

December 17
Lesson 3 (NIV)

FAITH

TO PERSEVERE

DEVOTIONAL READING: 2 Corinthians 1:3-11
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 14; Colossians 2:6, 7

ACTS 14:8-11, 19-23

⁸ In



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Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

¹¹ When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!”

¹⁹ Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰ But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

²¹ They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said. ²³ Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

KEY VERSE

[Paul and Barnabas] preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We

must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”—Acts 14:21, 22

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe the experiences of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra and nearby cities.
2. Compare the experiences of Paul and Barnabas with those of Christians experiencing opposition in the present.
3. Choose attitudes and behaviors that express faithful persistence in challenging circumstances.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Misheard Lyrics
- B. Lesson Background

I. Miracle and Misidentification (ACTS 14:8-11)

- A. Result of Faith (vv. 8-10)
- B. Conclusion of Crowd (v. 11)

II. Attack and Aid (ACTS 14:19, 20a)

- A. Opposition (v. 19)
What Goes Around Comes Around?
- B. Support (v. 20a)

III. Departure and Return (ACTS 14:20B-23)

- A. To Derbe (v. 20b)
- B. In and from Derbe (vv. 21, 22)
Back to the Front Lines
- C. Selection (v. 23)

Conclusion

- A. Power Seen in Suffering
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Misheard Lyrics

Sometimes singers and songwriters make their lyrics deliberately vague, leaving interpretation to the listener. Quite often, however, lyrics to famous pop songs are misheard. Those who sing along to a favorite song may be singing words that were never intended! For example, in the song “Purple Haze” Jimi Hendrix did not sing “scuse me while I kiss this guy,” but rather “scuse me while I kiss the sky.” Credence Clearwater Revival did not give directions to a “bathroom on the right,” but warned of a “bad moon on the rise.” The Rolling Stones vowed that they would “never be your beast of burden,” not counseling cooks to “never leave your pizza burnin’!”

We all want to be heard. We do not like to be misunderstood. It’s bad enough when it happens unintentionally, but problems multiply when it happens with malicious intent. Paul’s experience with regard to the latter has something to teach us.

B. Lesson Background

Our text continues the story of Paul’s first missionary journey of about AD 47-49. After traveling across the island of Cyprus, Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark sailed northward to Asia Minor (modern Turkey). From its south coast they traveled inland first to Perga, where John Mark called it quits (Acts 13:5, 13; 15:37, 38). It was then on to Antioch of Pisidia, a straight-line distance of about 75 miles; walking distance was much farther due to terrain. There Paul preached in the synagogue; his message led many to faith but provoked bitter opposition from others (13:13-52). This pattern was to repeat itself throughout Paul’s missionary travels. Wherever the gospel went in Acts, it met with opposition as well as faith.

I. Miracle and Misidentification

(ACTS 14:8-11)

From Antioch of Pisidia, the missionaries traveled eastward to smaller towns. The first was Iconium, where again preaching led to division and controversy (Acts 14:1-7). The team of Paul and Barnabas then moved on to Lystra, the setting of today’s text. Lystra was a modest-sized town on a secondary highway and thus somewhat isolated from contact with the wider world. A local language was used commonly there even after the Greek language had spread through the region centuries before the New Testament. Archaeologists have recovered inscriptions from the area showing the persistence of belief in traditional pagan gods and goddesses.

A. Result of Faith (vv. 8-10)

⁸ In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked.

A man with a lifelong disability comes to the forefront of the account. Perhaps like so many in his condition, there is little he can do except beg for money to survive. He reminds us of the man encountered by Peter and John at the gate to the temple, also lame from his birth (Acts 3:2). Both unnamed men were living in deep need, never having encountered anything that could change their condition.

9. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed

Now the man with a disability hears the preaching of Paul about Jesus. Perhaps that preaching includes accounts of miraculous healings on the part of the Son of God ([Luke 5:17-26](#); [7:22](#)). The man's response to this message is the beginning of faith. The text describes Paul looking closely at him, as Peter had done with the lame man at the temple ([Acts 3:4](#)). From what Paul sees, perhaps by various expressions of body language, the apostle understands that the man has *faith to be healed*. The man is convinced that the Jesus whom Paul preaches can change his life as no other can (compare [Matthew 9:27-30](#)).

