

The Holy Spirit

Pastor Ken

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You can explain the book of Acts or experience the book of Acts.

About 5 years ago I started experiencing joint pain in the knuckles of my right hand. This made it hard to “get a grip,” really to have a firm grip on anything. It was a struggle to do chores and mechanical activities. A couple of months ago, the pain increased to such a level of pain, I could not lift my pillow. On a Sunday, those with sickness, illness and pain were invited to come forward to receive prayer for healing.

One of the pastors at the church took some anointing oil, anointed me and prayed for me. I had no idea who the person was, but he prayed with faith. After church I went home, not feeling any different. Within 2 days I noticed a significant difference. I told my wife and mother-in-law who also prayed for me, how much better I was feeling in my hand. Without a doubt, it feels better than it has for 5 years.

I thank the Lord for those people that God uses. I believe it was a gift from our Lord that showed me healing is possible. God has not just healed my hand; he has also healed my marriage and is growing my faith. I am living a life of total fulfillment in Christ. -Tim

⁸ In 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!” ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. (Acts 14-NIV)

Recently, I had an opportunity for the first time to set up a book display at a women’s conference, about 400 ladies in attendance. Imagine my inflated and exaggerated hopes for selling books. I thought, “this weekend alone will put me into the new author category and publishing companies will be calling all week for the rights to a distribution.”

At the conference I was able to chat one-on-one with potential buyers of my book, *Rethinking Depression and Anxiety*.” Would you be surprised if I told you, I was little anxious about that weekend. I hate it when that happens, the author of *Rethinking Depression and Anxiety* is whacked by anxiety.

These kinds of thoughts got stuck in my brain,

*Do you have enough books for sale?

*How will you get your sermon done for Sunday? I will be tied up all weekend at the women's conference.

*Can I stomach the rejection of those who just walk past my table, and don't offer even a glancing eye?

Let me put it on the real for a moment. At times it was downright painful.

Before I describe the pain, I sold about 50 books, including some I gave away. Here is a hint, if you tell me, you want a book, and money is an issue, the book is yours, no questions asked.

Now, to the difficult part. Maybe I can describe the scene? It is Saturday morning at the women's conference. The venders are all ready for a big day of sales. Some ladies from a church enter the vender area. They are traveling as a caravan of cost savings. As a pack of piranhas. A gaggle of geese. They chat enthusiastically as they make their way through the vender area.

Our own Missionary Sarah Geseeka is talking about missions. The Adult/Teen challenge is selling maple syrup, salsa and spicy pickles. Brandy Lewis had a beautiful table of jewelry. Madison Sharp presented freshly baked cookies that spelled out the conference theme, Audacious Faith, perfectly displayed with sweet icing.

Next, time I sell books at a conference, I will set up my display table in the middle of the cookies and jewelry. My small bowl of free chocolate was not much of a draw.

You would have thought it was black Friday. The sound of pre-Christmas buying filled the air. Suddenly, one lady announced to all the rest, hey - look at this - merchandise from last year. Can you believe this, half price? What a deal.

Then the moment of truth happens. I eyeball the leader of the pack, a loud, confident lady guiding the caravan to my table. They glance at the table, and someone says, "**oh, a book.**" Her skills of observation were impressive. Another quietly tells everyone "There are a lot of people who need this topic."

Someone says, "I used to struggle with depression, it was a low point in my life."

Then it happened: what I call a forensic autopsy of my book.

The procedure and analysis are always the same. A lady picks up the book and turns it over and reads the comments on the back.

Melissa Swartz, Licensed Clinical Marriage and Family therapist.

- This twelve-step book offers a deeply spiritual approach to overcoming depression and anxiety, while providing practical guidance for healing.

Dr Kenneth E Squires III, Psychiatrist.

- This work symbolizes an important connection between one's faith in the Divine and mental healing. I am proud to know the author as father and friend.

I am sure those touching statements will close the deal. Then I hear, "**wow!**" Another book is opened, and they pour over some pages, and I hear, "**that's good.**"

They repeat this process for several minutes. Now, I am trying not to look like I am hovering. Suddenly, the person stops. Closes the book. Puts it back on the table.

Can I add, just my opinion, she moved the book from the new book category to the used book category, (if you spend more than 5 minutes reading a book, in my mind that is a sale). At least give me a couple bucks for the troubles. Then they walk away, and not even a word of thanks. My words, "**Ouch!**"

Didn't Paul say, we must go through many hardships before we enter the Kingdom of God? *We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22b-NIV)*

Acts records Paul's 3 missionary tours. Chapters 13-14 record his first tour in Turkey which lasted 2 years. This region is where Paul comes in contact with those who would one day make up the church at Galatia.

