

Acts 082
Edification Ministry
Acts 14:20b-26
October 8, 2025
Dr. Andy Woods

Good evening to you. Let us take our Bibles if we could, and open them to the Acts 14:20. We are continuing our verse-by-verse teaching through the Book of Acts on Wednesday evenings. Jesus Himself gave the outline to the Book of Acts:

"...and you will be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The Jerusalem ministry of the church is found in Acts 1-7. The outer regions surrounding Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria are found in Acts 8-12. Then He says, "You will be My witnesses to the remote parts of the earth," that is beginning in Acts 13 and going all the way through Acts 28. We are just at the initial part of that third big section, which is Paul's first missionary journey.

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)



We have seen Paul and Barnabas commissioned for that journey (Acts 13:1-3); their ministry on the island of Cyprus (Acts 13:4-12); they go to Pisidian Antioch and minister there (Acts 13:13-52). Then there was the Iconium ministry (Acts 14:1-7). The last two weeks we have spent on the Lystra ministry (Acts 14:8-20).

Now they leave Lystra and they go to Derbe, which starts in the second part of Acts 14:20. We have the journey to Derbe (Acts 14:20), and then ministry in Derbe (Acts 14:21). I am in Acts 14:20. Remember, they had left him dead. They threw so many rocks at him they thought he was dead. That is in Acts 14:19. He went right back into the same city of Lystra, and said, "I am not finished with my sermon yet." That whole transaction is complete. Then it says:

"The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe" (Acts 14:20).

Derbe is a journey of about 40 miles from Lystra. When he goes to Derbe, he has ministry in Derbe:

"After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples" (Acts 14:21).

That is the summation of Paul's ministry basically everywhere he goes. Even though he gets abused, almost everywhere he goes, he never leaves the gospel. The gospel, which it says there in Acts 14:21, is always the first thing on his mind and what comes out of his mouth and his ministry. He would later write this in Romans 1:16:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

You will notice in Acts 14:21 that Paul was not about making converts, believers, but he was interested in making disciples. That is the Greek word "mathetes," which is the idea of a learner.

First Missionary Journey (Acts 13-14)

VII. Derbe ministry (14:20b-21a)

A. Journey to Derbe (20b)

B. Ministry in Derbe (21a)

VIII. Return to Antioch (14:21b-28)

A. Return route (21b)

B. Ministries in revisited cities (22-23)

C. Route to Antioch (24-26)

D. Report to Antioch Church (27-28)

You will find and you are going to see this really clearly here in Acts 14, that when he goes places he does not bring a newborn home from the hospital and say, "Help yourself to a ham sandwich when you get hungry." That is not how it works. It is certainly not how it works in the natural world. You have to nurture a newborn, and that is what Paul does when he wins converts through the proclamation of the gospel. He stays long enough to see those newborns become disciples or learners.

Paul is not only interested in spiritual birth issues, he is interested in spiritual growth issues. That would make sense because what is the Great Commission? "Go therefore and make believers of all nations—" It does not say that. It says:

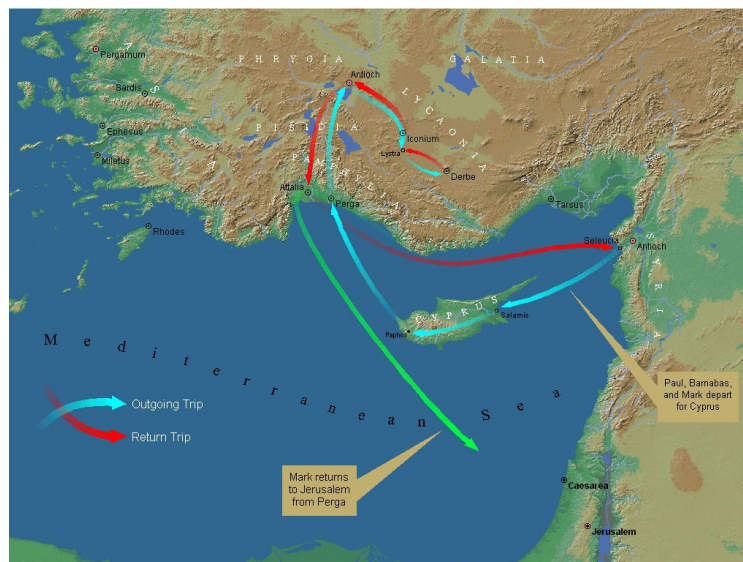
"Go there and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you..." (Matthew 28:19-20).

