



## **Useful to the Lord – Part 11**

### **Tenacious Endurance**

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Well, if I said, I need you in an hour to run a race, I think if you were enlisted by me to try to run in some kind of race, you would want to know what kind of race it was. And if I said, "Well, it doesn't matter. Just be ready," you'd want to know what it was because you'd say it does matter. It matters if it's a 50-yard dash or if it's a, you know, 5K or whether it's 26 miles, it matters if it's hurdles or that weird thing I saw on the Olympics a couple of times back The Steeplechase. Have you seen that? I don't understand that. I thought that was for horses, but they had this weird race.

It's 3,000 meters and seven and a half laps around the 400-meter track, and they've got these giant-like barriers. You know, when they run the hurdles, they flip over if you hit them. But these they do not flip over and there are pools behind them and those pools are in varying lengths. It's just crazy. 12 feet behind these barriers, seven pools. It's just crazy. It's a crazy race. And if I said, "Well, we're going to do that," you'd certainly need to know. If I just said racing, right? There are all kinds of racing. You can't be prepared unless you know what kind of race it is. Well, you see where I'm going. I hope you see where I'm going.

There is a race to be run in the Christian life and Paul was concerned in his first missionary journey that you know what kind of race it is. That you know what kind of metaphorical hurdles there are going to be. That you have a sense of the challenge of this race, that it's not a sprint and it's not going to be over in a month or two. It's going to take a long time. It's an endurance race to use the words of Hebrews Chapter 12. We're supposed to "run with endurance the race that is set before us." And even in that context, it reminds us that it's not an easy race, it's a hard race.

Paul is not only good at teaching this, but he is good at modeling what it takes to work through the challenges of an endurance race. A kind of race that looks more like that old TV show Wipeout. Remember that? You know, kind of like ninja warriors on steroids where things are coming at you and people are throwing things at you. It's just like, this is a kind of race that is filled with obstacles and enemies, and we better be ready that we're prepared. Because the ultimate enemy is not the flesh and blood, you know, opponents or persecutors of the Church, although that's very real and very painful. But it's the spiritual forces that lay behind that. And the church has been under attack from the beginning. And we have an enemy, a spiritual enemy, the Bible says is like a "roaring lion seeking someone to devour."

And so Paul is showing us by example the kind of tenacity we need to make this Christian life work between here and the time we see Christ. And he also teaches it very clearly and succinctly in this text. And the context of it is amazing, actually, if you learn a little bit about what he's doing and where he's going. Matter of fact, I provided another map for you this week, which is the map that we've been following on the first missionary journey. But please note as we look at the cities that we're going to see in this text. Now, if you really understand

where they're coming from, the opponents of Paul and Barnabas, and then you watch what he plans to do, I think it makes it even more profound and more noteworthy.

So, let me read this text for you. The penultimate section of our passage, our chapter in Chapter 14 of Acts. We are going to wrap up our series, Lord willing, next week with a sermon that I hope is encouraging to you, one that is our ambition to hear from the Lord, "Well done, good and faithful servant." But this week we're going to see what it takes to get to that place and Paul is illustrating it by his own life. So follow along with me in Acts Chapter 14, beginning in verse 19. I'll read it for you from the English Standard Version and try and keep an eye on the map here as we read through this.

You'll see the heading if you're reading from the English Standard Version, which I don't have on the worksheet there, but talks about Paul being stoned at Lystra. Lystra is the second to last city on this missionary journey, this trek. But it says, "The Jews," verse 19, "came from Antioch and Iconium." Now remember Paul's stay in Antioch, Antioch of Galatia, right? The Pisidian Antioch we call it, in Pisidia, part of Galatia. It is where the Jews who led the synagogue got so jealous and envious that Paul was having all these crowds show up to hear him preach the gospel that they conspired to run him out of town. Then he goes on to Iconium, which we studied last time we were together, and we saw that they were picking up stones to stone him and he ducked out of town there. He'd split the town in half, the people who supported him and were responding rightly to the gospel and those that weren't.

Well, the Jews came from Antioch and they collected a bunch of people in Iconium. Now look at the map, you'll see that's quite a distance to travel to try and get rid of a guy who's already left your town a long time ago, and they had no idea he was going to come back through. But they're chasing after this guy. They've got a mob, they're pursuing him, and they persuaded the crowds it says, middle of verse 19, and they finally catch up and they stone Paul and drag him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. Now this is a horrific way to be killed. And it's an awful thing to think about if you really think about what this is. It's not like the cartoons where you know this big rock gets dropped on Wild E. Coyote's head or something, and it's just splat and he's done.

This is people taking rocks, baseball size, softball size, throwing rocks at you as a mob encircles you. And you know, some people are missing and some people are hitting and you're tucking yourself into a ball and they're hitting your forearm, they're hitting your head, they're hitting the back of your head, you're balling up in a little ball and they just keep throwing rocks at you until they see you collapse unconscious and you're lying there as they continue to throw rocks until they think, "Well, the guy's dead." I mean, that's a horrific way to get attacked. This is a big deal.

I mean, there's no doubt that his arms were broken, that he had broken ribs. I'm sure he had several broken ribs. But I mean, as they hit the head, his head or maybe even his face or the side of his face and you can see them running up with malice and anger, throwing these rocks at him to try and kill him. I mean, his skull was clearly fractured. There's no way you can get through this without that. Maybe his face was disfigured. I mean, there's no telling what kind



of broken bones that he had, what kind of blood was coming out of his face. This was a big deal. We read it so quickly, "Well, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city." Horrifically violent. And they thought he was dead.

Verse 20, "But when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up." Now this is not a resurrection. I don't believe this is any indicator that this was some kind of breaking of natural law, some kind of miracle. It was God's providence, certainly, that he wasn't done with the Apostle Paul yet. But you can imagine as you had all these rocks thrown at you, you could see where this unconscious bleeding person whose mangled in his body, you would think, "Well, we did him in, he's done." But then the disciples come, and you can picture them kind of clearing the debris and moving the rocks around, and they're kneeling down and looking at him and pouring water from flasks on his face and trying to revive him, that he's revived and he gets up. You can only imagine what he looked like at that particular point.