As we see in the beginning of Acts 14, Paul starts his evangelistic efforts in a Jewish synagogue if the town has one. There is one in Acts 14, in Iconian.

At Iconian Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. (Acts 14:1-NIV)

Now, the pattern for Paul's ministry was the same, often he would be opposed-*but the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. (Acts 14:2)*

What made those exposed to Paul's ministry so mad? He did the work of God in the power of the Holy Spirit; *the Lord confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders. (Acts 14:3)*

That which the Holy Spirit did in the book of Acts, he wants to continue today. That is why the book of Acts is an open book. No formal conclusion.

Since the evil one cannot stop the Holy Spirit's supernatural work, he will hijack it or attempt to discredit it. (Acts 14:3, 5, 12, 19)

Some refused to receive the message of God's grace and attempted to assassinate Paul. A plot to stone Paul is underway in the first verses of Acts 14.

There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. (Acts 14:5-NIV)

First century Christians were often falsely accused of atheism, cannibalism, child sacrifice, worship of animals, illegal assembly, arson and a general hatred of the human race.

Did you know that in the 1950's and continuing today Chinese Christians are routinely accused of attempting to overthrow the communist government, womanizing, counter-revolutionary activities, poisoning the water, espionage, smuggling into the country Bibles, illegal border crossings and many other sidious activities.

Paul leaves Iconian and goes to the neighboring town of Lystra. There is no synagogue in Lystra, so Paul goes to the public square where there is a farmers' market, street entertainment and people socializing. Theatre. Magic and mime.

As Paul is speaking in the marketplace, he notices a lame man listening and possessing faith.

⁸ In 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 on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. (Acts 14:8-10-NIV)

Here Luke will report on one of the many supernatural healings that are recorded in the book of Acts. This healing of a lame man parallels a similar healing in Acts 3, by Peter. God is confirming that what he has done through Peter, he is now doing through Paul.

The man's feet were lame, either from a birth defect or injury as a child. Everyone in Lystra knew the man. Unlike the beggar in Acts 3, this man's healing came as a result of faith.

Luke wants the reader to connect these two healings using similar terms, phrases, and imagery that makes the connection unmistakable.

Luke tells this story, to show that Paul's apostleship is equal to Peter's apostleship. The healing is a miracle. Those in the marketplace do something unusual for anyone following Paul and Barnabas.

Nobody could have anticipated such a demonic turn of events. Instead, of looking to Paul and Barnabas as miracle workers for Jesus, the people look at them as the Greek gods, Zeus and Hermes (Jupiter and Mercury).

The people of Lystra lived in fear that Greek gods would destroy them if they failed to appease them with worship and sacrifices. The Iconian's thought that Paul and Barnabas were the embodiment of Greek gods, and they had come to torture them, to destroy them if they failed to offer them the appropriate kind of worship.

So, the people begin to worship Paul and Barnabas. They throw a barbecue. They have a parade. They give Paul and Barnabas key to the city. Then Paul goes ballistic. He tears his clothes and tells the people they have it all wrong.

This sad understanding of the gods circles the globe. Cultures steeped in the worship of false gods, other than the real God- Jesus Christ hold whole cultures of people in slavery. In some cases, even to the point of requiring human sacrifices.

One minute Paul is being deified, the next Jews are trying to destroy him. (Acts 14:11-20) Let me read the story right from the bible.

11-13 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they went wild, calling out in their Lyconian dialect, "The gods have come down! These men are gods!" They called Barnabas "Zeus" and Paul "Hermes" (since Paul did most of the speaking). The priest of the local Zeus shrine got up a parade — bulls and banners and people lined right up to the gates, ready for the ritual of sacrifice.

14-15 When Barnabas and Paul finally realized what was going on, they stopped them. Waving their arms, they interrupted the parade, calling out, "What do you think you're doing! We're not gods!

We are men just like you, and we're here to bring you the Message, to persuade you to abandon these silly god-superstitions and embrace God himself, the living God. We don't make God; he makes us, and all of this — sky, earth, sea, and everything in them. (Acts 14-MSG)

Never forget, if Satan cannot derail your witness with persecution and suffering, he will try to derail you with praise. The enemy will do anything to steal the limelight from Jesus. Or get you to steal the limelight from Jesus.