This is where a lot of missions groups go wrong, in my humble opinion. It is almost like a checklist. "We preached the gospel to that group and we got X amount of believers. Now let us move on." That is not what the calling of God is. The calling of God is not only to make converts or believers, it is to make disciples. Catching a fish is one thing; cleaning a fish is totally different. We are in the discipling business, not just the fish catching business.

There is not much said about his ministry in Derbe. It mentions Paul's two major things that he does—gospel and disciples. Then he leaves Derbe. From Derbe he is going to make a round trip back, and ultimately he is going to go back to the place that sent him, which is Antioch of Syria. Acts 14:21-28 is a description of his return trip, retracing his steps, and eventually getting back to the northern tip of Israel, where he is going to give his missions moment.

There is such a thing as a missions moment in the Bible. When he gives it, it is going to be the Greek word for "a long story." We let our missionaries talk for five minutes, but Paul and Barnabas are going to give a long story. I do not know how to get around that, because if our missionaries tell a long story, then we will not have any time for the Word of God. Maybe we will have to make our church services longer.

Here is his return trip, beginning in the second part of Acts 14:21. He takes the return route back: *"...they had returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch" (Acts 14:21).*



What happened in Lystra? He had so many rocks thrown at him, they thought he was dead. What happened in Iconium? They threatened him. What happened in Antioch? They expelled him. It is interesting to me that Paul goes right back into the same areas where he had experienced opposition. Why would someone do something like that? It has to do with the Holy Spirit in a person.

Paul would later write to Timothy, saying:

"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Only if the Holy Spirit is impelling a person do you go right back into the danger zone. I guess Paul could have taken a return trip back the easy way.

He could have done something like that, but he does not do that. He does not take the easy way out. He goes right back into the very areas that expelled him, threatened him, and threw rocks at him.

Why does Paul retrace his steps like this? Because he is not only interested in conversions, he is interested in discipleship. Basically, he wants to see how these converts in these churches in southern Galatia—modern-day Turkey—are doing. He will write to the Thessalonians, for example—we have not gotten to that ministry yet, but he will write to them—and he will talk about how he was a mother to them and a father to them.

How can you be a mother and a father to somebody when you give them the gospel and leave them to grow on their own? Paul does not do that. Sometimes in missions, you run into groups that say, "We are going to fulfill the Great Commission by the year 2035," or something. I personally do not think the Great Commission will ever be fulfilled, because if the Great Commission was just winning converts and reaching unknown people groups, then maybe you could say, "By 2035 or whatever, we are going to fulfill the Great Commission," but the Great Commission is about discipleship and edification.

The church never outgrows its need for edification. Edification is something that has to be constantly done, even for people that have been saved for a very long time. If you define the Great Commission that way, I do not think the Great Commission can ever be completed, because for it to be completed, you would have to bring every single convert to a full state of maturity, which I do not think can happen this side of the Rapture.

Here goes Paul revisiting these same cities. When you go down to Acts 14:22-23, you have a description of the ministries that he was doing on this return trip. Paul is doing three things: confirmation (Acts 14:22), exhortation (Acts 14:22), and the appointment of elders, leadership, in these different churches (Acts 14:23).

Let us take a look at each of these. Notice his ministry of confirmation: "strengthening the souls of the disciples" (Acts 14:22). Again, it is not about conversions; it is about strengthening. It is about conversions, but it is not only about conversions; it is about making believers through the power of the gospel. It is not only about making believers through the power of the gospel; it is about seeing them grow and seeing them become edified and strengthened in the things of God.

Paul would later explain that this is what one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is in the church. When he would write to the Ephesians much later on in the chronology of Paul's journeys and letters, he will say this:

"And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets [that is the foundation of the church], and some as evangelists [those are people that win souls into the church during the Church Age], and some as pastors and teachers' (Ephesians 4:11).

I happen to believe that "pastors and teachers" is basically talking about the same spiritual gift. It is called the Granville Sharp rule in Greek. When you have two nouns joined by a conjunction "and" and there is a definite article in front of the first of the two nouns, then the two nouns are equal. There are pastors, there are teachers, but then there is a special gift that God put into the body of Christ called the gift of pastor-teacher. It exists for the equipping of the saints.

