

2024 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church

Sermon Title - Ups and Downs

Sermon Text - Acts 13:49-14:7

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction:

“You are Alpha and Omega, We worship You, our Lord, You are worthy to be praised! When you face hard things in this life, and we all face hard things at different times in our lives and to varying degrees, what do you do? How do you handle hard things? Do you worry and fret? Do you get frustrated? Do you get angry? Do you get depressed? After we pray we will look at some facts we must know if we are to deal with life's ups and downs. Pray!

Let's read our text today from Acts 13:49 - 14:7

Acts 13:49 The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

Acts 13:50 But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

Acts 13:51 So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.

Acts 13:52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 14:1 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

Acts 14:2 But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

Acts 14:3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

Acts 14:4 The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.

Acts 14:5 There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them.

Acts 14:6 But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country,

Acts 14:7 where they continued to preach the good news.

Paul and Barnabas had moments of great ups and deep downs while on their mission and we too will have great ups and deep lows while on our mission. We've got to learn how to deal with life's ups and downs. Let's look at some of the facts from our text that will help us deal with life's ups and downs!

Fact #1 - Ups and downs are a reality of life for everyone!

Then

Acts 13:49 The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

Acts 13:50 But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

We touched on this last week. The Word of the Lord was spreading through the whole region! Do you think Satan was happy about that? Remember how unhappy he was when the proconsul believed? We saw a couple of weeks ago that Satan went to work immediately to discourage and break up the amazing evangelistic team of Paul, Barnabus and John Mark! John Mark left and went back to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas traveled on to Pisidian Antioch, as we talked about last week, where they were invited to speak in the Synagogue. Paul didn't hold back on the hard truths they needed to hear and guess what? They invited them back to speak the next Sabbath and this happened...

Acts 13:44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

But this also happened...

Acts 13:45 When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

Paul and Barnabus were run out of town and the region. And remember we read that even though they had faced such ridicule and hardship, God's Word says...

Acts 13:52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Then they head to Iconium, but face a similar situation there.

Acts 14:1 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

Acts 14:2 But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

They were experiencing all kinds of success in sharing the Gospel and many were believing, but at the same time Satan was working overtime to discourage them. Satan was stirring things up and poisoning the people's minds against Paul and Barnabas! It's hard to imagine the emotional ups and downs Paul and Barnabus were experiencing. But they were faithful!

Now

You may face ups and downs in many areas of your life! Financial, Family, Work, Health, emotional, mental, or in our Spiritual lives! We all have ups and downs, even people like Billy Graham. Some of you may not remember him, but he was a well known evangelist that packed

out stadiums and arenas and reached many people for Jesus! But even he had some extremely difficult times! His son – Franklin rebelled – drinking, smoking pot, and got kicked out of the Christian college he was attending. Thankfully he later got his life right with the Lord and went on to head the ministry of Samaritan's Purse! However, at one time his dad, Billy even thought about quitting the ministry. Some of you might not know who Billy Graham was. I wanted to see what the world had to say, so I went to Wikipedia. It says...

“William Franklin Graham Jr. (/ˈɡreɪəm/; November 7, 1918 – February 21, 2018) was an American evangelist, an ordained Southern Baptist minister, and a civil rights advocate[1][2] whose broadcast and live sermons became well known internationally in the mid-to-late 20th century. During a career spanning six decades, Graham was a prominent evangelical Christian figure in the United States...Graham's estimated lifetime audience, including radio and television broadcasts, topped billions of people.[14]”

But even this amazing Man of God, a spiritual giant in my book, who was so respected and maintained his integrity and faithfulness until the Lord called him home, he also dealt with ups and downs. Listen to this from Henry Blackaby's book on Spiritual Leadership...

“Billy Graham was thirty years old when he reached a crossroad in his life. His good friend and colleague, Charles Templeton, had abandoned many of the beliefs that he and Graham had formerly shared. Now Templeton ridiculed Graham for his faith. Although Graham was a successful college president and itinerant evangelist, the core of his life and ministry had been shaken. If those who had been closest to him were abandoning their fidelity to the Bible and its teachings, was he naive to continue trusting them as he had in his youth?”