10. and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

Perceiving the man's faith, Paul boldly commands him to do what he has never done before: stand on his heretofore powerless legs. The man does that and more, like the man Peter had healed ([Acts 3:8](#)). If the power of Jesus can accomplish this miracle, then surely it can bring the fullness of God's blessings to the people of Lystra!

What Do You Think?

What did you learn about God from an occasion when you exercised your Christian faith publicly?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding surprising results and reactions

Regarding unsurprising results and reactions

B. Conclusion of Crowd (v. 11)

11. When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!"

Absent any devout Jews in Lystra, it's safe to assume that everyone there worships pagan deities. So naturally the people try to comprehend the miracle just witnessed within the framework of stories about those gods. The conclusion: Paul and Barnabas must be two of those very gods.

What Do You Think?

What can we do to correct misperceptions of what being a Christian implies?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

As perceived through the lens of pop culture

As perceived through the lens of former churchgoers

As perceived through the lens of science

Other

As we read the reaction *the gods have come down to us in human form*, we naturally recall that that's what Jesus did. There is a critical difference, however. The stories of pagan gods in human form involve masquerades to promote self-serving agendas. The fictitious god acts for his or her own benefit. The New Testament affirms, however, that Jesus "being in human likeness," concurrently took upon himself "the very nature of a servant" ([Philippians 2:7](#)). Though always retaining his divine nature, Jesus never used his divine prerogatives for his own advantage. He willingly suffered death for the sake of humanity, choosing not to save himself so that he could save others. Sadly, the New Testament witnesses to the fact that people at times seem quite willing to bestow the status of "god" on mere humans ([Acts 12:22](#)), while being most unwilling to believe that Jesus is the Son of God ([John 1:11](#); [9:1-34](#)).



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Visual for Lesson 3. Start a discussion as you point to this visual while asking, “What interferes with our hearing God’s call on our lives?”

II. Attack and Aid

(ACTS 14:19, 20A)

Paul and Barnabas attempt to correct the false impression in the intervening verses that are not part of today’s lesson text. The fickleness of the crowd is seen in what comes next.

A. Opposition (v. 19)

^{19a}. Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over.

The miracle has made an enormous impact on the people of Lystra. But this does not ensure a favorable hearing from everyone! The preaching of Paul and Barnabas had stirred up opposition in places previously visited—*Antioch* of Pisidia and *Iconium* (Acts 13:13-14:7). Jewish opponents from those two towns now seek to suppress the gospel in Lystra. Their determination is seen in their willingness to travel many miles. Their opposition is so persuasive that a mob action

results.

The amount of time that elapses until these opponents arrive on the scene is unspecified. It may take several days for word to travel from Lystra back to Antioch and Iconium, and for opponents in those two cities to coordinate their plans.

^{19b.} They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.

Stoning is one means of execution in the ancient world, employed to engage members of the entire community in the judgment against the accused (example: [Leviticus 24:14](#)). In many cases the victim is first cast into a pit, then large stones are dropped or thrown on him or her. We cannot know the specific means of Paul's stoning. But it is certainly a horrific experience as a crowd of people overtakes Paul, utterly convinced that he deserves to die. The fact that those who stone Paul do not stop until they believe him to be dead implies that he suffers visibly severe injuries.

Paul himself had participated in the stoning of Stephen ([Acts 7:58-8:1](#)). Later, he will note a stoning to be among other episodes of violent persecution ([2 Corinthians 11:23-27](#)). In his letter to the Galatians, thought by many scholars to have been written to the churches in this region just after his first missionary journey, he will remark that he bears on his body "the marks of Jesus" ([Galatians 6:17](#)). Perhaps he refers to the scars of the violent incident under consideration here.

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND?

Most of us have heard others use the word *karma*. By this they typically mean that someone who has done wrong is now being repaid by a negative circumstance. The popular karmic sentiment "What goes around comes around" is appealing at first glance since it seems to say the same thing as the Bible regarding reaping what one sows ([Proverbs 11:18](#); [22:8](#); etc.).