Nevertheless, "he rose up and he entered the city, and on the next day," think about this, one day later. I mean, he's probably got splints and bandages and he's got his arm in a sling, who knows what kind of bones that he broke, right? "The next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe." Take a look at your map now. That's quite a trip. That's about 50 or 60 miles that they're going to continue going east. And what are they going to do there? Find a hospital, convalesce, find a hotel. No. "When they had preached the gospel to that city," verse 21, "and had made many disciples," now here's the amazing thing, "they returned to Lystra." What happened in Lystra? He just got rocks thrown at him. They left him for dead. There was a mob that attacked him. "And then to Iconium and to Antioch."

See, that's why you see this missionary journey making an about-face and turning back around. Do you see the dotted line? And they're going back. I'm thinking there's one place I don't want to go. I don't want to go to Iconium and I don't want to go to Antioch. That's where the crowds were formed. That's where the mob was formed. They traveled and tracked you down and you're going to go back to those cities? "Yeah, I got to go back to those cities, even though I'm still nursing my injuries." Why do you need to go back? Because I need to "strengthen the souls of the disciples," verse 22, "encouraging them to...," the very thing they wanted me to stop doing, preaching and trusting in Christ, I want them to "continue in the faith," and I want to remind them, now he's a visual example of this. I want to remind them, I want to "say to you that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

How long do we have between here and the time we see Christ face-to-face? I don't know, people of Iconium, I don't know, people of Antioch, but there's going to be a lot of troubles between here and there. I mean, is there some integrity in that? Talk about the gravitas of the guy who's maybe disfigured from this. And I say that because in Galatians Chapter 6 verse 17, he writes back to these churches, the churches of Antioch and Lystra and Iconium. I mean, when you read the word Galatians, it's not like Ephesians where you're thinking about the city of Ephesus or Corinthians, think of the city of Corinth or Thessalonians and thinking of the city of Thessalonica. Galatia is a region, right? In southern Galatia is where he writes this, and he's writing it to cities like Antioch and Derbe and Lystra. They're passing that letter around.



He says in Chapter 6 verse 17, he says, "I bear in my body the marks of Christ." I don't know if you've ever heard someone quote this passage or you've done some reading. Some people have created all kinds of mystical definitions and interpretations of this. They call it the "Stigmata," the stigmata, that it's some kind of miraculous representation of the marks of Christ's nails in his hands and his feet. That's not what we're talking about. Stop with all that nonsense. That's not what this is. When he says "I bear the marks of Christ," his allegiance with Christ. I mean, this is a genitive connection. In other words, there's the sense in which those marks of Christ right there on my body because I've allied myself with Christ. Just like Christ got persecuted, just like he was beaten, right? I have been beaten and you can look at me even today as he writes back to the Galatians churches and he says, "I bear those marks in my body." He had lasting scars because of this.

And he's telling these people, "You want to live the Christian life between here and the time we walk safely into the kingdom of God, you're going to have a lot of trouble." Talk about hurdles. You'll have a lot of hurdles. A lot of people hurling metaphorical and maybe in some cases, literal rocks at you. You're going to be under attack through tribulations before you're going to enter the kingdom of God. But this is a powerful call for Christians to endure. Notice the subtitle of the sermon this morning. I call it this "Tenacious Endurance." We need tenacity in the Christian life. Our series has been "Useful to the Lord." That's the title for these 12 parts on the first missionary journey we've been teaching through this journey of the Apostle Paul and Barnabas.

I just want to tell you if you want to be useful to God, representing him in our community, representing him in your workplace, representing Christ in your family, representing Christ just as a Christian in the conversations that you have, you are going to have pushback. If you try to serve him you're going to have obstacles. If you try to live for him, you're going to have tribulations and trials. And all of those things are going to tempt you to try to pull back, to mute, to kind of concede, to not be quite so outspoken, to not, you know, keep doing what you're doing. And yet, Paul says, "Watch me, keep doing what I'm doing. I'm willing to walk into the firing line to continue doing what I'm called to do." And I'm saying to you this morning, it's no different, you know, 20 centuries later that we're here in the 21st century thinking about the fact that there's plenty of pressure for you to back down, to sit down, to be quiet, and you need to say, I need perseverance. I need to, Hebrews Chapter 12, "run with endurance the race that set before me." And that's not going to be an easy race and I don't want you to back down.

Some of you want to quit a lot of things that you know it's not righteous for you to quit. "I'm not going to quit in this conversation. I'm not going to quit in this job. I'm not going to quit in this marriage. I'm not going to quit with my teenage son. I'm not going to quit. I have to keep going. I feel like quitting. I don't want to continue. I don't want to continue to stand up for Christ at work. I can't do it in my industry. I'm going to get fired. I don't want to pay the price anymore." And I'm telling you this morning what you need and what I need and what we all need is endurance. We need that kind of tenacious endurance to continue on when we feel like quitting



And again, just look at the first few verses here, verses 19 through the first half of 21. You would think that after being beaten and left for dead, Paul would say, "I'm going to take a break. I'm going to back down." But instead, I break this first point off right there in the middle of verse 21, "When they had preached the gospel to that city they'd made many disciples." That's the whole point. Nothing's going to shut him up. Nothing's going to back him down. There's no persecution, there are no oppositions, there's no criticism, there's no stoning that's going to keep him from doing what he knows he's called to do. He keeps going.

I want to give you the key to this and I'll telegraph this, then I'll prove it to you. The thing that he says about this incident in his first missionary journey that got him through this is a confidence that he had in Christ to give him the strength to continue on. He refers to it several times in his letters that he writes later in the New Testament. In his last extant letter Second Timothy, he talks about the fact that even though he felt at times that no one was standing with him, "the Lord stood with him."

So there's this picture of the fact that I feel like I can keep going because God is in this, because this is God's will and that God will sustain me. If you go back in the Scriptures at the time it was very difficult for someone to do something. The whole response of God was I'll be with you. When Moses was a fugitive in Egypt and he was thinking, "If I go back, they're going to kill me." And God said, "Go back and tell Pharaoh to let my people go." And he says, "No, I'm afraid. Well, they're not going to listen to me." He said, "Don't worry, don't fear them. I will be with you."

When Jeremiah was just a young guy and he was called to preach in a society that wasn't listening to the truth of God, God responds, "I will be with you, go." When Gideon said, "I am no way a military commander, the Midianites are way too much for me. There's no way I can lead an army against the Midianites." God says, "I will be with you." The whole point of continuing to endure when you feel like quitting has to be that you take your thoughts, your concept of hope and reliance, and shift it from yourself to God.

