whether they are Christians or not, whether they have read the Bible or not, whether they go to church or not. They see it for what it is. That is evidence of something inside of them.

Special revelation, on the other hand, would be something more specific, like the incarnation of Christ, miracles, and the recording of these 66 books. General revelation is available to the whole world. That is where Paul and Barnabas are starting. Special revelation is available to some. Not everybody has special revelation. We have it, but we have the 10-40 window today where this book has not penetrated.

What do you do with people like that? You appeal to the Bible that they have, which is general revelation. It cannot save you, but it can make you accountable to search for truth. Once a person really wants to know the truth, it is just a matter of time before special revelation arrives on their doorstep.

You have two examples of that in the Book of Acts. Cornelius wanted the truth, and God sent to him Peter (Acts 10). The Ethiopian eunuch wanted the truth, and God sent to him Philip (Acts 8). If you respond the right way to general revelation, it is just a matter of time before God will send special revelation.

The problem, though, is when people take general revelation and they suppress it and they hold it down in unrighteousness. Then we have a problem because that is not a knowledge problem, that is a will problem. If you are not going to respond to the light you have, why would you respect the Bible?

General revelation makes you accountable to search for truth, but it cannot save you. Special revelation will give you the specific information that you need to be born again and have a right relationship with God. General revelation is typically non-written or non-verbal, but special revelation when we are talking about the Bible is written down. It explains things in greater detail.

That is why Jesus is called the "logos" in John 1. "Logos" means what? The word. What do words describe? What did the incarnation do? Jesus becoming a man while retaining His deity. Humanity was added to deity. He described God to humans by becoming the God-Man. John 1:18 speaks of the incarnation of Christ, saying that He explained the Father.

The word "explained" used there is exactly where we get the word "exegete." The manifestation of the Son described or explained the Father, because God became one of us. As one of us, you can relate to Him. We have a record of that incarnation of Christ and His life among men for 33 years in the Gospels.

That is an example of special revelation. General Revelation is natural in the sense that it is the way the world works. The sun always rises in the east, etc. Special revelation is miraculous; it is supernatural. This book came into existence miraculously and supernaturally. The incarnation of Christ came into existence miraculously or supernaturally.

What Paul and Barnabas are doing here is they are talking about how God did not leave Himself without a witness. You may not have had special revelation, but look around you. God obviously exists. If you want a really good psalm—they are all good, but a really good psalm on the difference between general revelation and special revelation—I would recommend Psalm 19. The first four or five verses speak of general revelation: *"The heavens are telling of the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1).*

Unsaved people say, "Do not preach at me. I do not want to hear a sermon," when the truth of the matter is, every day of their life is a sermon. You look around, they get sermons all the time, whether they listen to Christian radio or anything, they get sermons just by looking at natural, general revelation. This world did not come about accidentally. There must be a design.

*"The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard there.
Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their utterances to the end of the world.
In them He has placed a tent for the sun" (Psalm 19:1-4).*

That is how the first part of Psalm 19 reads. You get to about Psalm 19:6, and the psalmist switches from general revelation to special revelation: *"The law of the Lord" (Psalm 19:7).* Now we are dealing with special revelation.

*"The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.*

*The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:7-8).*

This Psalm, written by David, is dealing with the two ways God speaks: left hand column, general revelation (Psalm 19:1-6); right hand column, special revelation (Psalm 19:7-14). That is a great psalm on that.

General vs. Special Revelation		
	General	Special
Examples	Nature, conscience (Rom 1-2)	Incarnation, Scripture, miracles
Availability	All	Some
Accomplishment	Accountability (Rom 1)	Salvation (Acts 4:12; 2 Tim 3:15)
Form	Non-written or non-verbal	Written
Quality	Natural	Supernatural, miraculous

One of the great general revelation passages is Romans 1:18-20:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18).

There is the problem. It is not a lack of knowledge, it is suppression of it and acting like God does not exist, despite the fact that it is obvious God exists. Look at the design of this world.

"...who suppress the truth and unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen..." (Romans 1:18-20).

You mean I can learn about the attributes of God without ever studying the Bible? According to Romans 1, I can. I could learn that He is eternal by looking at nature. I could learn that He has power, that He is divine, because these have been clearly seen, being understood not through the Bible. The Bible will give you more information, but general revelation will give you plenty to think about.