But karma is a pagan concept. The notion that karma determines one's future (reincarnated) lives should cause us to recognize the idea as unbiblical. Another red flag is that karma is a rigid, unyielding cause-and-effect system. Paul, as a Christian of Jewish background, knew that God had forgiven his sins, with no future punishment in store.

Even so, Paul came to experience the kind of persecution he had inflicted on others ([Acts 8:1-3](#); [9:1, 2](#); [Galatians 1:13](#); [Philippians 3:6](#)). It could make him even more grateful that the Lord had forgiven him and saved him from such a sinful life. What about you?

—C. R. B.

B. Support (v. 20a)

^{20a.} But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city.

The narrative does not tell us whether Paul actually dies and God miraculously raises him, or whether he comes close to death but God restores him to strength. What we are told is that *the disciples*—probably residents of Lystra recently brought to faith in Jesus—are not prevented from gathering round about Paul and witnessing the result of God's protection. They are certainly able to affirm that God has rescued Paul.

III. Departure and Return

([ACTS 14:20B-23](#))

Paul and Barnabas must make a decision: stay in Lystra or leave town. There is no record of God's revealing a divine decision in this regard (contrast [Acts 16:6-10](#); [18:9-11](#)).

A. To Derbe (v. 20b)

^{20b.} The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

Paul is strong enough to set out for Derbe *the next day*, a walking trip of at least 60 miles. This is not what we would expect of a man left for dead the day before! Clearly God's power has protected and preserved Paul just as much as his power made the lame man whole.

The trip to Derbe takes the travelers to the southeast. This means they will not be crossing paths with the agitators who are returning home to Antioch (to the northwest) or Iconium (to the north).

B. In and from Derbe (vv. 21, 22)

^{21.} They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,

Prior to reaching Derbe, Paul and Barnabas had met serious opposition in every city in which they preached in the Galatian region. As we read about their continuing travels and ministry, we are amazed that they continue in the face of such serious resistance. Yet they do indeed preach in Derbe, with influence on many people there.

Even more surprising is the missionaries' following move: returning to each of the cities where they experienced persecution! A different route is certainly possible. It's possible to press to the east, through Paul's hometown of Tarsus ([Acts 21:39](#)), and finally back to Antioch of Syria. Instead they retrace their steps, going back to the sites of their suffering.

What Do You Think?

When was a time God called you to minister in a hostile environment? How did things turn out?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding ministry to a fellow believer

Regarding ministry to an unbeliever

^{22a.} strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.

The missionaries' purpose in retracing their steps is so that they can continue to teach the new followers of Jesus. Such ongoing teaching is always important, but it is especially vital when those new to the faith live in an environment that is hostile to that faith.

The Greek underneath the translation *strengthening* is also translated the same way in [Acts 18:23](#). The strengthening is that of urging the new disciples to embrace attitudes and behaviors consistent with their new faith. Christians in every era have realized the importance of grounding new converts in their faith with ongoing teaching. The Christians of the first generation are our model.

22b. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.

The text emphasizes a particular aspect of the missionaries’ ongoing teaching: the significance of suffering for the followers of Jesus. The gospel focuses on Jesus’ suffering, his willing death for the sake of sinners. The book of Acts and the volume that precedes it, the Gospel of Luke, emphasize that Jesus’ suffering is the culmination of all the suffering of God’s people in history ([Luke 11:49-51](#)). Indeed, the story of God’s people in the Bible is repeatedly a story of hardship and suffering.

The new disciples are entering just such a life. What they had seen happen to Paul and Barnabas will happen to them, as it likely has already. Being God’s person does not mean an end to suffering. Rather, it means suffering as others suffer. Even more than that, it means distinctly suffering because of belonging to God and so not conforming to the pattern of the world.

But this suffering is not pointless. By his suffering Christ brought the kingdom of God, God’s promised rule, into the world. Because of his suffering, Christ is exalted at God’s right hand and extends his rule ultimately to embrace all the earth ([Acts 1:6-8](#)). Acts shows that by living in step with Jesus’ teaching, the followers of Jesus encounter hardships and persecution as he did ([John 15:20](#)). As Paul and Barnabas continue to experience this truth, so will the new believers. God’s kingdom is always shaped like a cross; yet God’s Spirit empowers us to carry the cross.