Number one on your outline if you're taking notes, and I want you to, number one, please "Rely on Christ to Keep Going." And that sounds very Christianity 101 but I need you to understand what that means. Rely on Christ to keep going. Here's what it doesn't mean, it doesn't mean that I'm waiting for some kind of internal breath of motivation to actually get in there and fight the good fight this week. I'm not saying that. Matter of fact, some people who talk about the strength of God. They talk about, "I can't. I'm not going to do this in my strength. I'm going to do it in the Lord's strength." Have you heard that? Raise your eyebrows if you've heard that. You've heard that right? "Oh, it's the Lord's strength, not me. I don't want to do this in my strength."

Everything you do in the Christian life is going to feel like your strength. But here's the deal, at some point you're going to get to the place where you think, "I just don't think I can do this anymore." And what God does is in the midst of the difficulty, he gives you endurance to keep going. We can talk about passages that talk about God at work in you. We can talk about





Paul saying, you know, I have the "strength which the Lord supplies." But if you think what that means is some kind of contrast between me engaging and working then we've missed the point of all that the Bible teaches. Matter of fact, the preceding verse to the one I'm quoting from Philippians 2 is that God is at work within us. He proceeds it with, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

In other words, everything in the Bible is going to demand all of your strength. Everything in the Bible is going to demand all of your strength. But you're going to look back at the end of this Christian life when you've traversed all these tribulations and as you look back at it, you'll say, "I can't believe I did this," and God's going to say, "I was at work in you. I was pushing you on. I was carrying you through." It's not like, "Oh, I'm going to do this in the Lord's strength, not my strength. So I want to put my feet up and wait for some kind of internal inspiration to finally go out there and do something hard and it'll be God kind of pushing me along." That's not what it feels like. It feels like, like Jesus is even loving him is to "love him with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind." Whose strength? Your strength.

This is going to demand your strength. For you to walk into your workplace and stand up for what is true, to speak even to issues that the world right now says you are a complete idiot to believe these ancient things from the Bible, right? The things by which your coworkers will all one day be judged, for you just to stand firm on those things, it's going to take all the strength you've got. It's going to take all the strength you got. And to continue to do it when you think, "I can't take this abuse anymore." For you to stand uncompromisingly on the gospel, on the exclusivity of Christ, on the truth of his morality. Right? You're going to look back and say, I only was faithful in doing this because God strengthened me to do it.

Let me show you what I'm talking about. Go to Second Corinthians Chapter 1, Second Corinthians Chapter 1. Paul is going to refer back to this time in Asia, and just remember as we see the word Asia in this passage we're talking about where we're at, in Galatia. Galatia is part of what I often say today is Turkey, modern-day Turkey. In the ancient world they called it Asia Minor. Keep moving east and it's the Middle East. And then it's the Far East, right? That's kind of how we use these designations. But Asia, as Paul uses this word, he's talking about where he's at right here, having all of these difficulties in Antioch and Iconium and Lystra.

Look at what he says here in this text. Second Corinthians Chapter 1. Let's go down to verse 8. Speaking to Corinth, the church of Corinth, "We don't want you to be unaware, brothers." This is not a perfect church. They got a lot of trouble, right? Not a bastion of super mature Christianity. And yet he goes, "Listen, I want you to know what I'm going through and what I went through of the affliction we experienced in Asia." So this is a reference back to a time when he was left for dead. He had a tremendous, horrible situation. They sought to kill him and they thought they had killed him. "We were utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself." There's the place where you feel like I'm at the end of my rope, I can't go on anymore. Have you ever said that? When it's a righteous thing and you know it's the right thing to do and you think, "I can't do this anymore. I can't do this anymore."

That's when you sense that I've been trying, I'm working, I'm trying to persevere, I'm trying to hang in there. I just can't do it anymore. That's the place that Paul was at and you can imagine this, this is so literally stated because he was having rocks thrown at him and he actually passes out. He's immobile and he's there, he's unconscious and they think, "Oh, we've killed him." And you can imagine, by the way, think of this, he might have been thinking as he's dying with people throwing rocks at him back to the time that he watched the first martyr in the book of Acts, Stephen, being stoned to death as Paul held the coats of the people who were throwing the softball-sized rocks at him. And he's thinking, "Well, this is a poetic way for me to end, I suppose." Right? "I was here cheering on the stoning of the first evangelist there who was martyred. And now I'm going to be an evangelist that's martyred by stoning." And maybe he thinks it's over. Right? "I should just be done."

"I was utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself, indeed, we felt," verse 9, "that we'd received the sentence of death." Well, of course, we're going to kill him. "But that was to make us," underline this now, "rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead." Right? I know this. He says, "I couldn't go on. I thought I was done." Most people who get stoned and left for dead actually do die. "I thought it was over." But here's the deal, "I was having to go through some difficulties," as he goes on to say in this book, even his thorn in the flesh, his chronic illness, "so that I would then see that in my own weakness all I've got left is God's strength. It's not that I'm putting my feet up in the recliner and just waiting for some move of inspiration internally. I'm just doing all that I can, but I can't keep going. And God then, is a God who perfects his strength and my weakness." He now gets that thing in my life, moving past what I think I can do and I can continue.

You can look back and say, "Man, I kept going. I was going to leave that church. I was going to stop with that ministry. I wasn't going to be involved in that group. I can't take these people anymore. I can't take this marriage anymore. I can't take this family," whatever it is, and you faithfully endure. That's the picture of someone who says, I know that if I'm going to continue in this God is going to have to..., it's a shifting of my reliance, my trust to make us not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead, because even if I were dead, right? The whole point of Christ coming on the scene and showing these miraculous signs like Lazarus coming out of a putrid grave four days later reminds me that even if God wanted to raise me from the dead, he could. And if he wants to take a weary, needing to wanting to give up kind of guy and put him back in the game this week, well, he can do it. God's got the power to do that.

And guess what he did in verse 10? "He delivered us from such a deadly peril." I walked out of that, I rose up. We just read it. They left him for dead. Disciples come around. He raises up. He stands up and then he goes into the city of Lystra, and then he goes on to Derbe and he makes more disciples. "I was delivered. God delivered me from such a deadly peril."