"...being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

On the day of judgment, unsaved people will not be able to say to God, "Why did You hide Yourself?" God is saying, "What do you mean? I never hid Myself. I revealed

Myself to you through general revelation. I gave you enough data to make you know that you are responsible to someone bigger than you. If your heart was in the right place, I would have given you more and you could have been saved." This is the kind of thing, I think, that Paul and Silas are talking about here.

Then they talk about how God is good.:

"And yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17).

Why would he mention rains? Why would he mention fruitful seasons? Here is the answer: Remember Acts 14:12 where they said, "And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes"? Guess what Zeus' job was? He was the god that brought the rain. Guess what Hermes' job was? He was the god that brought fruitful seasons.

That is the reason Paul and Barnabas are mentioning rains and fruitful seasons. They are trying to show them, "You had all of these things not because you prayed to the right deity, but because there is a real living God that created everything and provided all of this for you, around the clock. He is the one that wants a relationship with you."

They took these experiences with Paul and Barnabas, and they repackaged them according to their own pagan worldview. They wanted to turn Paul and Barnabas into Hermes and Zeus, and Paul and Barnabas would not allow them to do that. "Number one, quit worshiping us. Number two, if you really want to know the God that is responsible for the rains and the fruit and the crops here is the true God."

That is a great way to evangelize people. Take truth, and repackage it into their own worldview. Really good Christian apologetics—which is defending the faith and evangelism—takes them outside of their box and uses it as a platform to point them to the truth of God.

You notice that the apostles would not allow these pagans to put everything in their pagan box. They kept using their beliefs as a platform to direct them to the truth. "You guys worship gods, because of rain and crops. But let me tell you about the true living God that really created all of these things and gave these things to you. The reason He gave all this stuff to you is because He loves you.

*"Who satisfies your years with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle" (Psalm 103:5).*

That is God. He is a good God and He is patient.

"So that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45).

That is used as an example in the Sermon on the Mount as to why we should be good to those that hate us. We should be good to those that are good to us, which is not hard to do. Even the mob does that. But we should be good to people that mistreat us, because that is how God is twenty-four seven. The sun and the rain do not just come to the good people of the world; they come to the evil people of the world, too.

Since God is that way, we should be that way in how we deal with people. That is why He says, "When you act like that and you are good to everyone, regardless of how they treat you, you are like sons of your Father who does this all of the time by giving goodness, sunlight, and food to God lovers and God haters, simultaneously.

Jupiter was the Roman name for Zeus; Zeus was the Greek name. Remember what the Romans did when they took over Greece? They basically took the Greek gods and gave them Roman names. Zeus was renamed Jupiter, and then Hermes was renamed Mercury. These are real belief systems in Lystra that Paul and Barnabas are making reference to here.

Jupiter, or Zeus, was the god of the rains, and Mercury, or Hermes, was the god of fruitful seasons and crops. "Do not worship those gods. Worship the true living God, who is the true author of these things." God is good.

That is quite a sermon, is it not? What do you focus on in evangelism when you are trying to gain a hearing to speak? You focus on how God is alive, how He is the Creator, how He is patient, how He is not playing hide the ball, how He has revealed Himself in general revelation and special revelation, and how He is a very good God.

Then comes the reaction to the message. We have some apostolic restraining (Acts 14:18), Jewish opposition (Acts 14:19), and one of the most amazing—it is probably one of my favorite events in the whole Bible—a miraculous recovery. Notice, first of all, the apostolic restraining:

"Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrain the crowds from offering sacrifices to them" (Acts 14:18).

Do you remember what the crowds were doing in Acts 14:14? We studied it last time.

"But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd..." (Acts 14:14).

They are so impressed with this healing that they start to worship Paul and Barnabas. Here are Paul and Barnabas physically holding them back and saying, "Do not do that."

*"Not to us, O Lord, not to us,
But to Your name give glory
Because of your lovingkindness, because of Your truth" (Psalm 115:1).*

The apostles wanted to glorify the Lord, which is what we should be like right now. Do you remember Herod Agrippa? Herod needs to get a grip-a, as I like to say.

"Now he [Herod Agrippa] was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country. On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. The people kept crying out, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died" (Acts 12:20-23).

Think how many of our politicians would be dead today if God did this consistently? They are worshiping Herod Agrippa, and he receives the worship and he is struck dead by the Lord. Compare that to the corrupt leadership of Israel in the first century; compare that to these apostles.

