

LESSON 8

Equipped a Young Church: Paul in Corinth

Acts 18

*Do not be afraid, but keep on speaking and don't be silent.
For I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you,
because I have many people in this city.*

Acts 18:9–10

Class Overview: After leaving Athens, Paul traveled to Corinth, a city known for its wealth, trade, and corruption. It was a tough place to start a church, but God had great plans for it. In Corinth, Paul found new partners in ministry, faced strong opposition, and received encouraging words from the Lord. Through hard work, faithful teaching, and patient endurance, he helped build one of the most influential churches in the early days of the church. This lesson shows how God equips His servants to strengthen young believers, persevere through challenges, and rely on His presence amid discouragement.

Class Objectives: By the end of this class, you should be able to—

1. Describe the cultural and moral challenges of Corinth and how they affected Paul's ministry.
2. Explain how God provided encouragement and support to Paul through friends and fellow workers.
3. Understand how God's promise of presence gave Paul courage to keep preaching in a difficult environment.
4. Recognize the importance of mentoring and strengthening new believers.
5. Apply these lessons by trusting God to work through hardship and by investing in others' spiritual growth.

Introduction

WHEN PAUL ARRIVED IN CORINTH, he entered one of the most challenging cities of the ancient world. It was a place full of opportunities and temptations; a wealthy trade hub known for its immorality, pride, and idol worship. The city sat at the crossroads of commerce, drawing in merchants, travelers, and sailors from across the empire. It was also home to the temple of Aphrodite, where hundreds of priestesses took part in ritual prostitution as part of their religion. Corinth was a city where pleasure was celebrated, and truth was often overlooked.

For a weary missionary fresh from the intellectual debates of Athens, Corinth must have seemed overwhelming. Paul later described his mindset when he first arrived: *I came to you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.* (1 Corinthians 2:3). Yet, it was in this tough place that God accomplished some of His greatest work.

In Corinth, Paul found support and companionship in Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish tentmakers who had recently been expelled from Rome. They shared his trade and faith, and their friendship became a source of strength. Week after week, Paul preached in the synagogue, reasoning with both Jews and Greeks that Jesus is the Christ. But as opposition grew, discouragement set in; until one night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: *'Do not be afraid, but keep on speaking, and don't be silent. For I am with you.'*

Those words renewed Paul's courage. He stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching God's word and strengthening the believers. The result was the formation of a strong, growing church in one of the most unlikely places. This passage reminds us that God's mission continues beyond dark or difficult environments. The same Spirit who sent Paul to Corinth equips us today to serve faithfully, even when the culture is tough, the work is slow, and the challenges are many.

Historical Background

Corinth was one of the most important and wealthy cities in the Roman Empire. Rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. after being destroyed a century earlier, it quickly became a busy commercial center. Located on

the narrow isthmus connecting mainland Greece to the Peloponnese, Corinth controlled two harbors: Lechaion on the west and Cenchreae on the east, which made it a vital point for trade, travel, and culture.

The city was cosmopolitan and wealthy but also deeply immoral. Ancient writers used the expression “*to Corinthianize*” to describe living in debauchery or sexual excess. The temple of Aphrodite sat high on the Acrocorinth, with priestesses participating in prostitution as part of pagan worship. Corinth was also filled with temples dedicated to other gods and was known for arrogance, greed, and vice.

Paul arrived there around A.D. 50 during his second missionary journey. After working in Macedonia and Athens, he arrived in Corinth exhausted physically and burdened emotionally. However, God had already prepared the way. He met Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish believers recently driven out of Rome by Emperor Claudius. They were tentmakers by trade and invited Paul to stay and work with them. Their partnership grew into a lifelong friendship and ministry team that later influenced churches in Ephesus and Rome.

Paul began his ministry in Corinth by teaching in the synagogue every Sabbath. As opposition increased, he moved to preaching to the Gentiles in the house of Titus Justus, a God-fearing man nearby. Among those who believed was Crispus, the synagogue leader, whose faith encouraged many others to believe and be baptized.