And by the way, that reminds me that I can face the next lap on this race, this crazy race that we're in, I can do it with confidence that he will deliver us. I'm confident he will deliver us. "On him," here's another way to say it, "we have set our hope that he will deliver us again." And you can add this: and again, and again, and again, and again. You want to "finish the race," as Paul put it, "you want to fight the good fight of faith, you want to finish your course and be



able to say, 'I've kept the faith. I've done it.'" And you can have confidence that that's going to happen, that you're going to endure to the end of your Christian life, no matter what tribulations or trials or struggles you have. Because you know, my hope is set on Christ. My hope is set on the fact that he will stand with me.

I mean, that's a good promise. That's a helpful way to view it. It's a transfer of my trust that I am confident that I'll make it faithful to the end, trusting in Christ, serving Christ, not giving up. That's the picture here. I've set my hope on him. He's going to deliver us and he will deliver us again. And it's not as though I'm sitting back saying, "Well, I'll just sit on a rock and wait for God to infuse me with all this." I need the community, which is where our passage is going to end, by the way. And him caring about the community of believers, the Church. But it says here, hey guys, I know you're not perfect, not like you're my spiritual mentors or anything, verse 11, but "you must help us by prayer so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessings granted us through the prayers of many."

How do you think they felt when they pulled him out of the rubble and moved the rocks away and he goes off to Derbe, wins people to Christ and then comes back into Lystra and talks about the people won to Christ in Derbe? I think you'd be like, "Wow, it's amazing. We prayed for you, Paul. We prayed that your collarbone would heal, that your ribs would heal, that you could breathe normally, that that scar over your eye would heal up. Man, you were out there doing the work of God. You continue to do what you were called to do."

Do you feel battered, feel like you can't keep going and doing the right thing, can't stand up for Christ anymore in your work, you're going to get fired from your industry? You might, but you're going to move from one thing to the next, as we've said throughout this series, undeterred, doing whatever comes next. Faithful to continue with an endurance that is filled with a kind of tenacity, a stick-to-itiveness that says I'm not going to quit, because the end-all of my life is to be useful to the Lord, to be his faithful representative and ambassador in this world.

That, by the way, is a beautiful rendition of the reality of what we know of in one of the most familiar passages in the Old Testament. Matter of fact, I talked about the fact that God is a God who takes people who don't think they can go on anymore, and he gives them strength. If I said, what's a classic text of the Old Testament that would remind you of God, the everlasting God, giving strength to the weary? I hope your mind would go to Isaiah 40. And you don't need to turn there unless you're really quick to get there, but let me read it for you.

What a great text of Scripture beginning in verse 28, it says, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God," the eternal God, "the Creator of the ends of the earth." He's the one who designed the human body. He's the one who made the universe. "He doesn't faint and he does not grow weary." This one you're praying to never gets tired, never grows weary, never quits. "His understanding is unsearchable," it's inscrutable. He knows everything. He's the eternal, omniscient, omnipotent God.





Here's what it says next. Thinking about who we're relating ourselves to here, God, "He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength." Here's the kind of God we have, as it says in Second Chronicles 16. There's this idea of God looking for people to strongly support. God can't wait to give his strong support, not to people who are trying to make it in the business world, not to people who are trying to be super-duper healthy, not to people who have their own agenda they're trying to fulfill. But people whose hearts are fully his who say, "Here am I send me," who say, "I just want to be useful to God," who say, "I am someone who wants to be useful to the Lord. I'll be his ambassador in this world." His eyes are ready to go and lock onto a person like that and strongly support them.

And the Bible says this eternal God, this everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, "he gives that kind of strength to the one who doesn't have might, even though youths faint and are weary, even though young men fall exhausted. Those..." here's the phrase, it sounds somewhat poetic, but know what it means, "Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength." Think about that. "Wait upon the Lord." That sounds so, you know, Hallmark. It sounds so Dayspring. It sounds so like, "Oh, that's kind of poetic." It's one again sitting on a rock over the ocean, this placid sea.

Here is someone who is continuing to do the right thing in the race when their side is splitting and they want to quit and they want to stop and they don't want to go on. They continue to say, "I'm going to plug away. My strength will be expended, but God's strength will sustain me. It's like there's something within me that continues to say everything in me wants to quit, but I'm not going to quit. I'm going to wait on God to empower me. I'm going to wait on God to put the turbo booster in my life right now. I'm going to continue to be faithful to stick it out." That's what we need in our evangelism, in our discipleship, in our ministries, in our churches, in our marriages, in our homes.

"They who wait upon the Lord are going to renew their strength." I mean, look at the promise, "they're going to mount up with wings like eagles." It's like all of a sudden now, I'm running, I don't have wings, it's like I'm moving forward. "I'm going to run and not grow weary; I'm going to walk and not faint." That's the picture, again, waiting on the Lord, of transferring my trust when I'm despairing even of life itself.

And it may be too dramatic to say that for you this week or whatever was going on. Maybe you just felt like backing down a little bit or maybe, "I don't have to be out another night this week, or maybe I shouldn't sign up for that thing, or I don't even know if I should continue to do that ministry or talk to that person about Christ, or I don't want to continue to debate these issues with these people. They just keep giving me a hard time." Whatever it feels like, giving up, backing down, being quiet, not representing Christ, all I'm saying is you're going to wait on the Lord by transferring your trust to Christ, not waiting for some burst of energy to start the thing. It's you starting the thing, walking in the thing, continuing in the thing and God then continues to empower you.

You've got to rely on Christ to keep going. Those are two good words, right? Keep going, keep going, keep going. And in your heart, I'm transferring my trust from the fact that I can do



this because I have the wherewithal inherent in me to saying no, "The great God of the universe has promised this. I will be with you. I will strengthen you. I will defend you. I will continue to motivate you." Rely on Christ to keep going. Such a good text in Corinthians Chapter 1 and Isaiah Chapter 40.

And if you want to add at some point for homework, that 12th chapter, and I referenced it briefly, "the thorn in the flesh," same thing, all of the pain I feel like I can't handle it, God take it away. He's not taking it away. I wanted this change. I want the magic wand to make things easy. It's not easy. The hurdles are still there. But here is a God who says I'm going to make my strength perfected in you, even in the weakness and trials. And Paul says, "therefore I'll rejoice in my troubles."