BACK TO THE FRONT LINES

Wars result in horrific injuries for many soldiers. Yet sophisticated prosthetics allow some who have lost limbs to return to duty. But there is another force at work in allowing recovered soldiers to do so. That factor is drive, says John Ferguson, chief prosthetist at the Center for the Intrepid, San Antonio Military Medical Center. Drive is a soldier’s desire to continue the mission in spite of personal cost. For such personnel, loyalty to one’s comrades seems to be the most powerful factor at work.

In spite of having been stoned and left for dead, Paul returned to the places where he had been attacked. He could have said “mission accomplished, let’s go home.” But he didn’t. His return demonstrated that the power of the gospel was greater than the evil in the world. That return had something important to say not only to the people of the area but also to his traveling companion Barnabas (compare [John 11:8-10](#)). What is your level of boldness saying to others?

—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

Whose experience with suffering inspires you? Why is that?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding one who suffered loss of health

Regarding one who suffered loss of job

Regarding one who lost a family member

C. Selection (v. 23)

23a. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church

The new believers will need leadership after the missionaries depart, so Paul and Barnabas select leaders for them. The Greek underneath the word *appointed* is also translated “chosen” in [2 Corinthians 8:19](#), and that is the idea here.

Elders is the term used here and elsewhere in the New Testament for these leaders ([Acts 11:30](#); [15:2-6](#), [22](#), [23](#); [16:4](#); [20:17](#); [Titus 1:5](#); [1 Peter 5:1](#)). This term is commonly used in Judaism to refer to those who lead because of their maturity (examples: [Jeremiah 26:17-19](#); [Acts 25:15](#)). Christians adopt this as one of the terms for their own leaders (see [1 Timothy 5:17](#); [1 Peter 5:5](#); other designations are found in [Acts 20:28](#); [1 Timothy 3:2](#); and [Titus 1:7](#)).

These leaders are to look out for the welfare of those in their charge, with analogy to shepherds who feed and protect their flock of sheep ([Acts 20:28-30](#); [1 Peter 5:1-4](#); compare [Hebrews 13:17](#)). The leadership designations in [Ephesians 4:11](#) remind us of the New Testament’s plural use of leadership terms (see also [Philippians 1:1](#); [1 Timothy 4:14](#); [Titus 2:2](#)). The responsibility to nurture and lead the church never falls to one person alone. It is always a shared duty, part of the church’s fellowship in the love of Christ, who is the “Chief Shepherd” ([1 Peter 5:4](#)).

The context implies clearly enough a certain level of spiritual maturity to serve as one of the leaders who shepherd God’s people. If much trouble marks the way of God’s kingdom, then those who lead others on that way must know what it is to suffer faithfully as Christ’s followers. That experience in turn will enable them to guide others who encounter their own suffering.

23b. and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

Paul and Barnabas began their missionary travels with a calling delivered while they and other church leaders were fasting and praying ([Acts 13:1-5](#)). Now the two missionaries use the same procedure with the new leaders. See comments on [Acts 13:2](#) in [lesson 2](#).

To pray to God is to acknowledge that one’s fate does not lie within oneself. To be *committed . . . to the Lord* recognizes dedication of one’s life to his care and protection. The converts had come to believe in him through the preaching of Christ’s death and resurrection. Now they trust the God who raised Jesus from the dead to carry them through every circumstance. Even death itself will not separate them from God’s love ([Romans 8:35-39](#)).

What Do You Think?

What specific situations call for prayer and fasting today? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Among fellow Christians

By Christians in the presence of unbelievers

Conclusion

A. Power Seen in Suffering

Stories and experiences of opposition to the Christian faith can be very discouraging to us. Sometimes we look to the past and think that there was a time when the Christian faith was warmly and widely received. That selective memory contrasts with our view of the present, when it seems that hostility to Christian faith is common in all quarters.

We do well in such instances to remember that suffering is the means by which we experience God's kingdom. None of the biblical exemplars of our faith escaped suffering, and Jesus himself suffered supremely at the hands of his enemies.

Hostility to the faith should not surprise us. But neither should those experiences of persecution blind us to the other things that God is doing. As he did with Paul and Barnabas, God is bringing people to saving faith through the faithful witness of his suffering people.

