



**Acts – Can I get a Witness?**  
**Wk. 41 Learning How to Persevere Wk. 1 Iconium**  
**By Pastor Jody May 07/09/2023**

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**Paul and Barnabas at Iconium**

**14** Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. <sup>2</sup>But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. <sup>3</sup>So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. <sup>4</sup>But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. <sup>5</sup>When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, <sup>6</sup>they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, <sup>7</sup>and there they continued to preach the gospel.

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**[REVIEW/INTRODUCTION]**

I have been asked lately if I would do the *Savage Race* again, that's a 10K (6.2 miles) 25+ obstacle course and btw that won't be until March 2024 and for the record I would be 54 by then. The last time I did it was in my early 40s about ten years ago and back then I completed every obstacle and ran every part of that race. Heather will also tell you I did not train one time for that race outside my normal gym routine, granted I was about 15 pounds lighter though back then. My question for them was why would I want to run that? They took out my favorite parts like jumping over fire or what Heather thought was fun diving under electrified fencing! Good times!

To be serious with you, I am a little afraid of running that now, and it's got nothing to do with the obstacles. No, it's my **endurance or my perseverance**. I have always been good with endurance, but I have always hated endurance training such as running. I mean ask Heather, I am built for short distances and power, but she will also tell you I used to have great stamina, but running is just torture to me. And as you get older, it's not fun getting winded from things that never got you winded before. The problem with running that race is not the race you see, it's the training I would have to do, I would have to do a little running and brothers/sisters, that's just not happening!



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Thank the Lord that the **path to heaven is not through the Savage Race**, but you know even as I say that you all were thinking, “Yeah Jody, but life is a Race, isn’t it?”

**Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV**

**12** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and **let us run with endurance the race** that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

So, you are right, life is a RACE! And I am supposed to run it with **endurance/perseverance. Endurance is the same word for perseverance in the Greek, 5705** ὑπομονή (*hypomonē*), ἤς (*ēs*), ἡ (*hē*): n.fem.; ≡ Str 5281; TDNT 4.581–LN 25.174 **endurance**, perseverance, patience<sup>1</sup>

I am also to consider how Jesus, ran this race called life (v.2), that He did it to sit at His Father’s right hand, that was His finish line. Jesus’ race though wasn’t just a normal run, and it wasn’t like a marathon either, it was the **MOST SAVAGE of all RACES** of which His last obstacle, and family there were many trials/obstacles He faced, but the **last was the cross**. There was no way around it either, no one to help Him up, and no one to cheer Him on (like the wall in the SR), and He did that all on His own. We are to look to that and know it is to encourage us to do the same, as He said to us, “**take up your cross now and follow**” Him (Mat 16:24-26). And we know that plan works because in Heb. 12:1 it says there is a **cloud of witnesses**, people who also ran this SAVAGE RACE, and completed it, by keeping their eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of this race.

I want us all to see this morning that the Christian life, IS a **Savage Race**, it has obstacles, and you don’t go around your cross, **you go through it**. And in running that race you have to build up your **perseverance**, and yes, it is the worst part about your training. Learning to persevere is the worst type of

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<sup>1</sup>Swanson, J. (1997). [Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek \(New Testament\)](#) (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.



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training pain, going through something that leaves you breathless, worn out, and wanting to puke at times. But if you don't do your endurance work you won't make it through that which we all have to go through, our own cross.

Paul showed us in Romans how endurance training works to get us through:

**Romans 5:3-5 ESV**

<sup>3</sup>Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces **endurance**, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces **character**, and character produces **hope**, <sup>5</sup>and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

When we embrace training to build up **endurance**, working towards the goal of completing this race, when you hit your cross, your wall, your **perseverance** pays off because having gone through multiple race days you have learned to as Paul says in 1 Cor 9:24-27 to run in such a way, "**to obtain the prize.**"

When you run that way, you have developed **competitor character**, that is you have stopped thinking about whether to run or not, you "**just do it**", it is who you are, you don't give up. AND when you have that type of character, that is what makes you **HOPE**, which according to Hebrews 11:1, is **Faith that God will not fail in you!** SO, the picture is when you get to that big obstacle whatever your cross is and it may be daily for our cross is **denying self**, you are automatic, you pray as the Lord did in the garden and you go through it, and on the other side is the reward, to become a part of that great cloud of witnesses.