Which is what he does, back to our text, Chapter 14 verse 21, middle of the verse. "He returns to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch." That's just nuts, that's nuts. Lystra, think about it, you're walking into town past the place where you were laying on the ground. Maybe there are still some bloodstained rocks and you're walking past them into a town. I'm thinking that's the last town I want to visit, and I certainly don't want to go to Iconium and Antioch, where everyone was enlisted to come and throw rocks at me. And that's exactly where he goes. Why? Because he's not stopping. "He wants to strengthen the souls of the disciples," verse 22, "and encourage them." That's what he wants to do, "encourage them to continue in the faith, saying through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

Now I just want to show you what's happening here. A guy who has just confessed later in his letters that during this period of time, he was despairing of even life itself. He's a human being. He confesses it to the Corinthians. "I come to places to do ministry, sometimes trembling and I'm afraid." "I mean, I'm tempted to be quiet, to step back, to sit down. I have these human emotions that I want to quit. But here's the thing, I'm going to keep moving forward and what I'm going to do in trying to minister to the Christians who are there is I'm going to try to remind them that what they really need (is the very thing I need), I want them to be strong. I want them to endure. I want them to persevere. I want them to know that there's going to be a lot of trouble," right? It's like the preacher gets up, "I'm preaching this one to myself." Everything that Paul is saying to these people is exactly what he needs.

And so here's the thing I want to do. I take this text and flip it for just a second and say listen, if you're here saying, "I need strength, I need endurance, I can resonate with what you're saying, Pastor Mike." Well, then here's what I'm going to tell you to do. It may sound counterintuitive, but number two on your outline, you need to "Keep Teaching Endurance." Keep teaching it. Keep teaching it to other people. Keep doing what Paul is doing in the midst of him needing to endure, he's telling other people you need to endure. "Well, once you get it wired in your life, Paul, maybe you can come talk to me about it." Well, he's showing that he's doing it. Internally, though, he's got struggles, he's got doubts, he's got this kind of this equivocation of like, I don't know. He comes trembling to these cities, sometimes afraid. And yet, he says, I'm going to do it.



Well, one of the things he says to other Christians is, you need to keep doing it. Don't give up. He always says this, right? Paul and Barnabas have already been noted twice in the book of Acts of coming to towns and saying, "Continue faithfully in the Lord. Resolve to follow Christ. Continue in the grace of God." I mean, these are the phrases that we've seen come out of the mouths of Paul and Barnabas. They're continually telling people to endure. Stick to it. Persevere. Yet it's the very thing that they need.

If you were someone locked in this responsibility to every morning teach would-be golfers how to golf. Right? From 7:00 in the morning until your lunch break, all you do is give golf instruction. You get people out there on the driving range and you look at their backswing and their grip and their stance, and you teach them to follow through and not, you know, to shift their weight forward. You do all that stuff. Then you take them over to, you know, the putting green. You teach them how to read greens, you teach them how to putt. You got to putt uphill. Be careful this way and follow through this way if you're downhill. Be careful this and you know, then you go to the traps, the practice trap. Well, put the ball here in the trap. When you're in a trap like this and against the lip, here's what you got to do this, all these things you're teaching them to do.

You do it all morning and then you have a lunch break and every afternoon you're required, because this is your weird life and my weird illustration, you got to at one o'clock tee off and play 18 holes every day. You. That's your job. It's to teach all morning and then play all afternoon. I'm just saying this: what kind of connection might there be? What kind of pressure might even be inherent in you teaching all morning and then having to play all afternoon? I think it's going to matter. Matter of fact, when your ball's in the trap, you're going to think of all the things you told everyone else that you're supposed to do and you're going to say, "Well, I got to do that." And when the backswing and the grip and the problems, all the things on the putting green, everything you're teaching them how to do, you've then got an opportunity that afternoon to actually put it into practice.

And Paul says that all the time. He says, "You need to follow my teaching. You need to do what I'm telling you to do." And then he says, right? "And then you'll even watch me struggle, and you can even learn from that and I want you to follow me." I mean, it was all this synergistic connection. This symbiosis between his teaching and his practice. And all I'm telling you is that if you are struggling to continue to faithfully endure, I want you to step up and ramp up the ways in which you encourage other people to do exactly the thing you need to do.

Matter of fact, it's going to be as simple as you joining the, you know, the prayer team here at our church. And when people are struggling, someone's in the hospital, there's a trial and you say, I'm going to write notes to these people, I'm going to pick passages, I'm going to tell them to hang in there and continue on and don't give up and trust God through it. You're going to say these things and you're going to mean these things and then you going to be done after you write that email or once you send that letter and you're going to face all the things you've got to face and you're going to go, "Oh, this is hard for me. I feel like giving up." That



connection, of saying "watch what I'm telling you," then becomes an opportunity to say, "and watch what I do."

Let me give an example of this. Turn with me to Second Timothy Chapter 3. Paul says that's how it's been for me, you've watched what I've said and then you followed what I've done, especially when you're out on the course and you have some of your students playing in the foursome as you go out to play golf. They're watching what you're doing and seeing if whether or not what you told them to do you're doing. It's a good thing for you to be in the practice of teaching the very things you need to continue to remind yourself to do. And you'll find that other people are struggling with a lot of the same things and it will encourage you, it'll motivate you, it will strengthen you to do the very things you know you need.

Look at verse 10 Second Timothy Chapter 3, beginning in verse 10, he says, "You, however," he's speaking now to the pastor of Ephesus. Timothy is the pastor in the church at Ephesus. He says, "You have followed my teaching, and my conduct, and my aim in life, and my faith, and my patience, and my love and my," here's the word, "steadfastness." It's the Greek word I talk about a lot. "Hupomone," "I will remain. I will continue. I will hang in there," "hupo" is "underneath," "Meno" is "to remain." I'm going to stay under the burden of this, I'm going to keep ongoing. I'm going to not stop.

You've heard all that. You've agreed to all that. You've taken notes on all of that. And Timothy, by the way, I need to keep encouraging you to do that because I'm sitting there looking at you, pastoring in a well-to-do city like Ephesus, and I'm thinking, Timothy, don't be ashamed. Don't be timid. God hasn't given us a spirit of timidity. Keep on going. Be strong. "Don't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. Don't be ashamed of me his prisoner." Paul keeps urging him to be strong, which is exactly what he needs.

And then he says, "And you watched me." You've been on the back nine with me haven't you? He says, you followed my "persecutions and my sufferings," verse 11, "that happened to me at Antioch, and Iconium, and Lystra." Do those sound familiar? Does that verse make more sense to you now, does that come alive to you? Yeah, because in Antioch, that's where he got the people in the synagogue mad at him. The leaders there went on to Iconium and picked up more of the mob that was split by Paul's teaching. And then they came to Lystra and they threw rocks at him until they thought he was dead.