When they have these people worshiping them, they do not want anything to do with it. They are tearing their robes. They are physically restraining them. "Stop it." They are directing attention back to the true God. *"Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name be the glory" (Psalm 115:1).*

As this is happening, look at the Jewish opposition:

"But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead" (Acts 14:19).

Look at that first part of it: *"But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium."* How long of a trip is it from Antioch and Iconium? That is a trip of about 90 miles from there. These are unbelieving Jews steeped in legalism, and they hate the message of grace so much that they are willing to travel 90 miles. You are not dealing with helicopters, airplanes, modern roads, jeeps, or whatever we have today. There are no such things. They hate grace so much that they are willing to travel 90 miles to try to stop the message of grace. Unbelievable. It shows you the total hatred that these legalists had towards the apostle Paul.

Like they do, they try to gin up the Gentiles. Do not get me wrong, I am very pro Jewish, pro-Israel, all of that stuff, but I will be honest with you, Israel in the first century here is not portrayed that favorably. They just cause trouble everywhere. The Apostle Paul, himself Jewish, went. God is not impressed with the Jew because they are a Jew. What

impresses God is a believing Jew. Paul is very clear that even though he was hated by the Jews, he still said in Romans 11:28 that currently they are your enemies.

You see evidence of that here, but they are beloved on behalf of their fathers. He never catered to antisemitism, Jew hatred, even though he probably, in his human self could have because he was so mistreated by them. The unbelieving Jews in this case—do not get me wrong, there are a lot of Gentiles that do bad things too, so there is enough blame to go around—but in this case, it is the Jews stimulating these Gentiles in Lystra, *"having won over the crowds" (Acts 14:19).*

You see that same thing going on back in Acts 14:2. This is the Iconium ministry.

"But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren" (Acts 14:2).

They are doing the same thing now in Lystra, and they are so committed to their task that they want to travel 90 miles in the first century to make sure they get the job done. It reminds me of what Jesus said in the Upper Room to His disciples. He says, "The time is going to come where people are going to hate you, and they are going to put you to death. As they are doing so, they are going to think they are doing God a service" (John 16:2).

That is the power of religion, religiosity or legalism. When grace comes into contact with religiosity, religiosity always persecutes grace. It goes right back to Cain and Abel (Genesis 4). Jesus versus the Pharisees; Paul versus the Pharisees; you go right on through the Bible. It is always the people of religion and works that hate the message of grace, unmerited favor. They do anything to stamp it out.

What do they get the Gentiles to do? They get the Gentiles in Lystra to throw rocks at Paul to the point where they think he is dead.

"...they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead" (Acts 14:19).

Paul is going to come back here at the end of the first missionary journey to Syrian Antioch, and he is going to write a letter to these people, to these churches that he planted here in southern Galatia. He is going to talk about these sufferings that he went through. I think the sufferings he is talking about are the ones that we are reading about here. He will say in Galatians 6:17,

"From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body you the brand-marks of Jesus" (Galatians 6:17).

You can imagine the scars and marks he had from people throwing rocks at him to the point where they think he is dead. It is not as if he can permanently heal from that.

When he writes to the Corinthians later, he says,

"Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and day I have spent in the deep" (2 Corinthians 11:25).

It reminds me of that Tom Hanks movie. What was that called again? "Castaway." Now, why is it you guys know that? But you do not know? George Whitfield. Shame on us, myself included.

"Persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!" (2 Timothy 3:11).

If you are having some issues in life, struggles of some kind, read about Paul and the things he went through, and how the Lord kept helping him over and over again.

They threw so many rocks at him, they actually thought that the man had died. Remember what Luke's occupation is. He is a physician, so he is qualified to make this analysis. He looked dead, but he was not dead. *"Luke, the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14).*

Here comes this crowd, 90 miles. They are so angry at Paul that they stir up the crowds, who throw so many rocks at him that everybody thinks he is dead, but he is not dead. He has this miraculous recovery in Acts 14:20.

Now, what would you do—what would I do—if you are doing ministry, and there is such a vociferous opposition to it that people come against you so aggressively that they think you are dead, and they leave you alone only when they think you are dead? I would probably, in my human self, put my tail between my legs and say, "I must be outside of God's will," but look at what Paul does:

"But while the disciples stood around, he got up and entered the city" (Acts 14:20).

What city? Lystra. It is almost as if he said, "I am not finished with my sermon yet. He went right back into the city and finished what God called him to do. This is something that the Holy Spirit is trying to develop in God's children called patience.