**[GOSPEL]**

This type of **perseverance** helps you do a lot of things in life.

- It makes the parent never quit praying for a child even when that child is far from God.
- It makes couples not attack each other but rather attack the world together when they go through economic hard times.
- It makes our kids **courageous/steadfast** when they are challenged about accommodating people with wrong pronouns.



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- It makes us all not despair but remain **positive** when we go through a bad doctor visit where we get some bad news.
- It makes us go through election cycles prayerfully with a sense of **optimism** knowing God's purposes can't be thwarted.
- It makes us more **generous** in the light of economic uncertainty because market futures have nothing to do with Kingdom Wealth, Production, and Purpos.

HS empowered perseverance keeps you in the race, to make much of Jesus, in all circumstances and at all times. We **need Perseverance** to accomplish the **Great Commission** of taking that Gospel into the world, that they may see that the belief in Christ 'IS' the answer for all things.

That all sounds fantastic right!? **Now let me give you the hard part to swallow in all of this:**

**MAIN POINT:** Perseverance is not something you are born with, it is something you have to develop.

Don't be afraid of this, you're not going to have to pick up some extra exercise routines, you probably won't have to change your life patterns too much really, BUT it will require you to live with a **different intentionality**. It will call you to stop being a conformist and start being confrontational. To be real honest, it means you will need to confront yourselves, look in the mirror, and get on your own case about why you are not putting the work in.

Today we will begin to look at the work that Paul and Barnabas put in, and I will tell you something else, when you engage in the act of **Mission**, taking the Gospel into the world, that **lifestyle** is automatically going to make you build that endurance/perseverance. It's like choosing to go to the gym, making your way there is 50% of the fight.

I have three different ways **Perseverance is Practiced** in our story today that helped Paul & Barnabas finish their race, and it will help you too: 1<sup>st</sup> Practicing Perseverance w/Courage, 2<sup>nd</sup> Practicing Perseverance with Reliance, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Practicing Perseverance with Prudence.

**1. Practicing Perseverance with Courage.**



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**14** Now at **Iconium** they **entered together** into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.

Why does it take courageous perseverance to go into Iconium? Well, as we said last week Paul is learning about what to expect when he comes to a synagogue; a sad and depressive truth, most Jews don't want the Gospel. His choice to go there first, although it makes sense strategically, tends to get him into trouble. He loves His Lord though, and out of honor again for Him, He takes the Word to his brothers first, offering them Grace through preaching a **call to repent and believe in Jesus for forgiveness of sin.**

You see, it takes courage to go back into a place where you know they won't want you; it takes courage to walk into a place, where as Paul learned, they may be chasing you out with stones and canes, it takes courage to go around those that will show nothing but disdain for you. To the credit of the HS in Paul, that was his calling card, he always went into the Lion's Den first. But here's what Paul knew in those times:

**Psalm 23:4 ESV**

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.

**Matthew 28:20 ESV**

<sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Knowing the promises of the OT + Knowing Jesus was with him + the act of practicing the commands of the Lord led to Paul not just to getting through his cross but pulling those he loved along as well. Paul was on a mission folks, Jesus has charted his course already so he would be made an example for us.

**Acts 9:16 ESV**



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<sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

Paul is learning by persevering that some of those bumps and bruises you get by confronting this world, are actually what makes you strong (see his letters about the sharing of his sufferings); it is what builds you up, it is what sets the example for God's people, it is what God uses to call people out of darkness, and that there is a TRUTH that is worth persevering for.