You will notice that the pastor-teacher is working primarily with the saved saints, whereas evangelists are working primarily with the unsaved. Rarely do you have a pastor-teacher who is an evangelist. Rarely do you have an evangelist who is a pastor-teacher. Those are two separate gifts. I have seen people have both, but it is sort of uncommon from my own powers of observation.

An evangelist is an obstetrician that helps with the birthing process, spiritual birth. A pediatrician is a different discipline entirely in medicine. It helps the newborn grow. An evangelist brings people to faith in Christ. They have an ability to do that. A pastor-teacher helps the new converts to grow. In the world of medicine, you typically do not have a pediatrician who is an obstetrician and an obstetrician who is a pediatrician. Those are two different disciplines, and I think that is largely how it works in the spiritual world as well.

"For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12).

Once you are mature, what does it look like?

"Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we will no longer be children—" (Ephesians 4:13-14).

How do you know if you are a child? An infant crawls on the ground. Everything they see on the ground, they put in their mouth. Anything they see, they just jam it into their mouth. Whether it is good for them or not, they do not have any discernment. If you are 16 years of age doing that, you have a developmental problem.

As you continue, as you mature, what you start to see is that not everyone that stands behind a pulpit and preaches out of the Bible is necessarily good for your spiritual development, because you start to recognize there are false teachers in the body of Christ, unfortunately. There are false teachers in the world. You develop a screening where you can say, "That I am going to absorb. That is not good for my spiritual growth. That I will not absorb. It is not good for my spiritual growth. But this over here, I will absorb because it is good for my spiritual growth."

When you are a newborn, you cannot do that. Anybody that has the three G's—the gift of gab, good looks, and a guitar—who stands behind a pulpit, you are like, "Wow, this is amazing." You just take in everything they say. But as you grow, you start to say, "Wait a minute, that point over there was not Biblical, so I will reject that, but this point over here was Biblical, so I will accept it." That is what God wants for us.

The goal of a pastor-teacher is to bring children, newborns in Christ, into a state of maturity. As they come into a state of maturity, they are no longer *"tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in craftiness, in deceitful scheming"* (Ephesians 4:14).

I have been around for a little while. I got saved in 1983, and I cannot tell you the number of fads and fashions that have blown through Christendom since I have been a believer. I was around for the Promise Keepers movement, which was the thing, and then it faded away and no one even talks about it anymore. I was around for the Prayer of Jabez deal. Do you remember that? I should be able to roll off a few others. Everybody jumps on the bandwagon. "This is the greatest thing ever." Then it fades away and nobody talks about it anymore.

It is like the fashion world. Stuff is really in vogue—a certain tie or when I was in junior high and high school, you had to have OP shorts and shirts. Do you guys remember that? It stood for Ocean Pacific. Then you had to have these shoes called Vans. If you did not have Vans and OP shorts or a shirt, you were not part of the in-crowd.

For fun I put on all that stuff—I could not fit into it, really. I showed it to my daughter. She is like, "What in the world are you doing? You are a total embarrassment." It is like a fad that is just really cool and in vogue, and then all of a sudden nobody talks about it anymore. I guess my philosophy is to hang on to all that stuff, because it will come in vogue again at some point, maybe this side of the grave.

That is how Christianity is, particularly in the West. It is one fad after another. When you are young in the Lord, you jump on board with everything, but as you grow you are no longer tossed about by every wind of doctrine, and you start to develop some discernment. You say, "This is good for me. This is not." If you are in an environment where you are not being brought to this state of maturity, that is the fault of the pastor, because that is the pastor's job. He is a pediatrician.

You know you are reaching maturity when you could speak the truth in love. I am pretty good at speaking the truth, but can I do it in love? That is a different calling altogether. That is how you know you are maturing.

"But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies—" (Ephesians 4:15-16).

You start to realize that you have a place in the body of Christ. You are not there to sit, soak, and sour. You are there to contribute with your own unique spiritual gifts.

"—according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body building up of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:16).

That is what maturity looks like. That is what the gift of pastor-teacher is in the body of Christ to accomplish. Frankly, all the spiritual gifts are generally designed to help someone else reach some higher level of understanding or maturity or edification.

Very sadly, what is happening in many churches today is that Christians are going to a pep rally every week where they are getting really excited because they hear some kind of motivational talk. It is like drinking that stuff they used to sell. Maybe they still sell it. It has extra sugar and extra caffeine—Jolt.