During this time, Paul likely felt fear and exhaustion, unsure how much longer he could go on. But one night, the Lord appeared to him in a vision: “*Do not be afraid, but keep on speaking and don’t be silent. For I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you, because I have many people in this city.*” (vv. 9–10). Empowered by that promise, Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months—the longest period of his second journey.

The gospel’s influence extended beyond Corinth as well. Later in Acts 18, Luke introduces Apollos, a talented preacher from Alexandria who arrived in Ephesus. Although passionate and articulate, he only understood John’s baptism. Aquila and Priscilla privately took him aside and taught him more accurately about Jesus. His humility and their patience demonstrated the kind of teamwork that bolsters young churches and prepares future leaders.

Corinth was a challenging place to preach, but it ultimately demonstrated God's grace in action. The church Paul founded there faced struggles with pride and division, yet it also served as a testament to God's power to bring light into dark places.

Equipped through God's Provision (18:1-6)

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he was tired, discouraged, and financially limited. Yet God had already arranged everything he needed. He met Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish tentmakers who had recently left Rome because of Emperor Claudius's decree expelling the Jews. They not only shared Paul's trade but also shared his faith. In their home and workshop, Paul found both friendship and stability. What started as a business partnership grew into a spiritual partnership that would last for years.

Paul worked with his hands during the week and debated in the synagogue every Sabbath, *trying to persuade both Jews and Greeks.* (v. 4). Even in hardship, he remained faithful to the mission. God's provision didn't eliminate Paul's effort; it supported him in it. The Lord provides not so we can take a break from service, but so we can serve longer and more effectively.

But opposition soon arose. When the Jews rejected his message and became abusive, Paul symbolically shook out his clothes in protest, saying, *"Your blood is on your own heads; I am innocent." From then on, I will go to the Gentiles.* (v. 6). This act was not out of bitterness; it was obedience. Paul understood his responsibility: to share the gospel faithfully and leave the results to God.

Immediately after this confrontation, Paul moved next door to the house of Titus Justus, a Gentile worshiper of God. His proximity to the synagogue showed that Paul had not given up on his people; he simply followed where God opened doors. One of the first converts after this shift was Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, along with his entire household. Many others in Corinth believed and were baptized.

God's hand of provision is evident in every part of this story: through friendships, opportunities, and even rejection. The Spirit empowered

Paul to trust that when one door closed, another would open. The Lord's provision often comes through people placed in our path for encouragement and partnership. When we walk by faith, we begin to see that every relationship, every resource, and even every setback can be part of how God equips us to serve.

Equipped through God's Presence (18:7–17)

After leaving the synagogue, Paul moved next door to Titius Justus's home, a Gentile Christian. From there, the gospel continued to spread. God's grace reached even into the synagogue as Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his household believed and were baptized. This victory was significant because it showed that the message of Christ could still soften hardened hearts. However, Paul's growing success also stirred up hostility. The tension from ongoing conflict likely exhausted him, and he may have wondered if it was time to move on.

Then God spoke. One night, the Lord appeared to Paul in a vision and said, *Do not be afraid, but keep on speaking and don't be silent. For I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you, because I have many people in this city.* (vv. 9–10). Those words renewed Paul's courage. He had faced rejection, persecution, and loneliness, but now God reminded him that he was not alone. The promise of divine presence, "I am with you," was the same assurance God gave Moses, Joshua, and the prophets. It's the same promise Jesus gave to His disciples: *I am with you always, to the end of the age.* (Matthew 28:20)

Encouraged by that assurance, Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching God's word. His longest stay up to that point became one of his most fruitful. Even when opposition resurfaced, God demonstrated His protection. The Jews brought Paul before Gallio, the Roman proconsul, accusing him of breaking the law. But Gallio dismissed the case, refusing to involve the Roman government in Jewish religious disputes. This legal precedent provided protection for Christian preaching across the empire for years afterward.

God's presence doesn't always eliminate problems. Instead, it gives us strength to endure them. Paul didn't avoid opposition, but he was

prepared to face it with peace and confidence. When we remember that God is with us, fear loses its hold, and faith grows stronger. The Lord's presence isn't just a feeling; it's a fact. And it forms the foundation of all lasting ministry.