And you know what? You follow the pattern. You know what it's like to stand strong. Look at those words again in verse 10. "My conduct, my aim, my faith, my patience, my love and my steadfastness." I love God and I love people and I want to be an ambassador of Christ. And I'm willing to hang in there whatever it takes. And you know what? You've watched me get in trouble. You've watched what happened to me at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions that I endured. Yet you watch this too. All the traps I got into, all the trouble I get into right? The Lord rescued me from them all, from them all the Lord rescued me.

You watched how God got me through. I just want to remind you, Timothy, you're facing pressure. They may not be trying to stone you at Ephesus. Not like they stoned me at Lystra,



but there's a lot of pushback. You're tempted to be timid. You're tempted to sit down and to be quiet and not speak up, not stand for the truth, to compromise your teaching. Don't. Because, verse 12, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Just know that's just how it works.

Matter of fact, the equation, if you are desiring to live godly, it deals with all the stuff there in verse 10, right? You're teaching faith, conduct, aim, life, love, steadfastness. If you want that, then here's what's going to come on the other side. Persecutions. And people who I preach to in South Orange County, California, if they think, "Well, you know, there's no persecution for us." I'm thinking, Well, then let's think about whether or not you're being godly and desiring a godly aim of life. Because if you are, I'm just saying this: you would be offended at the things that blaspheme the Lord. You would be offended at the things that are an abomination to God that are celebrated as good things and virtues in our society. You'd be offended when people call black white, and white black, and good bad, and bad good and evil they call it righteousness. You'd be like offended by that. You'd be like, I can't be quiet about that.

You'd be offended by people who say, "Well, you can get to God in any way you want. You know, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, it doesn't matter. It's all the same. Just people trying to be good." You'd say, no, no. Jesus said "there's no other way to the Father except through me." You'd be offended by people and you would say, I cannot let it stand when you say all religions are the same. I'd have to quote from Acts Chapter 4, and I'd have to say in verse 12, "There's no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved." You wouldn't look at cult members knocking on the next-door neighbor's door and not get upset about the reality that they're trying to proffer some kind of false doctrine in your neighborhood. You would say to them what I had to say to them in my neighborhood this week, "Get out of my neighborhood, you're false teachers, you're false prophets." You would be offended by that.

And guess what happens when you start acting like that, when you start being zealous for the honor of God in your workplace, and in our society? You don't sit by like a bump on the log like some bacteria. You sit there and say, this is wrong. You're outspoken about the truth. You're not trying to cause arguments. But I'm telling you this. You're out there saying I'm not going to put up with it. I'm not going with the flow. I'm not going to take a poll to see whether or not our doctrine should say X, Y or Z. I look to God's word, which is exactly where he goes next.

You got a bad environment out there, right? "Things are going to go from bad to worse." The evil imposters and evil people, bad doers "deceiving and being deceived. But as for you," you got to double down, "continue in what you've learned and have firmly believed," that you believe those things, that you believe the word of God. I thought you believe there's only one way to heaven. I thought you believed in repentance, I thought you believed that sin is sin. I thought you believed those things. Do you "firmly believe" those? Well, I think you should remember "knowing from whom you've learned it and how from childhood you've been acquainted with the sacred writings," you know the Scriptures, "which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture..." How much of it? "All Scripture





is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching," well, that sounds easy, but not this part, "reproof, correction," I don't want to be known for that, yeah, "and training in righteousness."

Do all that and "the man of God can be complete, equipped for every good work." A lot of people who think they're godly and say, "I don't have any persecution," because they're not truly godly, because if they are, they would stick to the words of God and they would say it, they would defend it, they would zealously promote it in their communities and their neighborhoods and their religion. If you do that, you are going to get some pushback.

We don't do that so we get pushed back. Matter of fact, we want to be in a community, in a society where everyone is listening to these things respectfully. We want people to tremble at God's words when we recite them. We're not living in that anymore, right? If there was a time like that in the golden age of like this kind of Protestant evangelical American culture, we don't have it anymore. Right? Now, we're living in Lystra at this point. It's time for us to know that we're living in Sodom and Gomorrah and as though I need to remind you, things are going from bad to worse, evil people and imposters.

And by imposters, it's just like the people who we're picking up rocks to stone Paul. You do understand they were religious leaders. How many religious leaders...? I heard again this morning, a church down the road who's angry at us because we don't have female pastors. "You don't have female pastors, you know, you're just not with it and cool. You guys are narrow-minded fundamentalists." Well, I'm sorry, I didn't write the Bible. I didn't come up with what it says. I got to do what it says. And it's not rooted in some cultural practice in Ephesus. It's rooted in the creation order, and I can't change that. And if you don't like it, I'm so sorry. But we've got to do what the Bible says, let alone the LGBTQ stuff, let alone gender fluidity, let alone the nonsense that our government officials are saying is the right and righteous thing. We cannot walk with you in agreement on those things.

So where is the pushback coming from? Well, it comes from all over the culture. But don't expect that you'll be exempt if someone's wearing a Jesus t-shirt to say that you somehow have got a problem. You stick to the God-breathed truth of God, and you say, I'm ready to teach it. Look at these words again. I'm ready to approve and correct and train you in these things because we believe all that. Even the Old Testament, we believe what it says. This is the truth. And if it's the truth, I'm just saying this: go back up to verse 12, there's going to be some pushback. What kind of difficult trek do we have between here, right now today, and the time you enter the kingdom? "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

You're not going to like our doctrine because I'm not taking polls to figure out what it should be. Right? We're going to look to what the Bible says and we're going to affirm it. We're going to do it. We're going to let the chips fall not trying to be a problem to anyone, not trying to be disagreeable for disagreement's sake. But to be able to say I'm going to be judged by the words of God, and therefore I'm not going to acquiesce to get your approval. I'm going to be willing to say this is what God says. I'm going to keep teaching endurance and fidelity to those things, and I'm going to tell people to keep doing that. And then when I go on the 12th hole and have to figure out why I want to just move the ball a little bit, I have to say I can't. I have



to do what I'm telling everyone else to do. I got to be faithful to the truth of God's word. I got to keep on, keep moving forward and unyielding to any other voice but the voice of Scripture.

