



Summary

What happens when God sends his people into the most unlikely and even dangerous places? In Acts 18, we find ourselves walking alongside Paul as he makes the fifty-mile journey from the philosophical refinement of Athens into the raw, depraved streets of Corinth, a city so notorious for wickedness that its name had become a slur in the ancient world. And yet, it is precisely there that God says, 'I have many people in this city.' This is one of the most striking and encouraging truths we can hold onto in our own lives and communities. God never gives up on a city or a person, no matter how far gone they may seem. The spiritual lesson here cuts deep: the places and people we might be most tempted to write off are often the very ones God is most actively pursuing. We also encounter something profoundly human in this passage. Paul, one of the greatest missionaries who ever lived, was afraid. He experienced rational, understandable fear rooted in real persecution and real danger. And into that fear, Jesus speaks directly, personally, and tenderly. This reminds us that our fears are not disqualifiers from ministry or from faith. They are invitations for Christ to demonstrate his faithfulness. The foundation of everything we build in life, in faith, in community, is either Christ or it is nothing. That is the question this message leaves ringing in our ears.

calvary
chapel
gulf coast



Points

Title: From Fear to Foundation: Paul's Ministry in Corinth and the Call to Build on Christ

Sermon Summary: This sermon follows the apostle Paul's journey from Athens to Corinth in Acts 18, exploring how God called Paul to minister in one of the most depraved cities of the ancient world. The pastor draws out the tension between rational human fear and divine assurance, showing how Jesus personally appeared to Paul in a vision to encourage him to press on. The sermon emphasizes that the gospel is an invitation, not an intellectual argument, and that God never gives up on a city or a person no matter how wicked. Through the stories of Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos, and the founding of the Corinthian church, the sermon builds toward its central theological conclusion: that Jesus Christ is the only foundation upon which a life, a church, or an eternal hope can be built. The pastor also addresses the relationship between Jewish faith and Christian belief, presenting Christianity not as the eradication of the Old Testament but as its completion and fulfillment.

Key Points:

- Paul's departure from Athens to Corinth was Spirit-led, demonstrating that the gospel must be taken to the most broken and depraved places, not just the intellectually respectable ones
- The gospel is an invitation, not an intellectual argument, and no one can be talked into saving faith; salvation is the singular work of the Holy Spirit
- Corinth was one of the most morally corrupt cities in the ancient world, notorious for sexual depravity tied to pagan temple worship, yet God declared to Paul that He had many people in that city
- Paul's rational fear at Corinth was legitimate given his history of beatings, stonings, and mob violence, but Jesus appeared to him in a night vision with direct assurance and comfort
- Jesus himself experienced rational fear in the Garden of Gethsemane, which qualifies him to aid and comfort those who are afraid, as reflected in Hebrews 2:14-18
- The concept of tent-making ministry is introduced through Paul's trade, illustrating how bivocational ministry has always been a legitimate and sometimes necessary expression of gospel work



- Aquila and Priscilla are models of faithful lay ministry, remaining close associates of Paul to the very end of his life and playing a key role in discipling Apollos
- Apollos, though eloquent and knowledgeable in Scripture, only knew the baptism of John and needed Aquila and Priscilla to complete his understanding by introducing him to Jesus
- The Old Testament is not discarded by Christian faith but is the very foundation of understanding Christ, his sacrifice, and the necessity of applying the blood
- The Passover lamb imagery, including the spit and crosspiece forming a cross, is a powerful Old Testament picture pointing directly to the crucifixion of Jesus
- Paul's Nazirite vow and eagerness to attend Jewish feasts demonstrate that becoming a follower of Jesus was the completion of his Jewish faith, not its abandonment
- The central conclusion of the sermon is drawn from 1 Corinthians 3: no other foundation can be laid than Jesus Christ, and every person must examine what their life is built upon

Scripture Reference:

