Acts 14:1–20 | Week 27

When Following Jesus Gets Hard

START HERE

Have you ever done what you genuinely believed God wanted you to do, only to have things get harder instead of easier?

What happened, and how did you respond?

LOOK AT THE WORD

Read Acts 14:1–20 together.

In Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas are sharing the Gospel and watching lives change. But their obedience doesn't lead to an easy road. They face opposition, misunderstanding, rejection, and even physical violence.

Through three different scenes, we see what it looks like to remain faithful when following Jesus gets difficult.

The message gives us three important reminders:

- When people are against you, stay bold.
- When people are for you, stay humble.
- When people hurt you, get back up.

DISCUSS

1. When people are against you, stay bold

Read Acts 14:1–7.

Paul and Barnabas arrive in Iconium and begin sharing the Gospel. Many believe, but others stir up opposition. Instead of leaving, Paul and Barnabas stay and continue speaking boldly about Jesus.

The message reminds us: **Hard doesn't always mean wrong.** Sometimes God calls us to knock, wait, and remain faithful even when things are difficult.

Why do we sometimes assume that if something is difficult, it must not be God's will?

Have you ever experienced resistance while trying to do something you believed God was calling you to do?

Read Acts 14:3. What stands out about Paul and Barnabas' response to opposition?

2. Don't let resistance determine your obedience

The message shares the illustration of a little boy surfing in big waves. He wasn't afraid because he knew his father was watching him from shore.

Paul wasn't bold because the waves weren't big. He was bold because his God was big.

Read Isaiah 41:10.

How does knowing God is with you change the way you face difficult situations?

What is something that currently feels like a "big wave" in your life? How can you trust God's presence rather than allowing fear to determine your next step?

3. When people are for you, stay humble

Read Acts 14:8–18.

Paul encounters a man who has never been able to walk. Paul tells him to stand, and the man immediately begins walking! The crowd is amazed and begins treating Paul and Barnabas like gods. But they quickly reject the attention and remind the crowd that they are ordinary people.

The message makes an important distinction:

Pride looks in the mirror and says, "Look what I did." Humility looks through the window and says, "Look what God did."

Read James 4:6.

Why can success, recognition, or compliments sometimes lead to pride?

How can we remain humble and give God the credit when things are going well?

4. Don't let criticism crush you or compliments crown you

Paul and Barnabas experience two very different reactions. Some want to worship them, while others want to destroy them. People's opinions can change quickly, and we must be careful not to let those opinions define us.

Why is it so easy to let other people's opinions influence how we see ourselves?

Which is more difficult for you to handle: criticism or compliments? Why?

What would it look like to find your identity in what God says about you rather than what others think?

5. When people hurt you, get back up

Read Acts 14:19–20.

Some of the people who opposed Paul follow him to Lystra. They win over the crowd, stone Paul, drag him outside the city, and leave him for dead.

But the disciples gather around Paul, and he gets up. Not only does he get up, but he goes back into the very city where he was attacked.

The message reminds us:

Following Jesus doesn't mean you won't suffer. It means you don't have to suffer alone.

Why was it important that the disciples gathered around Paul?

Have you experienced a season when other believers helped you get back up after something difficult?

Read Proverbs 24:16. What encouragement do you find in this verse?

6. Your pain doesn't cancel your calling

Read 2 Corinthians 4:8–9.

Paul describes being hard pressed, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

The message reminds us: **The stones hurt Paul, but they didn't stop him. The pain affected him, but it didn't define him.**

Why is it important to understand that experiencing pain doesn't mean God has abandoned us?

Are there disappointments or painful experiences that have made it difficult for you to keep moving forward?

Who in your life might need encouragement to get back up and keep following Jesus?

7. We get back up because Jesus got up

Read Isaiah 50:7.

The message connects Paul's suffering to Jesus. Jesus was rejected, falsely accused, beaten, and crucified. But Jesus didn't just get back up. He rose from the grave!

Because of the cross and the empty tomb, Jesus conquered death once and for all.

We don't get back up because of grit; we get back up because of grace.

How does Jesus' death and resurrection give us hope when life knocks us down?

What's the difference between trying harder in our own strength and relying on God's grace?

What does it mean to live with the confidence that because Jesus rose, what knocked you down doesn't get the final word?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Take a few minutes to reflect silently:

1. Where am I allowing resistance or difficulty to affect my obedience to God?
2. Am I more concerned with what people think of me than what God thinks of me?
3. Is there an area of my life where I need to get back up and keep following Jesus?
4. Who might need me to come alongside them and help them get back up?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

This week, take one step:

- **Stay bold:** Don't let resistance keep you from doing what God has called you to do.
- **Stay humble:** Give God the credit instead of seeking recognition for yourself.
- **Get back up:** Don't allow pain or disappointment to keep you from following Jesus.
- **Encourage someone:** Come alongside someone who is struggling and remind them they aren't alone.

Challenge: Identify one area where life has knocked you down or made obedience difficult. Ask God to help you take one faithful step forward this week. Remember, your pain doesn't cancel your calling.

PRAY TOGETHER

Pray that God would help your group:

- Remain bold when following Jesus becomes difficult.
- Walk in humility and find their identity in Christ.
- Trust God through pain, disappointment, and resistance.
- Encourage and support one another through difficult seasons.
- Remember that their hope comes from the grace of Jesus and the power of His resurrection.