At a recent Dove awards one artist who won 7 Dove Awards, Forrest Frank declined to show up because he felt it detracted from Jesus. When asked why he did not want to attend to get his awards, Forest Frank said,

"I'm convicted, personally, that a line that I can draw is that I will not receive a trophy for something that is from Jesus and for Jesus," he proclaimed. "I was wrestling with this last year. I even said that on stage at the Dove Awards. I said, 'I'm still struggling with the concept of receiving this award, but all glory to Jesus, every name will fade away, including mine, except for one name.'"

Frank detailed how he felt "a conviction to go even a step further and say, 'I don't know if I even want to step on the stage. I don't know if I want to step in the room.'" Thus, he announced that he has "decided to take a stance of nonparticipation," vowing, "I will not be attending the Doves and the Grammys."

"I hope to be an example to the youth that the trophy is our salvation," he added. "The trophy is that my name is listed in the Book of Life and I get to have eternal life. What good is a piece of metal going to do compared to that?" (Ryan Foley-Christian Post Reporter)

As move on through Acts 14, we see that Paul is completing the first missionary journey as directed by the Holy Spirit. Over a year ago Paul left Antioch and now Paul and Barnabas begin to retrace their steps.

Paul, are you going back to Lystra? Why? One beating was not enough. Paul's commission and call to encourage Christians was greater than his concern for death. Paul already has his concern for death settled. *So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. (2 Corinthians 5:9-NIV)*

Can you say that? You are at peace in either living for God or dying for God. When you can get this settled, you have less fear about the king of fears, death.

²¹ They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²²strengthening 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. (Acts 14-NIV)

On Paul and Barnabas return trip, God's word tells us, they were strengthening the disciples. Continuance is a characteristic of faith. Notice with me, not perfection, not Bible reading, not serving or even giving, but **continuance in growth in Christ**.

Paul tells those who began to follow Christ, the Christian life is not a bed of roses, it would be jail, sickness, hard work and even stoning.

Christ follower who is new in your faith and seasoned follower in your faith learn to **accept** some adversity, anxiety, accidents from time to time.

*We must go through **many** hardships to enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22b-NIV)*

Hey friend, underscore the word, **many** in the verse. Not some. Not a few. But many. How many you ask? That is up to God. He is the one that is directing your life. Guiding your life. Guarding your life.

The events and experiences of your life are not a random series of challenges, sufferings and difficulties, each one has a God designed purpose. Why not stop fighting God and start working with God.

I see that you are able to do everything, and to give effect to all your designs. (Job 42:2-BBE)

I'm convinced: You can do anything and everything. Nothing and no one can upset your plans. (Job 42:2-MSG)

Two accidents. Two different families.

One family coming home from a family gathering.

One family coming home from vacation.

Both attend Bethel Life Center in Wichita, Kansas. Both love Jesus Christ. Each family makes their unique mark on their community.

Each praying, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done." Both with countless blessings to thank God for.

Two different states. One in Kansas. One in Louisiana. 2 different outcomes. One in Dodge City. A daughter driving. Slick roads caused her to slide off the pavement, she over compensated and then slid into a semi. Dad is dead. Daughter is injured. All family members shaken up.

Another family. A couple. On vacation. They had to return early because of bad weather. Was it the bad weather or the death of a dear friend that brought them home?

While pulled off onto the side of the road, they were almost killed by a semi driver drifting onto the shoulder of the road. 50 feet from a collision in Louisiana the driver swerved back onto the highway. That was God. The wife did not know this was happening.

How does a person make sense of two seemingly different outcomes? Was the hand of God only on one family and not on the other? Did an angel push the semi back onto the road and where there no angels to help the spinning car that hit the semi and killed dad?

For every story of a hair-raising death-defying escape there is a broken family somewhere on the highway with no miracle to tell. Was God in control of both events?

How quickly we praise and post on face-book how God is in control when our roadside shoulder miracle saved our lives.

Should I also praise God and post that God is in control when someone else suffers an unlikely tragedy?

Near accident deliverances and traumatic accidents all are permitted or caused by a Sovereign God. People scratch their heads. Many wander dazed on the side of the road wondering, what just happened?

If you choose to allow God's Kingdom to be formed in you, you will experience adversity, hardships or suffering, and for some, even death.

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22b-NIV). Here is my advice to all who face suffering, don't give up. Don't slow up. Don't seize up. Just grow up.

Will you give up when you face adversity, hardships and suffering? Don't give up! Don't abandon your faith!