"But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Second Peter 1:5-7 calls it "perseverance." The Greek word for "perseverance" is "hypomone," which involves the capacity to stand up under completely unfair circumstances. That is something that God is trying to develop in the character of His children, which is available through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Second Peter one verses five through seven describes spiritual maturity. How do you know if you are making progress into spiritual maturity? Because these kinds of things will start to show up in your life with greater consistency. It is not an "I am going to let go and let God" kind of thing. I have to apply myself to learn what He says in His book and obey it and appropriate it by faith, moment by moment.

"Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control" (2 Peter 1:5-6).

Paul is not screaming at these people, "God is going to get you one day." He is a man under control; it is strength under control.

"And in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance ["hypomone"], and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love" (2 Peter 1:6-7).

You do not measure your spiritual growth, your spiritual maturity, by how much data is crammed into one's mind, if you can pass the test better than the next guy. We are pro-knowledge here. We believe knowledge is very important, but it was never intended by God as a last step. It is a first step.

Here is the portrait of growth (2 Peter 1:5-7). It starts with faith, on faith is built goodness, like how God is good and sends the rain on the God haters and God lovers simultaneously. Can we do that in our lives? Can we treat people respectfully in the same way when they love us or when they hate us? That is a tough one, but as someone has said, "The Christian life is not difficult; it is impossible."

If I am trying to live the Christian life through my own power, there is no way I could do this, but under God's power, I can say like Stephen and like Jesus, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60). "Don't get mad; get even." No, that is the flesh talking; that is the world system talking. That is how the natural world works. That is not how the Holy Spirit works.

If you can do that, you are growing as a Christian, and you may know next to nothing about the Bible. You may have never seen a miracle or had any visions from God or whatever, but if you can love your enemies, you are so far ahead of people spiritually in terms of maturity that may know the Bible backwards and forwards, and can quote the Greek and the Hebrew and know all the systematic theology and church history. What

good is a person like that if they cannot love their enemies? Believe me, when I have a finger pointed at you guys, I have three coming back at me.

On faith build goodness, on goodness build knowledge, on knowledge build self-control, on self-control build perseverance ("hypomene"), on perseverance build godliness, on godliness build brotherly kindness. That is "phileo" where we get the word Philadelphia—"phileo" and "adelphos," love and brother, brotherly love—which is always funny because they have one of the biggest murder rates in the country. That is supposed to be the City of Brotherly Love, right next to the Rocky statue.

On brotherly love build kindness. Then you have "agape" which is your most selfless kind of love. It is not "eros," romantic love; it is not "phileo," brotherly love; it is not even "storge," family love. It is a love that gives and expects nothing in return, which is the true definition of love (1 Corinthians 13). Lust cannot wait to get. Love cannot wait to give. That is what spiritual maturity looks like. Paul is walking in this, and writing about it. I love how Paul, when he wrote stuff, he did not just tell us what to do, he lived it.

He goes right back into the city and completes his ministry. That is "hypomene."

*"For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again,
But the wicked stumble in time of calamity" (Proverbs 24:16).*

It is not the fact that you get hit—we all get hit—it is how fast can you get up? That is "hyponome." How fast can you get up after you have been hit? A little history on this verse. I do not know if you guys remember the 1988 presidential campaign. George H.W. Bush was running, and I learned this by listening to Doug Wead, who was one of his advisors at the time. He was killed in the early primaries. Whether he was going to be president or not, was riding on New Hampshire. He ended up winning New Hampshire.

I am not here promoting everything George H.W. Bush said or did, but I found this testimony really interesting. Doug Wead said he looked at his Bible on the eve of his supposed defeat, and this is the verse that George H.W. Bush had been reading. He was knocked down, got right back up in New Hampshire and ended up becoming the president.

*"But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city"
(Acts 14:20).*

Who are these disciples? These disciples are many believers. You know who one of those disciples was that got saved watching all of this? A guy named Timothy. On his second missionary journey Acts 16 says:

"Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek" (Acts 16:1).

This guy Timothy became the key guy under Paul. Paul called him his son. You have two books in the New Testament written to him. Paul is circling back through on his second missionary journey, and he picks up this guy named Timothy. Where did this guy Timothy come from? Timothy, I believe, was there in Lystra and got saved by watching this happen. He saw that Jesus is real; God is real. He saw it in the life of the Apostle Paul.