Listen to what Billy Graham said in his autobiography “Just as I Am...”

“As that night wore on, my heart became heavily burdened. With the Los Angeles campaign galloping toward me, I had to have an answer. If I could not trust the Bible, I could not go on. I would have to quit the school presidency. I would have to leave pulpit evangelism. I was only thirty years of age. It was not too late to become a dairy farmer. But that night I believed with all my heart that the God who had saved my soul would never let go of me...”

He then prayed...

“O God! There are many things in this book I do not understand. There are many problems with it for which I have no solution. There are many seeming contradictions. There are some areas in it that do not seem to correlate with modern science. I can't answer some of the philosophical and psychological questions Chuck and others are raising.”

He then says...

“At last the Holy Spirit freed me to say it. “Father, I am going to accept this as Thy Word—by Faith! I am going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will

believe this to be Your inspired Word.” When I got up from my knees at Forest Home that August night, my eyes stung with tears. I sensed the presence and power of God as I had not sensed it in months. Not all my questions had been answered, but a major bridge had been crossed. In my heart and mind, I knew a spiritual battle in my soul had been fought and won.”

I’ve read numerous books by Billy Graham and he was a tremendous influence on my life! I’m so thankful he didn’t give up during the down times. In fact, listen to what Wikipedia says about his accomplishments...

“As a result of his crusades, Graham preached the gospel to more people in person than anyone in the history of Christianity. According to his staff, more than 3.2 million people have responded to the invitation at Billy Graham Crusades to "accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior!”

So Fact #1 - Ups and downs are a reality of life for everyone! And here’s...

Fact #2 - Some things you can change, some you can’t!

Then

Acts 13:51 So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.

Paul and Barnabas had to realize that some were just not going to accept their message. That was hard for Paul and Barnabas to accept. Paul had such a burden for his own people, the Jews that he once said this...

Romans 9:1 I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—

Romans 9:2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

Romans 9:3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race,

Romans 9:4 the people of Israel...

But Paul knew he couldn’t force them to accept God’s love. Some things you can change, some you can’t! And Paul couldn’t change some of the circumstances he would face as an evangelist back in his day. It was brutal. Pastor Jay recently mentioned in a sermon some of the types of persecution Paul went through. Things he had no power over and couldn’t change. Let me remind you...

2 Corinthians 11:24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

2 Corinthians 11:25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,

2 Corinthians 11:26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.

2 Corinthians 11:27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

Now

When I think about all that Paul went through, I look at my troubles and they pale in comparison. And I am also reminded of the struggles that some of you have endured, with serious illness and loss of loved ones or other extreme difficulties in this life. So many of you have been such an inspiration to me! God has used your faith in the midst of the storms of life to encourage me and challenge me! You all know that there are things we can change and things we cannot change when it comes to the circumstances of our lives. Certainly there are things we can do to help the ups and downs become less extreme. We can make better decisions financially. We can spend more time nurturing our family relationships. We can work at our jobs with an attitude of "I'll do my best and work as if I'm working for my Lord." We can do more to live healthy lives. Yet with each of these things we all know that there are variables that are out of our control, which I talked about in a sermon a short time ago. Choices others make affect us in our family, at school, at work ...it can be heartbreaking. And sometimes the unexpected can happen. I know I shared this sometime back, but when I crushed my foot in High School my Grandparents gave me a piece of art that had the serenity prayer written on it...

"God grant me the strength to change the things I can, the courage to endure the things I can't change and the wisdom to know the difference."

Even in our spiritual lives there are mountain tops and then there are the valleys and the dry times. The Psalmist, King David, expresses the difficulties of facing circumstances that you can't change...

Psalm 55:1 Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea;

Psalm 55:2 hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught

Psalm 55:3 because of what my enemy is saying, because of the threats of the wicked; for they bring down suffering on me and assail me in their anger.