I too, often have the wrong response when I face suffering. When I face difficulties. When I am stoned and left for dead. Right!

You know the kind of suffering we all face.

We miss a light that turns red, when we are in a hurry and so you swear!

Your spouse fails to put the toilet seat down, so you feel tormented.

Your favorite sports team loses, so you want to give up and become a Mariner fan.

Recently, as I was thinking about these issues, I felt the Lord ask me, so I am asking you...

As a Christ follower, when you rely on anything other than Jesus Christ, are you not abandoning the faith?

On the way back to Antioch Paul goes back to Lystra, Iconian and Antioch strengthening and encouraging the brothers and sisters to remain true to the faith. Paul makes this statement

that I want to end with...We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.
(Acts 14:22b-NIV)

That is not a verse you are going to post on Facebook, as a source of motivation. Really. What kind of encouragement is that pastor?

This verse does not mean that through a lot of hard work and much suffering you will eventually enter heaven. The suffering that was endured is what Jesus suffered, so we can have access to heaven, and the supernatural in this life.

Jesus suffered on our behalf so we would not have to suffer, the way Jesus suffered. We don't get to heaven because we suffer for Jesus, we get to heaven because Jesus suffered for us. Anybody grateful for that?

Paul does not tell us we must go through many hardships to enter the **kingdom of heaven**. He says, **Kingdom of God**. In the NT, there are a few times when the kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven are interchangeable. In most places, NT writers distinguish between the Kingdom of heaven and Kingdom of God.

Here is way to understand what each means. The Kingdom of heaven is about a **destination**. The Kingdom of God is about a **designation**. The designation is about a king, who is ruling right now in your life. Kingdom of Heaven future, Kingdom of God, formation.

In other words, it is all about making you like Jesus. And tough times do just that, makes you like Jesus. Tough times teach us how to be patient, how to persevere and how to endure.

Let's look at each of these briefly. This is your personal benefit from tough times, not the outcome of tough times, the benefit.

Tough times do what no other event or experience can do.

Tough times make you tough.

1. Tough times teach us **patience**. (James 1:2-3, NCV)

² My brothers and sisters, when you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy, ³ because you know that these troubles test your faith, and this will give you patience.
(James 1:2-3-NCV)

2. Tough times teach us **perseverance**. (Romans 5:3, NKJV)

³ And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; (Romans 5:3-NKJV)

The idea is how to have a steady hand and steady heart during trials and tribulations. We don't fold. We don't fake it. We don't flop and flounder.

3. Tough times teach us **endurance**. (Hebrews 12:1-3, NLT)

^{1b} And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. ³ Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. (Hebrews 12-NLT)

As followers of Jesus, we surrender to the reign and sovereignty of our king. When Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is within you, he says there is a life that when you are surrendered to Jesus you are experiencing the Kingdom of God.

No one will say, "Look, here it is!" or, "There it is!"; because the Kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17:21-GNT)

When you surrender to that King and that Kingdom, you will encounter on some level suffering, adversity or trouble.

This is what Paul is telling us; we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22). How many have discovered as a follower of Jesus the truth of this verse.

Hardship comes with faithfulness.

Suffering comes with faithfulness.

Sickness and maybe even death comes with being faithful to Jesus. Jesus said this in John 16:33,

I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world. (John 16:33-NLT)

So, how are we going to end today? We are going to invite our prayer team forward to pray for those who want God's grace and strength in the midst of your trial or sorrow.

Trial is physical difficulty. Sorrow is the emotional consequences to your trial. Come and receive Jesus' grace in the midst of your trial and tribulation. And if you need healing, our prayer team is here to pray for God's intervention in the midst of your sickness and suffering.

If you are starting with Jesus Christ for the first time or a fresh time, come and join me at the **I Have Decided Wall**. I want to do something different, rather than prayer for your

deliverance, I want to pray for your patience, perseverance and endurance as you face trials and tribulations.

This is not a prayer of deliverance; this is a prayer of spiritual development. Not a prayer for your freedom, it is a prayer for Christ's formation.

Lord, be near!

The hardships of this season weigh heavy on me. But I know they produce in me patience, perseverance and endurance. As fear grows louder, quiet the fear so I can hear Your voice. I declare, Lord, You are good, and I accept Your Sovereign plan that I must go through hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.

Lord, remind me that Your plans are far better than my own.

When I am scared, grow my faith bigger than my fear.

When I am discouraged, guide me to seek You in the pain.

When it feels like too much, let Your presence be near.

Lord, by faith I trust that I am truly living the abundant life.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.