You drink this stuff and you feel really good, but within five minutes, it is over. That is church for most people, unfortunately, particularly in North America. You get the jolt, but when the doctor's report says, "There is something bad on your X-Ray that I want to talk about with you," suddenly the fizz wears off. You need more from church than the jolt. You need something that is going to prepare you for the valleys of life that inevitably come.

Sugar Land Bible Church is trying to follow this model of edification. That is what Paul is doing here in Acts 14:22, as he is "strengthening the souls of the disciples." Then he also moves into exhortation:

"Encouraging ["parakaleo," which is the idea of exhorting] them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:22).

Notice that "the kingdom of God" is future. We have got to go through tribulations before we get into the kingdom. The Greek word there for "kingdom" is "basileia." If you followed us on our Kingdom series, we dealt with issues like this. It is speaking of the Millennial Kingdom.

One of the things I say in that book is that most of the New Testament references to the kingdom inarguably describe the kingdom as a future reality, rather than depicting it as

a present reality. That is why Jesus, when He taught us to pray, said, "Pray this way, 'Thy kingdom come'" (Matthew 6:10).

Let me just list these references to the kingdom: Matthew 20:21; Matthew 26:29, Luke 23:42, to the thief on the cross, "I tell you, today you will be with Me in the kingdom," which is a silly statement if there were in the kingdom presently, as they were hanging on the crosses together; Acts 14:22, which we are looking at here; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Corinthians 15:24 and 50; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Timothy 4:1 and 18; James 2:5; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 5:10.

If you look at all of those, you will see that the kingdom is something that is exclusively future. Obviously, they were not in the kingdom because he says, "You have got to go through many tribulations before you enter the kingdom." Once the kingdom comes, there are not going to be any tribulations. There is going to be peace on the earth, and peace in the animal kingdom. A little child will be able to put his or her hand into the cobra's nest and not be harmed; the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord; they will neither hurt nor destroy on My holy mountain (Isaiah 11:8-9).

We are obviously not in those conditions right now. It must be something future. Before that time period comes—and it will not come until Jesus sets it up, so if you are in a church that is trying to build the kingdom, they are involved in a waste of time because the only person that can build the kingdom is Jesus. Jesus never told us to build the kingdom. What He said is, "In the present age, I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). That is the project that we are involved in.

The body of Christ not to be confused with the kingdom, because only Jesus can set up the kingdom. That cannot happen until you have a converted Israel, nationally; and that cannot happen until the events of the seven-year Tribulation Period. When people sign their emails, "For the kingdom" or "We are doing kingdom work," count me out of that. I do not want any emails that say stuff like that. In fact, when I get emails like that, I usually get a little snarly with people and say, "What does this mean? Because we are not building any kingdom at all."

To be frank with you, the kingdom that is being built right now is the Antichrist's kingdom. That is the fourth beast that has to come before the smiting stone instantaneously strikes the feet of the statue, which is the Antichrist's kingdom. Then it grows and grows and grows and fills the whole earth (Daniel 2:34-35). If you are building the kingdom, you are actually contributing to the Antichrist's kingdom, because chronologically, that is the next kingdom on the horizon. All this stuff about the mark of the beast technology, the World Economic Forum, on and on and on it goes—that is the kingdom of the Antichrist that is being constructed.

The kingdom is completely and totally future. You will not have the Millennial Kingdom on planet Earth until Jesus touches down on planet Earth. His feet will touch the Mount

of Olives, the Mount of Olives will split, and He will bring in, at that point, the thousand-year Kingdom. Until that kingdom comes—and we should be praying for it to come one day, in God's timing—we go through many "thlipsis," which is the Greek word for "tribulations."

As I like to say—I think my friend Thomas Ice, I heard this from him—"If this is the kingdom, I must be living in the ghetto section," because there is nothing on this planet right now that looks anything like the kingdom of God.

I could prove we are not in the kingdom from my living room, looking at my two cats being mean to each other. One cat gets on the foot stool and acts like they own it, and the other cat sneaks around and out of the clear blue pushes Cat A off the footstool and acts like they own it. Then the other cat kind of sneaks around and they do the same thing back, and they go back and forth, back and forth, just being nasty to each other.