- Acts 18:1-28 (primary text, Paul's ministry in Corinth)
- Mark 1:35-39 (Jesus departing Capernaum to preach in other towns)
- 1 Corinthians 6:7-20 (Paul addressing the former depravity of the Corinthian believers and calling them to holiness)
- Luke 5:31-32 (Jesus explaining that he came not for the righteous but to call sinners to repentance)
- 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 (Paul describing his ministry approach at Corinth and the contrast between human wisdom and spiritual discernment)
- Ezekiel 3:17-21 (God appointing Ezekiel as a watchman and the responsibility of warning the wicked)
- Matthew 10:14-15 (Jesus instructing disciples to shake the dust from their feet when a city refuses the gospel)
- Hebrews 2:14-18 (Christ sharing in human flesh to destroy the power of death and aid those who are tempted)
- Matthew 26:36-46 (Jesus in Gethsemane, wrestling with the suffering ahead of him)



- Matthew 10:28-31 (Jesus commanding his followers not to fear those who can only kill the body)
- Luke 9:23-24 (Jesus calling his followers to deny themselves and take up their cross daily)
- Numbers 6:1-21 (the law of the Nazirite vow)
- 1 Corinthians 7:18-24 (Paul instructing believers to remain in the state in which they were called)
- John 1:29-34 (John the Baptist declaring Jesus to be the Lamb of God)
- 1 Corinthians 3:5-11 (Paul and Apollos as planters and waterers, with God giving the increase, and Jesus Christ as the only foundation)

Stories:

- Jesus rising early to pray in solitude at Capernaum and then choosing to move on to other towns rather than capitalize on his growing popularity, which parallels Paul's decision to leave Athens for Corinth
- Paul's history of suffering across his missionary journeys, including being stoned at Lystra, beaten at Philippi, and driven out of Thessalonica and Berea, providing context for why his fear at Corinth was rational rather than imaginary
- Jesus appearing to Paul in a night vision at Corinth, assuring him he would not be harmed and that God had many people in the city waiting to be reached
- The attempted prosecution of Paul before the proconsul Galio, who dismissed the charges as an internal Jewish religious dispute and drove the accusers away, with the crowd then beating Sosthenes, who may later have become a believer and co-author of 1 Corinthians
- Apollos arriving in Ephesus as an eloquent and Scripture-knowledgeable Jew who preached only the baptism of John, and Aquila and Priscilla quietly taking him aside to explain the way of God more completely, after which he became a powerful advocate for Christ in Achaia
- The Passover narrative from Exodus, used to illustrate that knowing about the blood of the lamb is not sufficient and that the blood must be personally applied, with the image of the lamb on a cross-shaped spit serving as a foreshadowing of the crucifixion
- Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane praying three times that the cup of suffering might pass from him, used to demonstrate that Jesus personally understands and has compassion for human fear



Scripture

Here is a list of all scripture references mentioned or alluded to in the sermon:

1. Mark 1:35-39
2. Acts 17:34
3. Acts 18:1-24
4. 1 Corinthians 2:1-16
5. 1 Corinthians 3:5-11
6. 1 Corinthians 6:7-20
7. 1 Corinthians 7:18-24
8. 2 Timothy 4:19
9. Ezekiel 3:17-21
10. Matthew 10:14-15
11. Matthew 10:28-31
12. Matthew 26:36-46
13. Luke 5:31-32
14. Luke 9:23-24
15. Hebrews 2:14-18
16. Numbers 6:1-21
17. John 1:29-34

Thematic references alluded to but not explicitly cited:

18. Genesis 15:6 - Abraham believing God and it being credited to him as righteousness, referenced in the discussion of the seed of Abraham
19. Exodus 12:1-14 - The Passover lamb narrative, referenced extensively in the closing illustration about applying the blood
20. Romans 4:3 - The righteousness of Abraham by faith, alluded to in the discussion of Gentile believers as seed of Abraham
21. John 14:6 - Jesus as the only way, alluded to in the closing invitation
22. Revelation 20:11-15 - The judgment seat, alluded to in the discussion of the Bema seat at Corinth