The first step in our learning to persevere is to take heart, **have COURAGE**, for Jesus is with us, and walk back into that place where you know you may **not be wanted** for we are told by Jesus to **bless those that curse us** (Luke 6:28).

- Maybe there are people in workplace that curse you, make sure you walk through the middle of them and tell them good morning, good night, and have a nice day.
- Maybe you have relatives that just hang up on you when you reach out to them, make sure you text them, you send them greeting cards, and you pray for them as often as they come to mind.
- Maybe you have a neighbor that has been unneighborly to you, make sure to say hie and keep inviting them to watch the game every once and a while and lend them a tool when they need it.

All of those things are examples of exactly why you are there in the first place, to be the fragrance of the Gospel. God has put us all around some just mean people so we could have the effect of Christ on them. It takes courage to be around those that may curse you, but **perseverance is something you have to develop, it is not something you were born with.**

## **2. Practicing Perseverance with Reliance on the Holy Spirit.**

<sup>2</sup> But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and **poisoned** their minds against the brothers.

OK here we go again, just like last time in Antioch, the Jews are stirring the pot. They can't refute truth, so they poison or hurt the minds of the Gentiles so that they become antagonistic to these preachers of the Good News. There is nothing more infuriating than to have someone gossip about you, tell



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others that your motives are to do them harm, without you ever getting a word in. Have you ever had someone stop you from trying to help a loved one, someone that defamed your name about something good you were trying to do?

Well, you have a choice to make when that happens. The world seems to want to show us now that if they yell loud enough, if they slander enough, if they lie enough, you will just shut up. It's what they are betting on. So, we can either be conformed to the things of this world, and by our silence let them think they are right, or we can confront in love. **[Illustration of the evangelist preacher and how he was told that what he was spewing was violence].**

<sup>3</sup>So they **remained** for a **long time, speaking boldly** for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Notice the grammar, because of their poisonous gossip it says "**so they remained**" the reason for staying was because of them being slandered. They spoke boldly, remember that from last time, when people react poorly to the truth, you go bold! Then **God empowered them by the Spirit** with ability to do miracles, probably to directly confront the falsified claims of the Jews.

Paul and Barnabas are now practicing perseverance/endurance, they are staying this course relying on the HS to validate their claims. Practicing perseverance means you will have to notice **you don't do this RACE alone in your power** but that you must **be reliant on the power** of God.

Make no mistake for our students to have the opportunity to spread the gospel this week in **Panama City** they will have to rely on the Spirit, for us to take one more step in **Ecuador** this October it will have to be done by the Power of the Spirit, for you and I to make any leigh way in our workplaces, schools, neighborhoods, and family for people to understand the Gospel, we will have to rely on the Holy Spirit.

**Luke 21:14-15 ESV**





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Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

To practice perseverance with reliance on God you and I will have to be ok, without always knowing what the objections will be, where the attack will come from, nor who will be doing the attacking. To practice perseverance to build our character, that will come from engaging with this world, be ready to let God do the moving and acting on our behalf. Oh BTW, I need to leave you with this great word from Jesus when you take this training serious and rely on the Holy Spirit.

**Luke 21:17-19 ESV**

<sup>17</sup>You will be hated by all for my name's sake. <sup>18</sup>But not a hair of your head will perish. <sup>19</sup>By your **endurance** you will gain your lives.

Jesus is not saying you **'may'** be hated, no, you will, BUT not a hair of your head will perish, that means eternally, but by your **Endurance/Perseverance** you will gain your lives. You are demonstrating your faith is real, "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*" – Paul (Phil 2:12). Practicing **perseverance by relying on the HS for strength is something you have to develop; it is not something you were born with.**

**3. Practicing Perseverance with Prudence.**

<sup>4</sup>But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles.