In the kingdom, the animals will get along with each other. I cannot even get my cats to get along with each other, so you are telling me that we are in the kingdom now? I would have to rewrite every biblical passage I know of about the kingdom.

In John 16:33 Jesus said this to His disciples in the Upper Room:

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world ["kosmos"] you will have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Do those guys that he was talking to have tribulation? Judas had left in John 13. Jesus is talking to eleven guys, and every single one of them was martyred; none of them died of natural causes. The only one that died of natural causes was John. It is not like they did not try to kill John. They tried to kill John. They boiled him in oil, but he was a stubborn guy. The guy would not die. What do you do with a stubborn old man that will not die? You throw him out on an island called Patmos, which was God's design, because it was on Patmos that he received a vision that we call The Book of Revelation.

There is no "your best life now" type theology in any of this. They suffered tribulations. Paul, as he is moving his way back through on his first missionary journey, is saying the exact same thing to these Christians that he had won to Christ a little earlier.

"But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation" (1 Corinthians 14:3).

That is what Paul is role-modeling here. He is prophesying and proclaiming edification, building, exhortation ["parakaleo"], encouragement and consolation. Why do they need all that as new converts? Because they are going through tribulations. New believers need comfort in the midst of tribulation. We all do, really, when you get right down to it.

I was very fortunate. The guy that won me to Christ gave me an open phone line to him. This was pre-cell phone days. This was back in the dark ages when the Earth's crust was still cooling, when we actually had to dial numbers on the wall. Have you guys ever gone through that?

I had this open line to this guy, and every time I had a problem as a new Christian—I was only 16 years old—I called him and he was able to edify, comfort, and console me as I walked through trials as a brand new Christian. That is what Paul is doing here with these folks.

Then Paul does something else. He appoints elders in these congregations, and you will see that in Acts 14:23.

"When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Acts 14:23).

The first time elders are mentioned in the Book of Acts is in Acts 11:30, where they were raising up money for the suffering saints in Jerusalem. The money had to go to the Jerusalem elders, which means the apostles, who were the original elders of that church. They were starting to pass off the scene, and they were being replaced by elders, which is a different governing body. It says in Acts 11:30:

"And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders" (Acts 11:30).

You will notice that the elders are not elected by the congregation; they were appointed. That is how we do it at Sugar Land Bible Church. We do not elect elders. What we do is take nominations from the floor concerning whom people might think qualify as an elder. The current elders take that under consideration when there is a vacancy in our elder board, but it is the leadership that ultimately makes the call concerning who is going to be an elder and who is not going to be an elder.

At Sugar Land Bible Church, you will notice that there is more than one elder: *"When they had appointed elders for them in every church" (Acts 14:23)*. Unfortunately, there are a lot of churches that run like a one-man show. Some of my friends that want to control everything in the church, have a method that they use for this. They call it the Moses method.

When you are dealing with the Church Age and you are going back to the Law of Moses to develop leadership, you know you are going the wrong direction because we are not Israel. We are not in the dispensation of law anymore. We are in the Church Age. It is a problem when you go into a church and one person controls virtually everything in the church. It is an attitude that says, "This church is a theocracy, and my name's Theo, and I am going to control everything in the church." That is a problem because that is not

God's model for the church. The church polity is supposed to be decentralized into a group of godly men.

You will see their criteria to serve in that position in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. That is how a New Testament church is to be governed, by a plurality of godly men. You will notice also that these elders were only selected after much prayer and fasting. This reminds me of how Paul and Barnabas were sent out originally from Antioch. It says:

"While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work which I have called them.' Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:2-3).

It was not one of these things where, "Who wants to be a missionary? Stand up." It was the leadership, fasting and praying, letting God make a determination as to who should be sent out on missionary journey number one. That is how elders are to be selected. It is supposed to be the same pattern. It is not supposed to be, "Whose turn is it? Who did I play golf with last?" Those are not supposed to be factors to consider. It is supposed to be a time of prayer, where you are asking the Lord's leading on, "Who is Your person?" Not, "Who is my person?" But "Who is the Lord's person?" That is how you select missionaries. It is how you select elders.

Of the elders at the church at Ephesus, Paul would say:

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

You become an elder because the Holy Spirit wants you to be an elder. That was disclosed to the other elders. There is no favoritism. There is no good old boys club. That is not how it is supposed to work. You are asking for the Lord's leading.