And I don't have time even to get into this, but in Colossians Chapter 1, I might have put this in the discussions question this week, verses 21 through 23. These are salvation issues, by the way, right? To be faithful and endure with fidelity to the end. I'm not talking about secondary issues of this church and that church and church polity or how you do this. I'm talking about faithfulness to the truth of God. Right? The saving facts of the gospel and the things that God says about redemption, about sin, about the exclusivity of Christ. If we abandon these things, the Bible says we never had it to start with. The proof of our Christianity, you can look at Hebrews Chapter 2, continually reminding us those who endure to the end are the children of God, the people who are going to make this and continue through this. I'm not saying they do it on their own strength, it going to take all of their strength, but there's something added to that. The God of the universe gets inside and "works in them, both to will and to work for God's good pleasure."

Keep teaching endurance. "Be faithful unto death," as Jesus put it in Revelation 2:10. Keep being faithful. Christ is our ultimate example of this, isn't he? "For the joy set before him he endured the cross despising its shame." Looking down on it and thinking it's no big deal. It is a big deal, he's about to be naked and crucified in front of all of my friends and all the jeering crowd. But he "for the joy set before him," pleasing the Father, he did all that. Then he "sat down at the right hand of the Father" and "he was exalted," as Philippians 2 says. And it says this, remember guys, "run the race with endurance that's set before you, and look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith," I'm quoting now Hebrews Chapter 12, the first four verses. He says you need to "consider what he endured at the hands of sinners so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Don't lose heart this week.

That's why you need church, by the way. Every single week we should be coming to church saying, I need another installment of Boost to push me to do one more lap, seven-day lap to get through my life, my work week, my dealing with the vendors and my clients and my family and my neighbors. I got to do all that standing faithfully, so get back to church and get motivated again as the word of God is open, the God-breathed truth that helps me think rightly "to be equipped for every good work."

But speaking of that leads right into what we're talking about in verse 23 when he "appointed elders for them in every church." Right? Lystra, Iconium, Antioch. He went back through all these places. He wasn't there with rocks in his hands to exact some retaliation. He was there to find the Christians who had put their trust in Christ and say, "What you need now is churches. You need it structured under elders." The word elder in Scripture is a synonym for the word "Poimen," which is the word "pastor" or the word "shepherd." It's also used synonymously with the word "overseer." So the overseers, the pastors and the elders, they're all the top-level administrators who are responsible for doctrinal fidelity and the teaching and administration of the church.



And he went through and said, "Well, OK, a lot of young Christians here, but I got to pick the right guys to lead these churches," put them in place so that these Christians who are being called to be faithful through tribulations will have a church where they're being nurtured and guarded and motivated and infused with the kind of strength that comes from the corporate identity that even I spoke to and hinted to in Second Corinthians Chapter 1, which is what? Which is I need to be helped by your prayers. I need to be helped by your life. We need life on life, community, discipleship, where I have a tenacious community of believers. And that's what we need.

And he was so into this, look at the last line of verse 23, that "with prayer and fasting," he put leaders in these churches in all these cities, "they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed." So Barnabas and Paul said, We're going to commit you to the Lord. Stay with it. Now you have a church to function in. And those of you watching on some little tiny TV screen, I just want to remind you need to be in church. And if you live in some other city, you need to find a local biblical Bible-teaching church where the pastor and the leaders are not afraid to preach the Bible and you need to go there, physically go there. You need to get there every week and be able to get pumped through the preaching of the word so you can do one more lap in this thing called the Christian life. You need to get there and be a part of it.

And if you're sitting here in the auditorium looking at me in the eyes and go, "Oh, we got that wire." Come back next week. Every week you need to be faithful to be in your church. The church is structured for you. It's the gift of God to bring you and to provide for you a tenacious community that's going to be committed to enduring, which helps you endure as an individual. You got to be praying for that. Number three, they are praying and fasting. How prayer-ardent were they? They were willing to give up meals. Number three, "Pray Churches will be Tenacious." You need to pray for that. Pray that the churches all over the country, all over the world will be tenacious. I'm not going to back down.

How many churches are there right now who worry about the polls or the community temperature of our culture to decide whether or not they're going to hold to this verse or that verse? All kinds of churches. Evil men and imposters go from bad to worse. You just need to know what you need to do is to pray. I hope you're praying for your own church. I'm looking you in the eye right now. This is your church. I hope you're praying for this church. You should pray, if you want to endure in the Christian life that you have a tenaciously enduring, persevering church, that's certainly helpful. You need that. But then you need to be praying for others because there are a lot of people in South Orange County. We got a million people around here, we got 3.3 million in the county. How many churches do we need? A lot of churches. I mean, a lot of faithful, tenacious churches that aren't afraid of the culture. They're not going to back down. You need to be praying for that.

How about across our country? You do read the news feeds, right? And see everything that's happening there? Do we need tenacious churches right now who are zealous for God's truth? We need them now more than ever in America. We need it all over the world. We need to pray for the Church worldwide. You don't think we're in a battle, we're in a battle. It's easy



when a battle breaks out and it's a real literal battle and there are tanks coming through your town.

I'm studying yesterday morning in my study, and I get a text message from a friend of mine, a missionary friend of mine, part of the missions organization, the Eurasian Mission, and they have their headquarters in Irpin in Ukraine. And he sent me pictures of what had happened when the invasion of the Russian troops came through. And he showed me pictures of the burnt headquarters of this missionary organization. And since I'd never been there, I'd never seen it, he sent me a picture then of what it looked like before it was burnt and destroyed. And then it made that radical contrast. Right? Here it was. They were doing Bible studies, they were broadcasting, they were passing out Bibles, and then the next picture is the place in shambles and burnt.

But then what got me was he showed me then what was left of a pile of Bibles, which the claim was, they said that the army that came in, they piled together the Bibles from that mission, put them in a big pile, lit them on fire to make a statement. Now all I'm telling you is this: when you look at that and you say, "Well it's easy to see the opposition, talking about persecution," right? If you came to church today and it was burnt down because the cultural forces, the elite, the powerful had burnt to the ground our church and had piled all of our pew Bibles together out in the parking lot, put them in a big pile, lit them on fire and there was nothing left but ashes of our Bibles, I mean, we'd be like, "Wow, we're under attack."

Ephesians 6 says no matter what, you need to know that "we're not really wrestling against flesh and blood," it's not just the rocks that are being thrown at you physically, it's not just the fires that are being lit of the Bibles in Irpin. It's not just about that, right? It's the metaphorical and spiritual forces of evil that lay behind it. Spiritual forces of darkness in this present cosmos are constantly out there to try and make you back down, to be quiet, to sit down and to compromise your truth in God's God-breathed infallible word. That's what's happening.