Quotes

- God never gives up on a city or a person, no matter how wicked or depraved they may be.
- Paul knew acceptance of the gospel, though entirely rational and logical, and it is, was not a trifling intellectual plaything.
- We cannot, I cannot, you cannot, we cannot save anyone. That is singularly the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Even in this depraved, wicked, pagan city, listen to what Jesus says, I have many people here. They don't know it yet. Paul doesn't know it yet, but Jesus knows it.
- Becoming a follower of Jesus was the completion of his Jewish faith, not the eradication of it.
- Fear, as we all know, hope you know, is a God-given, self-preserving emotion. It is nothing to be ashamed of. Paul was not ashamed to admit he was afraid or this would not be here for us to read.
- The Bible is full of pictures for those who are willing to look into these things.
- It's not enough to just know about it. It's not enough to just know that God exists. It's not enough to just know that Jesus exists. It's not enough to believe there is a Holy Spirit. You must apply the blood.
- we don't offer an intellectual argument. We only offer an invitation.
- that emptiness that you have inside is an indication of it. And it informs you of who it is that you need. And Jesus alone can save you.



Discussion Questions

Paul moved on from Athens to Corinth rather than staying to build on initial interest — what does this teach us about the difference between planting seeds and trying to force a harvest in our own evangelism efforts?

The sermon describes Corinth as a city of extreme depravity, yet God told Paul 'I have many people in this city' — how does this challenge the way we decide which people or places are worth investing our ministry efforts in?

Paul admitted fear and trembling when he arrived at Corinth, and Jesus appeared to him in a vision to address that fear directly — in what ways does knowing that Jesus personally engages with our rational fears change how you approach your own seasons of anxiety or reluctance in faith?

The sermon draws a parallel between Paul shaking out his garments and Jesus instructing his disciples to shake the dust from their feet — what is the spiritual significance of knowing when to move on from someone who has repeatedly rejected the gospel, and how do we discern that moment?

Paul remained a tent maker even as an apostle and church planter, supporting himself through a trade — how does the concept of bivocational ministry challenge or affirm your understanding of what it means to be called to serve God?

Apollos was fervent, eloquent, and knowledgeable in Scripture, yet his understanding was incomplete until Aquila and Priscilla took him aside — what does his willingness to receive correction from fellow believers say about the kind of humility required for genuine spiritual growth?

The sermon argues that Paul's Jewish practices after coming to faith in Christ represent the completion of his faith rather than its eradication — how should this perspective shape the way the church engages with Jewish believers and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments?

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2 that he came to Corinth not with persuasive words of human wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and power — where do you see the tension between intellectual engagement and Spirit-led proclamation in modern ministry, and how should that tension be navigated?

The sermon describes the Passover lamb imagery as a picture pointing directly to Christ, and emphasizes that knowing about the blood is not enough — one must apply it — what does it practically mean in your own life to move from knowing about Jesus to personally applying his sacrifice?

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3 that he planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase — how does this division of roles among human workers and God himself reframe the way we measure success or fruitfulness in ministry and in our personal witness to others?



Small Group Guide:

Small Group Guide

Based on Acts 18 | "Building on the Right Foundation"

OVERVIEW

This session explores Paul's ministry in Corinth, one of the most morally depraved cities of the ancient world. We will examine how Paul overcame fear, built relationships, and laid a foundation for a thriving church, all while trusting in Christ's promise to be present with him. The passage challenges us to consider what foundation we are building our own lives upon, and whether fear is keeping us from the ministry God has called us to.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- God never gives up on a city or a person, no matter how wicked or depraved they may be.
 - Evangelism is an invitation, not an intellectual argument. We cannot talk someone into faith, and we cannot save anyone. That is singularly the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - Fear is a God-given, self-preserving emotion and nothing to be ashamed of. Even Paul and Jesus himself experienced it. The question is whether we will trust our self-protective emotions or trust Jesus.
 - Jesus knows our frame. He inhabited flesh. He has compassion for our rational fears and meets us in the middle of them.
 - Becoming a follower of Jesus is the completion of faith, not the eradication of a person's history or identity.
 - There is no other foundation anyone can lay than that which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11).
 - God sees people who are not yet saved and calls us to find them, teach them, love them, and nurture them.
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GETTING STARTED

Use one of the following questions to open your group time and help people ease into conversation.

1. Have you ever visited or lived in a place with a rough reputation? What was your first impression, and did it change over time?
2. Think of a time you had to do something that genuinely frightened you. What helped you push through it?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Section 1: God's Reach Into Unlikely Places

The sermon described Corinth as the Las Vegas of the ancient world, a city whose name had become a slur for depraved behavior. Yet the Holy Spirit led Paul directly there.