Today, even as we see persecution coming from every direction, we also see faith in Christ taking root in the lives of people whom we thought far from God's truth. The power of Christ that healed the lame man continues to transform lives around us in amazing ways. In fact, we realize that the power of Christ is often most clearly demonstrated among his people when they suffer.

Are we ready to accept and act on both of these realities? Can we demonstrate firm faith in Christ when our faith is tested by suffering and persecution? Are we ready to acknowledge and celebrate the work of God that is happening all around us? Will we revere Christ in our hearts and serve in his name with our hands, despite the hardships and with expectation of his victory? Do we desire to see the victory of God enough that we are willing to see it in our own suffering?

B. Prayer

God Almighty, as Paul and Barnabas committed the new believers to your care, so we likewise commit ourselves. Teach us faithfulness in every situation, a faithfulness that praises you in hardship as in triumph. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Speak up; speak out; speak clearly!

HOW TO SAY IT

Antioch *An-tee-ock.*

Barnabas *Bar-nuh-bus.*

Corinthians *Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in thin).*

Cyprus *Sigh-prus.*

Derbe *Der-be.*

Galatians *Guh-lay-shunz.*

Iconium *Eye-ko-nee-um.*

Lycaonia *Lik-uh-o-ni-uh.*

Lystra *Liss-truh.*

Pisidia *Pih-sid-ee-uh.*

synagogue *sin-uh-gog.*

Syria *Sear-ee-uh.*

Tarsus *Tar-sus.*

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Do an online search for the "Who's on First?" comedy routine by Abbott and Costello. You can either show a video of the original routine to the class or print out a script and invite two volunteers to act it out.

Alternative. Distribute pens and copies of the "Say What?" activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Students will be reading complicated directives and matching them with more simplified versions. Have students work individually or in small groups. When students are finished, review the correct answers together.

After either activity, say, "We all want to be heard. We do not like to be misunderstood, ignored, or misquoted. But it happens! Let's look at how Paul responded during times when others suffered from spiritual deafness."

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups. Give each group one of these research assignments about confronting spiritual deafness.

Group 1—Deafness of pagan ideas

Case studies of culturally caused spiritual deafness: [Acts 14:8-13](#); [17:16-18](#)

Paul's prescription: [Acts 14:15-17](#); [17:22-28](#)

Group 2—Deafness of anger and jealousy

Case studies of jealousy-caused spiritual deafness: [Acts 14:19](#); [17:5-7](#)

Paul's prescription: [Acts 14:20](#); [17:10](#)

Group 3—Deafness of forgetfulness

Case studies of spiritual deafness caused by forgetting what was taught: [Acts 14:21, 22](#); [Titus 1:10](#)

Paul's prescription: [Acts 14:23](#); [Titus 1:5-9](#)

Allow groups time to report. Here are some points you may wish to make:

Group 1—In Lystra, the crowd interpreted Paul's miracle as coming from their pagan gods. Later, a very educated group in Athens interpreted Paul's words as adding to the list of gods and goddesses they already acknowledged. In both cases, Paul responded with a more detailed explanation, correcting their misconceptions.

Group 2—In Lystra, jealous Jews stoned Paul and left him for dead. In Thessalonica, jealous Jews hired a mob to cause a riot. In both cases, Paul was supported by other believers. They gathered around him in Lystra. In Thessalonica, they protected him from a mob.

Group 3—In Antioch of Syria, Paul found it necessary to remind the church about what he had already taught them. Paul sent Titus to the church in Crete to remind them of the truth.

In both cases, Paul determined the need to appoint leaders to remind believers of the truth, even when he was absent.

Into Life

Say, "We all have a story to tell. God has written our stories of faith, using hardships and struggles to bring about something beautiful. Our stories can help others see what God has done in our lives and can give them hope that he can do something meaningful in theirs."

Have students write or tell their stories thus far. Suggest that they include the following points:

My life before I accepted Jesus.

How I came to faith in Jesus.

Blessings after I became a Christian.

Struggles after I became a Christian.

Discuss how they can more effectively share the good news of Jesus through those stories. (Note: be aware of how much time this will require!)

Alternative. Distribute pens and copies of the "Rooted and Built Up" activity from the reproducible page. Have students work individually to complete the activity.