The enemy is going around like he did to Eve in the Garden to deceive you. Paul speaks of that in Second Corinthians. He says, I betrothed you to one groom, one relationship, and I want you in that relationship to be faithful. I don't want you to be led astray from that devotion to the Lord like Eve was. And the Bible says right now, Satan is going around, First Peter 5, "Like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour." He just wants you to compromise. And you're coming to church one more week to hear the Bible taught where you're being told to endure. Don't quit. Don't back down. Don't give up. Pray for tenacious churches and start with this one, I hope you pray twice as much for this one than you do for any other one. Pray that this church will remain faithful. That's my prayer.

I don't know how long until Christ comes back and the kingdom comes. I pray for it every day. "Your kingdom come." That's what I want. But if it takes another 100 years before Christ returns to set up his kingdom on earth, I just want to know that when my body is in a box in the Orange County cemetery over there shriveling away, I hope that here in this building or wherever Compass happens to be at that point, that Compass Aliso continues to be faithful to



the truth, tenaciously, aggressively zealous to preach the gospel unabashed. That's what I want. I want it to happen.

I pray that all the time for Compass Bible Institute, for Compass church planting, for Compass Bible Church to be faithful to the end. And I don't want it to be determined by the societal cultural norms. That's my prayer, and I pray for this church and I pray for other churches. I pray for this church a lot more. But I want you to join me with praying that this church will be tenacious all the way to the end. Faithful to the end. I want you to pray for other churches to be faithful.

How intense? They fasted. I mean, I wish I had time to talk more about fasting. Fasting. They were willing to say, "You know, we're not even going to eat today. We're just going to pray." I mean, how many meals do they miss? I don't know. I mean, I don't know. Paul's willing to put up a lot of pain to get the job done, and he knows that a lot of the job is done on our knees. Matter of fact, here's a passage where he went, in Luke 18, Jesus is talking about prayer. He says, "I want you always to pray and never give up." I just love that, the way the English Standard Version translates that. Never give up. Never stop. Always persevere in prayer.

He tells a story of the unrighteous judge. Do you know the passage? There's a widow who needs justice and things are wrong and messed up and she goes to this unrighteous judge who doesn't fear God, doesn't care about people, and she keeps coming to him day after day after day after day and he gets so worn down he finally says, "Fine, I'm going to give you justice and fix your problem." And then Jesus says listened to the lesson of the unrighteous judge. Will not the Lord, this God, this God who's been promised to "not give a rock to someone who needs a piece of bread, not to give a snake to a kid that asks for a fish," will not the Lord speed his justice to the elect who cry out to him day and night?

Isn't that a weird juxtaposition of words? How are you going to speed an answer if they're crying out day and night? It apparently didn't come right away. It's like the book of Revelation, doesn't it bother you that it says he's going to come quickly, come quickly, come quickly? Well, it's been 2,000 years, man. Where are you? And that's the point. The point is you're going to have to cry out and endure all through your life until Christ ends up coming. But when he comes, he comes quickly.

It's like the building of the Ark, right? It just came suddenly. "The great fountains of the deep broke forth and the place was flooded." And Jesus says, "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the coming of the Son of Man." I'm just telling you, it's going to happen quickly. And I hope what he's going to find is a church that's going to be tenaciously crying out for God's will to be done.

Here's the passage and how it ends, by the way, just to quote the passage of the first section and paragraph of Luke 18. He says this, "When the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth?" Has that passage ever haunted you? Here's the context. People crying out day and night, "God make it right. Make it right." We're all about this. We know this is the right





thing and it's not happening. We're crying out for this. God, bring justice, bring vindication. Resolve this issue.

You live in a culture right now, we're living in Sodom and Gomorrah. We're living in a compromised world, we're living in a world with a religious compromised church, keeps attacking the church that's being faithful to Christ. And all I'm saying is Christ is at the end, as things go from bad to worse, evil men and imposters increase, "Am I going to find faith on the earth?" Where are people like that? I just love that picture of saying I'd like that to be us. I'd like it to be us individually, I'd like it to be us corporately. I'd like the church to be found faithful, tenaciously enduring.

We need you in a race, it starts right now. And you're going to run another lap in the next seven days. When I thought about the steeplechase it came to mind, as I was thinking about the kinds of races that we can run. And I looked it up because I had never really studied it. I'd seen it before on TV. And I thought the name steeplechase, that's weird. What does that mean? Does that have anything to do with the church steeple? Well, it does. I researched it, it does. They would have this ancient race and it went through swamps and puddles and all this other stuff, and they put hurdles up. They would run at between one town's church and the other town's church. It's called the steeplechase.

You'd get your eyes fixed on where you were going and you'd run to the steeple of that other city. And I think about that picture. Here they were, they found grace and forgiveness and the early church was like, "We get it, the weight of our sin is gone." And then Paul says, listen, between here and there, it's going to be a mess. Right? "Through many tribulations, we've got to enter the kingdom, but keep your eyes fixed on the end of the race." I just love the picture that you're running through all that mess and you're running to the steeple. You're running to the church. You're running to the kingdom where Christ is seated on his throne. I mean, that's our hope, that's the blessed hope is the return of Christ exalted. May he find us faithful, corporately and individually.

Pray with me. God, we are really, really grieved as we ought to be with the world in which we're living and the pain that is brought to our own hearts knowing these things are egregious to you, you call them abominations to you, the pluralism of our day is really not toleration of Christianity, it's really an attack on Christianity. The hardened, corrosive, acerbic postmodernity that we live in is tough. It's hard for us. It's hard because we grieve over what they're saying, what it means. And even as religious institutions continue to look at those who want to remain faithful to your word and they mock and they ridicule and they oppose, we want to be faithful, we want to be tenacious people, which means that we're going to be your representatives in this world. We're going to speak of a gospel that you spoke of, a repentance and faith of sins forgiven by vicarious atonement, the substitutionary atonement of Christ on a cross. Even that in the last 30 years has been massively attacked. Help us to be faithful. Help us to be tenacious, not to be disagreeable. God, we'd like to do all things that we possibly can do that we might by all means win some. Let us know that we cannot compromise what you've said. Let us be great ambassadors. Good ambassadors who are faithful. Let us have tenacious endurance. I pray in Jesus name. Amen