How did Jesus select the Twelve disciples? Have you ever wondered that? How did He end up with those guys? Of all the people He could have had, He picked them. Luke 6:12-13 tells you:

"It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12).

He was up all night long praying. This was God incarnate doing this. If God incarnate had to pray all night long to get insight related to who should be His disciples, why in the world have we ever gotten this idea in our heads that we do not have to similarly seek God?

"And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles" (Luke 6:13).

He got the twelve that He got because He had been in prayer at the mountain all night long. That is what you see role-modeled here in the Book of Acts.

There are three basic models for church government. Number one is the Episcopalian model—bishop rule. That is the model I grew up with as an Episcopalian. One bishop rules over multiple—they did not call them in that particular denomination, churches, they called them dioceses. When the bishop came to town, everybody was really nervous. I remember that because I was an acolyte in the church, and the bishop had this special chair that was bigger than all the other chairs.

That is one model. Is there biblical support for it? They think there is biblical support for it, but there is not. They try to find support in Acts 15 where the apostles made a ruling and it affected everybody, but that was the apostles. We do not have apostles today.

The second model is congregational rule, which to me is like letting the inmates run the asylum, basically. The people you are trying to bring to maturity are the people calling the shots in leadership. There are all these votes and that kind of thing. They think that they can support that from Acts 6:1-7. I call it mobocracy, to be honest with you. It is like letting children tell the parents what to do.

They think it is in Acts 6, where there was a decision made related to the appointing of deacons, and it said: "This found favor with everyone." It does not say that they voted. It just says that they happened to agree with leadership at that point.

Finally, there is what we think is the correct model. It is not something we came up with. We think it is supported in the New Testament called the Presbyterian model. Why is it called Presbyterian? Because the Greek word for elder is "presbyteros." It has nothing to do with Presbyterian denominations that we know today.

It is elder rule in the sense that a local church is governed by a plurality of godly men. There is no higher body that our church is accountable to because we are not a denomination or a local church. The highest authority you can go to is the elder-led model. Why embrace this? Because it is all over the New Testament. It is hard to get away from it.

"From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17).

"Do not neglect the gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying of hands by the presbytery [elders]" (1 Timothy 4:14).

First Timothy 4:14 uses the word "eldership" instead of "presbytery" in the NKJV.

"The elders who rule well are to be considered of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching" (1 Timothy 5:17).

"Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses" (1 Timothy 5:19).

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you" (Titus 1:5).

"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Here is Paul, appointing these elders. When he appoints them, he commends them to the Lord. The Greek word for "commend" here is the same word for a deposit in a bank account. He prayed for them; the Lord showed him who were the right people to be in charge of this particular church. Just like taking money and depositing it into a bank account, he deposited them before the Lord, and then he moved on because he was not called to pastor or lead this church.

This is how church planting takes place. You will notice at the end of Acts 14:23, it says: *"they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."* They were believers and they were growing disciples. You will notice that there is one condition necessary to be justified, it is to believe. Lewis Sperry Chafer says: "...upwards of 150 passages of Scripture condition salvation upon believing only."¹

You get to Acts 14:24-26, and now he is making his route back to Antioch, at the northern tip of the nation of Israel. He travels through Pisidia and Pamphylia (Acts 14:24):

"They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia" (Acts 14:24).

Pisidia is up there. It is a big area. It is a region. I guess in modern-day vernacular we would call it a county. Then Pamphylia is the next county south. One of the cities that we are going to see in just a minute is Attalia and Perga. This is where John Mark, you might remember, bailed out. You remember that when the first missionary journey started, it was Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark. We do not know why he left. There are all kinds of speculations, but he just quit.

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer vol. 7, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 265-66.

"Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem" (Acts 13:13).

This is going to lead to a big split between Paul and Barnabas at the end of Acts 15, as we move into the second missionary journey. Barnabas, who is related to Mark, says, "Let us take the kid." It does not say "kid," but that is my rendition of it. "Let us take the kid on the second missionary journey." Paul says, "No way. He bailed out with missionary journey number one. He is going to bail out with missionary journey number two."

There was an intense—the Greek is really strong—an intense schism or argument between two men of God. Barnabas is going to take Mark and they are going to go to Cyprus. Paul is going to split off, and he is going to retrace a lot of these steps, and then get further into Europe on the second missionary journey. Barnabas and Mark are going to drop off the radar screen. Not that they are not important; it is just the focus of Acts is on Paul. He is going to get the spotlight, once that schism occurs, for the rest of the book.