Psalm 55:4 My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen on me.

Psalm 55:5 Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me.

Psalm 55:6 I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.

Psalm 55:7 I would flee far away and stay in the desert;

Psalm 55:8 I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm."

But listen to what David eventually concludes...

Psalm 55:16 As for me, I call to God, and the LORD saves me.

Psalm 55:17 Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.

Psalm 55:22 Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.

While there will be mountaintops and valleys in our spiritual lives, we must come to a place where our spiritual lives are not on a constant roller coaster no matter the circumstances! Like the Psalmist, call to God, evening, morning and noon, anytime you are in distress, knowing He hears your voice. Cast your cares on the LORD and He will sustain you! How do we accomplish this? This takes us to our third fact...

Fact #3 - We must learn to rejoice no matter what!

Then

Acts 13:52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

If you were here last week you know I said that I don't think I would be filled with joy if I had just been run out of town! But the disciples, even amid the turmoil, the persecution, and the rejection, had also seen many lives changed! They had seen many come to faith in Jesus and they were elated!

Acts 14:1 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

Acts 14:2 But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

But here's the amazing thing you must see: God gave them special strength and powers to be able to stay in Iconium for a long time in spite of the opposition they faced there!

Acts 14:3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

The Lord confirmed their message to the people, even though many rejected it. But not all rejected and that was cause for rejoicing!! I think Paul and Barnabas remembered the words of the Psalmist...

Psa 40:16 But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, "The LORD be exalted!"

Now

What about today? What about your life when you face the unthinkable, the unavoidable, the unexpected, the unbelievable difficulties that sometimes come out of nowhere? Are we to

rejoice no matter what? That just can't be what we are expected to do, can it? Paul tells us this...

Phil 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

So yes, we are to rejoice no matter what. But let me explain: This doesn't mean we are to be happy when bad things happen, loss of loved ones, serious illness, difficulties in relationships, a mess up or failure in our spiritual lives. No, we are not happy about these things. But we must remember that happiness is based on circumstances, however, the Joy of the Lord is based on the promises of God which He never breaks. Sometimes I've had deep pain and grief in my heart over the loss of a friend, and with tears flowing from my eyes, and with a hurting heart, I was still able to by faith rejoice in the Lord because I knew God was going to make good come out of the bad even though I couldn't imagine how! The Bible states this...

1 Thessalonians 4:13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

So people of faith also grieve, but not like those who have no hope! We have a blessed hope, a "know so" hope, that while not all things are good, we know God can make good come out of the bad. God doesn't cause the bad, but He sure has the power to use it! Listen to what Paul wrote...

Rom 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

He says, "In all things God works for the good," not all things are good! And I've personally witnessed God turning the evil into good in my life as I trusted Him and held onto His hand through the trials of life! Do you remember the story of Joseph in the Bible? His brothers sold him into slavery and told his poor old dad that he had been killed by a wild animal. Years later, God used that evil act to accomplish His will! God made Joseph second in command to the Pharaoh of Egypt during a time of great famine. When Joseph's brothers went to get food an amazing story unfolds and they realize that the man they are asking for food, the second in command, is none other than their long lost brother! They are scared to death as to what is going to happen next. Listen...

Genesis 50:18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

Genesis 50:19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?"

Genesis 50:20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Genesis 50:21 So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

And God used that awful family situation to save Joseph's whole family from starvation!
We don't rejoice about all things, but in all things! Paul tells the church at Thessalonica this...

1 Th 5:16 Be joyful always;

1 Th 5:17 pray continually;

1 Th 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

You don't say "thank you God for this tragedy" or "hardship!" You thank Him **in it!**

What does this mean? Thank Him no matter what you're going through that He loves you! That He has a purpose for you! That He is there with you in the midst of the storms and in the middle of the messes! Remember this truth...

Rom 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Rom 8:36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

Rom 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Rom 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

Rom 8:39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He has a purpose for you...