So, the Apostles by being bold, have effectively made wedges in the devils lies and schemes. God has been successful; He is awakening the eyes of His elected remnant. Listen, if you have not gotten anything out of the last 3-4 weeks hear me, **when the going gets tough God's people can't stop because He uses our boldness, our witness, our mouths to call His children home!** People get saved when the church rises up and confronts culture, we can't never stop doing that! But that doesn't make for great friends with those that are threatened by the Gospel.





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<sup>5</sup>When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, <sup>6</sup>they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, <sup>7</sup>and there they continued to preach the gospel.

The world says look we were able to drive them away they lost! No, what's going on here is the **formula for success**. Some were saved v.4 while preaching the attempt was made of verbal and physical attacks, and those actions of the Iconium leadership are what solidifies faith for these new disciples and another church is planted, just as in Antioch.

Then practicing prudence in their perseverance delivers them and their ministry. They have ascertained it is not time for them to give their lives yet for the cause, that will come later. 2 thoughts on the reasons why:

First, the strategy was becoming to hit these Gentile cities surrounding the area so they can receive support from local churches. If they were to stay, they would risk imprisonment or death, and Paul and Barnabas at this point were the only evangelists requesting help from these churches. No, it wasn't the right time to give their life for this cause yet, **that wasn't the strategy**.

Secondly, Paul had an appointment with history that he would give his all in a different way at a different time, **God chooses when our time has come**. To sacrifice his freedoms is an actual choice that Paul makes later in his last travels where he finally gets arrested by the Jews in Jerusalem. He knew what was in store for him, and he walked into that persecution, for he knew it would eventually get him in front of Cesar to make the case for the Gospel.

Practicing Perseverance with prudence or patience is how we learn the art of sacrifice; how and when to give of yourself. But that is hard to do if you have no sense of calling, no sense of purpose, no plan for you and your family on how you will be used by this kingdom. After ten + years of church planting, through ups and downs I have never felt like it was time to throw in the towel, that is because I pray on and think about what God has asked my family to do in this midst of this community, and the importance of it. **Family that is your**



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**call to.** You are a part of HCC and it is your calling to figure out what God has in store for you according to Matthew 28, you are to pray about it, and you are to practice perseverance with prudence.

**[CHALLENGE]**

Let me tell you about another young Christian that accepted his call and learned from Paul what it means to persevere, and we will use this example for our closing words.

**2 Timothy 3:10-17 ESV**

**All Scripture Is Breathed Out by God**

<sup>10</sup>You (Timothy), however, have followed my teaching, my conduct (boldness), my aim in life (to suffer for Christ), my faith, my **patience** (prudence), my love, my steadfastness (courage), <sup>11</sup>my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at **Antioch**, at **Iconium**, and at **Lystra**—which persecutions I endured (persevered); yet from them all the Lord rescued me (relying on the HS). <sup>12</sup>Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus (members of HCC) will be **persecuted**, <sup>13</sup>while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. <sup>14</sup>But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it <sup>15</sup>and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

**Practicing Perseverance with courage, reliance, and prudence can be helped...**

- We practice perseverance with courage by accepting if we **desire a godly life we will be persecuted.**
- We practice perseverance with reliance on the HS accepting people have a **desire to deceive**, but some have a desire to know truth, so let us desire to **speak the truth boldly.**



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- We practice perseverance with prudence/patience by **seeking, praying, contemplating, and discussing with our church family** what they think is my calling for God.

Yes, it is true family, Perseverance is not something you are born with, it is something you have to develop. So, let's practice this publically and corporately, let us pray, and let us rely on the Holy Spirit to start making the changes in our lifestyles right now, and let us be doers of the Word and not just hearers.

**[PRAYER]**

**[COMMUNION]**

**[BENEDICTION]**

Go in the name of the Father, that has laid out our destinies through our crosses to bear, so that we too may glorify Him.

Go in the name of the Son, that is the author and perfecter of our faith, keep your eyes on Him and know He is with you always.

Go in the name and power of the Holy Spirit, and rely on Him for your strength, and practice your perseverance among a lost and dying world.