They get to Perga and they preach the word: *"When they had spoken the word in Perga" (Acts 14:25)*. Why are they speaking the word in Perga? Because they had been to Perga before on the trip. That is what I have got circled there. All it says on the trip in is that they traveled through there, but they did not preach the word. We do not have any record of it.

"Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left and returned to Jerusalem. But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down" (Acts 13:13-14).

On the trip in they went to Perga, and there is no recorded ministry, there is no recorded evangelism, proclamation, or disciple making. It was a port town. They were there momentarily and they made their way up to Pisidian Antioch.

You guys are aware that there are two Antioch's right. This one is Syrian Antioch. Every missionary journey is going to be launched from there, at the northern tip of Israel. The one up here is called Pisidian Antioch. It can get a little bit confusing, but it is like the United States. I looked up Duluth one time, since I have a lot of friends there, and there are about 40 Duluths in the United States of America. That is kind of how it was in the Greco-Roman world.

They were in Perga briefly, and they went all the way up north there to Pisidian Antioch and in Perga. We do not have any record of ministry, proclamation, or disciple making, so that may be why they are doing preaching here on the trip back. You see that there in Acts 14:25: *"When they had spoken the word in Perga."*

Maybe Perga did not get the gospel the first time around, but on the trip back, we are going to make sure they get the gospel. That may be why it reads that way. Then from there they go to Attalia: "...they went down to Attalia" (Acts 14:25). Where is Attalia? It is right next door to Perga. It is considered to be the seaport in Perga.

Do you see all the geography that Luke is using here? Syrian Antioch, Cyprus, Paphos, Perga, Attalia, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe. Why does he have to give us all this geography? He is giving us all this geography because he is trying to document for Theophilus, his reader, the birth and the growth of the church. He is explaining to Theophilus that, "Your Christianity is real. Look what God did to get the gospel to you," presumably in Rome. After all, Jesus said, you are going to be My witnesses to the remote parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

How do you document the birth and growth of the church? Three ways: numerically—that is why it keeps mentioning numbers; ethnically—it is transitioning from an offshoot of Judaism into an institution that is primarily dominated by Gentiles; he is documenting the birth and growth of the church geographically.

Luke is a physician. He has a mind for detail. If you have a physician that does not have a mind for detail, you should get a new physician. He is meticulously recording all of these places of geography so Theophilus can get the picture concerning how important he is in the outworking of God's sovereign purposes.

There is numerical growth. Those are progress reports—3,000 saved; later on it is 5,000. You get to Acts 11, and it says "vast numbers." Geographically, the church's progress is being documented from Jerusalem to Rome, giving every little geographical detail. I guess he could have said more, but a lot of geographical details in the process.

Then it is moving ethnically from being an offshoot of Judaism to something that the Gentiles would eventually have ascendancy in. Virtually everywhere he goes, he goes to the synagogue and the Jews do not want it and reject it. He has to go to the Gentiles instead, and he bears much fruit. Then the Jews in the synagogue get mad at him because he is successful at winning the Gentiles over, and they drive him out. That pushes him to the next city, and virtually the same thing happens there.

Luke is telling us how all of this materialized, all the way back to Syrian Antioch. Let us look at Acts 14:26: "*From there they sailed to Antioch.*"

They got on a boat, and they made it back to Antioch. Keep in mind that they had been gone from Antioch for two and a half years, which is a long time—AD 48 to AD 49. This is the church, the church at Antioch, that sent them. They go back to the same place. Why did they go back to the same place? Because they are accountable to that body. It is that body that sent them. It is that body that gets their missions report.

Then if you look at the last part of Acts 14:26. I love Acts 14:26. I love all of it, but I especially love Acts 14:26. It says:

"From which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished" (Acts 14:26).

What he is talking about here is a work of grace from start to finish. Grace is unmerited favor. "We were launched out of here by the grace of God. It was the Holy Spirit that picked us and sent us, and it was the grace of God that pushed us through all of these areas and got us back to the same location two and a half years later." The grace of God still at work in their lives. I say to the Lord, "Lord, I want to be just like that. I want to be a grace operation from start to finish. I want Sugar Land Bible Church to be a grace operation from beginning to end."