Eph 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

Eph 1:12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Eph 1:13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

Eph 1:14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.

Jesus told His disciples...

Mat 28:20 ...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

And what does this promise of Jesus really mean for you and me? The same thing it meant to Paul the Apostle...

Phil 4:12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

Phil 4:13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Jesus is your strength, your Good Shepherd, your peace and your provider! Paul says...

2 Cor 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

What must you do to be able to rejoice in all circumstances, good and bad?

Fact #4 - Commit yourself to God and He will get you through the ups and downs of life!

Then

Acts 14:3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

Acts 14:4 The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.

Acts 14:5 There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them.

Acts 14:6 But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country,

God gave Paul and Barnabas supernatural abilities and alerted them to the wicked plans of their enemies and were able to flee to safety! Paul gives the secrets to this kind of commitment in 2 Corinthians...

2 Cor 6:4 Rather, as servants of God we commend (commit) ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses;

2 Cor 6:5 in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger;

And here comes the resources you have when you commit yourself as a servant of God in every way...

2 Cor 6:6 in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love;

2 Cor 6:7 in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left;

2 Cor 6:8 through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors;

2 Cor 6:9 known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed;

2 Cor 6:10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Now

You might ask, "How do I make that kind of commitment to God so I can have those resources?" Good question. Let me remind you of some verses we've already read...

1 Th 5:16 Be joyful always;

1 Th 5:17 pray continually;

1 Th 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Pray Continually!

This doesn't mean that you never get off your knees or come out of your prayer closet! It means that you remain in an attitude of prayer throughout the day. You remain aware of God's presence in your life at every moment by way of His Holy Spirit, and you converse with Him at various times of the day. Morning, noon and evening! Daily commit everything in your life to God in prayer: Your agenda, Your goals, Your family, Your finances, Your disappointments, hold nothing back! Commit everything to God and He will take care of the rest! The writer of Proverbs said it so well...

Prov 16:1 To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the reply of the tongue.

Prov 16:2 All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the LORD.

Prov 16:3 Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.

I'm reminded of the words to this old hymn and it encourages me to take everything to God in prayer...

What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer! Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer. Are we weak and heavy-laden, Cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge—Take it to the Lord in prayer; Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer; In His arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there.

If we do that then we can do this...

Fact #5 - Determine to never, ever quit no matter what!

Then

Acts 14:5 There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them.

Acts 14:6 But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country,

Acts 14:7 where they continued to preach the good news.

They didn't quit! They continued to preach the good news! Enough said! That's why we are here today, because the people they led to Jesus, led people to Jesus who led people to Jesus, all the way down to you and me! Praise God!!

Now

Folks, it's hard not to quit when it seems Satan won't quit and the circumstances just don't seem to get any better! That's when we have to rejoice anyway, always, trusting that God's got a bigger plan and that nothing gets through unless He allows it and if He allows it He will give us what we need to get through it and He will use it for our good in the end! But it's hard to walk by faith when our feelings are fighting us in every way! When you just can't seem to shake the negative thoughts, the hurt feelings, the betrayals, the feelings of fear and uncertainty! I know they did away with the old red cabooses on trains some years ago and now they just have a blinking red light at the end. In the old days if you saw a train being pulled by a caboose, one of two things was happening...It was backing up or it was trying to make it up a hill and the engine quit and it was a runaway train. Why would you know it was one of these two things? Caboose don't pull trains, they can't, they have no engine. Sometimes Christians try to run their Christian lives based on emotions, and feelings. The Problem: Emotions are based on circumstances and circumstances change! And feelings can be impacted by what you eat or drink. They are extremely undependable. Your life must be based on something that is stable and does not change with the latest fad, political or social whim. You must walk by faith in a God who is...

Heb 13:8 ... is the same yesterday and today and forever.

You must remember this...

Rom 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Rom 5:2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Rom 5:3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

Rom 5:4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Rom 5:5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Let's pray!