Equipped to Strengthen Others (18:18–28)

After a year and a half of ministry in Corinth, Paul set sail for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila, his trusted coworkers. Their partnership was built through shared labor, faith, and perseverance. In Ephesus, Paul briefly preached in the synagogue before leaving for Caesarea and returning to Antioch, marking the end of his second missionary journey. However, his influence persisted through those he had trained and encouraged.

While Paul moved on, Priscilla and Aquila stayed in Ephesus. There, they met Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria who was eloquent, educated, and passionate about his teaching. He spoke confidently about the Scriptures and the coming Messiah but only knew the message of John the Baptist. Although sincere, his understanding was not complete.

Instead of publicly correcting him, Priscilla and Aquila invited Apollos into their home and *explained the way of God to him more accurately*. (v. 26). Their quiet wisdom and humility offer a timeless example of how mature believers support younger ones in truth. Apollos gratefully received their instruction and went on to become a powerful preacher, greatly aiding the believers in Achaia and defending the faith with conviction.

This final scene captures the essence of Christian leadership: disciples training disciples. Paul strengthened Aquila and Priscilla; they, in turn, trained Apollos, who then encouraged others. That is how the church grows—through faithful people passing on what they have learned.

In every season of ministry, God calls His servants not only to proclaim truth but also to reproduce it in others. The Spirit equips us to teach patiently, correct gently, and invest intentionally in the next generation of believers. Whether we lead a class, teach a child, or encourage a

struggling friend, our goal remains the same: to strengthen others in faith so that the gospel continues to spread long after we have moved on.

Lesson Summary and Reflection

Key Truths from Corinth:

- God provides the right people, resources, and opportunities to sustain His servants in challenging work.
- The Lord's presence gives courage when opposition or fear sets in.
- Ministry grows stronger through partnerships built on faith and humility.
- Teaching and mentoring others are essential to equipping the church.
- God's mission continues through ordinary believers who faithfully invest in others.

Corinth was one of the toughest places Paul ever ministered, but it also became one of his greatest successes. What started with exhaustion and fear ended with a thriving church, loyal friends, and future leaders ready for service. Through every challenge, God provided Paul with what he needed most: His provision, His presence, and His people.

Paul's story in Corinth reminds us that God never sends His servants into the field unprepared. He provided work, friendship, and encouragement through Aquila and Priscilla. He strengthened Paul's courage with His promise, *"Do not be afraid, for I am with you."* And He produced lasting results: new believers, developing leaders, and a congregation that would later become a vital voice in the early church.

The Spirit also worked through Priscilla and Aquila, who patiently guided Apollos in the truth, illustrating that teaching and mentoring are vital parts of building strong churches. Ministry is never meant to be a solo effort. God surrounds His people with others to help share the burden and carry on the work.

We need consistent perseverance and collaboration. During times of discouragement or opposition, we can find comfort in knowing that God is always present, constantly working, and continually preparing others to stand with us. The Spirit empowers believers not just to endure

ministry but to multiply it, ensuring the gospel continues to grow long after we're gone.

Memory Verse and Weekly Challenge

*Do not be afraid, but keep on speaking and don't be silent.
For I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you,
because I have many people in this city.*

Acts 18:9–10 (CSB)

Weekly Challenge: When you feel tired or discouraged in your work for the Lord, remember God's promise to Paul. Spend time this week praying for courage and endurance. Look for one person you can encourage or mentor in faith: someone who needs the reminder that God is with them too.

For Discussion

1. How did God provide for Paul's needs, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, while he served in Corinth?

2. What does Paul's vision in vv. 9–10 teach us about God's presence in times of fear or discouragement?

3. How do Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos demonstrate the importance of mentoring and teamwork in ministry?

4. Why do you think God often chooses to work through relationships rather than through solitary effort?

5. What steps can you take this week to strengthen and encourage someone in their faith, as Paul did in Corinth?