1. Why do you think God would send Paul to one of the most wicked cities in the known world rather than somewhere more receptive? What does that tell us about God's character?
2. Jesus said in Luke 5:31 that those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. How does that perspective challenge the way your group or church thinks about where to invest ministry energy?
3. Are there people in your life or community that you have mentally written off as too far gone? How does Paul's mission to Corinth speak to that assumption?

Section 2: Knowing Your Audience

The sermon contrasted Paul's approach at Athens, where he appealed to creation and the unknown God for a pagan audience, with his approach at Corinth, where he reasoned from Scripture with Jews and God-fearers.

1. Paul adapted his approach based on who he was talking to. What does that look like practically when you are sharing your faith with someone who has no background in the Bible?
2. The sermon made the point that evangelism is an invitation, not an intellectual argument. Do you tend to approach conversations about faith more like a debate or more like an invitation? What might need to shift?
3. Have you ever tried to reason someone into faith? What was that experience like? What did you learn from it?

Section 3: Overcoming Fear

Paul admitted fear at Corinth, and Jesus met him in that fear with a direct word of assurance. The sermon emphasized that fear is rational, not shameful, and that overcoming it is one of Jesus' specialties.

1. Paul had already been stoned, beaten, and run out of multiple cities before arriving at Corinth. Given that history, how would you describe his fear as rational rather than weak?



2. Jesus told Paul two specific things in the vision: that he would be protected and that there were many people in the city waiting to hear the gospel. Which of those two promises do you think would have been more encouraging to Paul in that moment, and why?
 3. Is there a ministry calling, a conversation, or a step of faith that fear is currently keeping you from taking? How does Jesus' promise to be with Paul speak to your situation?
 4. The sermon referenced Hebrews 2:14-18, which describes how Jesus took on flesh so that he could be a merciful and faithful high priest who is able to help those who are being tempted or afraid. How does knowing that Jesus experienced fear himself, as seen in Gethsemane, change the way you bring your own fears to him?
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Section 4: Relationships and Ministry

Paul's friendship with Aquila and Priscilla began simply because they shared a trade and a faith. That relationship lasted the rest of his life and bore significant fruit, including the discipleship of Apollos.

1. The relationship between Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla began in an ordinary, practical context. They were tent makers who needed to work. How has God used ordinary, everyday relationships in your life to advance his purposes?
 2. Aquila and Priscilla did not publicly correct Apollos. They took him aside privately and explained the way of God more accurately. What does that model teach us about how to handle situations where someone is sincerely but incompletely presenting the gospel?
 3. Apollos had great knowledge, great oratory skill, and great humility. The sermon pointed out that his humility was what allowed him to receive correction and grow. Which of those three qualities do you find most difficult to cultivate, and why?
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Section 5: The Foundation

The session closed with Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3, describing himself as a wise master builder who laid a foundation, and declaring that no other foundation can be laid than Jesus Christ.

1. The sermon asked directly: Is the foundation of your life Jesus Christ? How would you answer that question honestly, and how would someone watching your daily life answer it?
 2. Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. How does that division of responsibility free you from the pressure of feeling like the results of ministry depend entirely on you?
 3. The sermon noted that the Old Testament is the foundation of our faith in Christ, and that the New Testament cannot be properly understood without it. How intentional are you about studying the whole of Scripture? What would it look like to grow in that area?
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PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Choose one or two of the following to discuss as a group or commit to individually before your next meeting.

- **Identify one person** in your life who seems far from God and commit to praying for them by name this week. Ask God to show you how to be an invitation rather than an argument in their life.
- **Examine your foundation.** Take 15 to 20 minutes this week in quiet reflection or journaling to honestly assess what you are building your life on. What do your daily priorities, your fears, and your decisions reveal about what you actually trust most?
- **Name your fear.** If there is a step of faith or a ministry calling that fear is holding you back from, write it down. Bring it to God in prayer this week and ask him specifically for the kind of assurance he gave Paul.
- **Invest in a relationship.** Think of someone in your life, inside or outside the church, with whom you could go deeper in faith. Reach out to them this week with a simple invitation to talk, meet, or study Scripture together.
- **Read across both Testaments.** If you do not currently have a plan for reading the Old Testament, consider adding one passage from the Old Testament to your weekly reading to build a stronger foundation for your understanding of Christ.

CLOSING PRAYER PROMPTS

Close your group time in prayer, using one or more of the following as a guide.

- Thank God for his relentless pursuit of people in every city, every culture, and every season of history.
- Ask for courage to overcome whatever specific fears are keeping group members from the calling God has placed on their lives.
- Pray for the people in your community who do not yet know they are seeking Jesus.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to do the work that only he can do in the hearts of those you are believing for.

All Scripture references in this guide are drawn from the sermon content and correspond to the passages taught. Group members are encouraged to read Acts 18, 1 Corinthians 2, 1 Corinthians 3, and 1 Corinthians 6 in full before or after your group meeting.



5-Day Devotional:

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Based on Acts 18 and Supporting Scriptures

Day 1: The God Who Never Gives Up on a City or a Soul

Reading: Luke 5:27-32

Devotional: Jesus did not come for those who had it all together. He came for the broken, the depraved, the wandering, and the lost. Corinth was considered beyond reach by most standards of decency, yet God sent Paul directly into its darkness. The same God who pursued Corinth pursues you. No past, no reputation, no depth of sin disqualifies a soul from the reach of divine grace. Consider where you have assumed God could not or would not work, whether in a person, a city, or a corner of your own heart. God never gives up.

Reflection: Is there someone in your life you have written off as beyond reach? Bring that person before God in prayer today.

Day 2: Do Not Be Afraid, For I Am With You

Reading: Mark 1:35-39

Devotional: Paul had every rational reason to fear Corinth. He had been stoned, beaten, and driven out of city after city. Fear in that context was not weakness; it was wisdom. Yet Jesus met Paul in the night with a specific, personal word of assurance. Jesus did not dismiss Paul's fear. He entered into it and spoke directly to it. The same Lord who met Paul in his fear meets you in yours. He knows your frame. He inhabited flesh. He wept, he trembled in Gethsemane, and he understands what it costs you to keep going. He is with you.

Reflection: What fear is currently keeping you from obedience? Bring it honestly before God and ask him to speak into it as he spoke to Paul.

Day 3: The Foundation That Cannot Be Moved

Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:9-15



Devotional: Paul laid a foundation at Corinth that was not his own wisdom, not his rhetorical skill, and not his theological training. The only foundation he laid was Jesus Christ. Everything built upon any other foundation, reputation, religion, intellect, or tradition, will not survive the test of time or eternity. The wood, hay, and stubble of a life built on anything other than Christ will eventually reveal itself. But what is built on Christ remains. Examine what your life is being constructed upon today. Not what you say it is built upon, but what your daily choices, fears, and priorities reveal it to actually rest upon.

Reflection: What does the way you spend your time, energy, and resources reveal about the true foundation of your life?

Day 4: I Planted, Apollos Watered, But God Gave the Increase

Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

Devotional: Apollos arrived in Ephesus preaching sincerely but incompletely. He knew the baptism of John but had not yet encountered the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Rather than dismissing him, Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately. No ego, no public correction, no condemnation. Just faithful, humble instruction. And Apollos, for all his eloquence and learning, listened. The kingdom advances through this kind of partnership. You plant, someone else waters, and God brings the harvest. Your role is faithfulness, not control of the outcome. Trust the God who gives the increase.

Reflection: Is there someone in your life who needs gentle, humble instruction rather than public correction? Ask God for the wisdom and the opportunity to come alongside them.

Day 5: Such Were Some of You

Reading: 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

Devotional: The list Paul recites in this passage describes the very people who now comprised the church at Corinth. Fornicators, idolaters, drunkards, thieves. And then come three of the most powerful words in all of Scripture: such were some of you. Were. Past tense. The grace of God does not merely forgive the past; it transforms the present and secures the future. You were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified. The body that once served sin is now the temple of the Holy Spirit. This is not a call to shame but to astonished gratitude and a life that reflects the magnitude of what God has done.

Reflection: Spend time today in genuine gratitude for what God has delivered you from. Let that gratitude shape how you treat your body, your relationships, and your witness to others.