

The Book of Acts: The Spirit Moving

Do Not Be Afraid, But Go On Speaking / Acts 18:1-17 / March 8, 2026

Introduction:

There are moments in ministry, and in the Christian life, that can feel dramatic and powerful. Sometimes God gives us moments where He reminds us of His goodness and how sovereign over everything He really is. I'm sure I could list thousands of ways that God can show off how great He is, and when that happens, glory be to God! But those moments aren't always the case. Sometimes there are seasons in ministry or the Christian life that are rife with difficult circumstances. Whether it be from circumstance or opposition, those times can feel exceedingly difficult. Especially when we pray, and we pray, and we pray for God to move. When we go through times like that, eventually we may find ourselves at a crossroads. The constant weight of discouragement can move us toward making the decision to give up instead of continuing on the path that you once felt so sure was God's will. Your patience and perseverance begin to run thin, and you begin to doubt if you're doing the right thing... Have you ever experienced times like that? I know I have. It's in the midst of one of those seasons that Acts 18 meets us. From Paul's time in Corinth, Luke looks at four brief episodes that show us a man of ordinary faithfulness, fierce opposition, a weary servant, an encouraging God, and the unstoppable advance of the gospel. If I had to summarize this text in one sentence, it would be this: that God sustains His servants and advances His gospel, even in hard places. And if you belong to Christ, if you are on mission for Him in your everyday life, that should matter to you.

Acts 18:1-3

Paul in Corinth

¹ After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

The Apostle Paul has just come from Athens, where some mocked his call to repentance and faith. A few believed, but there was no sweeping revival. And so, Paul now moves on to the city of Corinth. After being rebuilt as a Roman colony in 44 BC, the city later became the capital of the province of Achaia. Corinth was a bustling commercial hub that sat on the Corinthian isthmus, which is a small strip of land with the sea on either side of it. Because of this, everyone passed through the city, whether sailors, merchants, travelers, or philosophers, making it a likely place for the gospel to spread more easily. Estimates for the population of the city during Paul and Luke's time suggest a population of roughly 70,000 to 110,000. But it wasn't always a home for upstanding citizens. High on the mountain called the Acrocorinth stood a temple to the Greek goddess of romance and passion, Aphrodite, which at one time hosted a whopping 1,000 cult prostitutes that would roam the city streets at night. For a long time, the term "Corinthianize" meant to live a life of gross sexual immorality, debauchery, and drunken licentiousness. The city was wealthy, cosmopolitan, and morally notorious. If Athens was intellectual, Corinth was indulgent. And this is where God sends the Apostle Paul to.

Acts 18:2-3

² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³ and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.

When Paul arrives, he meets a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who had recently come from Italy because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. Although the text doesn't mention whether or not they were Christians at the time, it is likely that they would have been familiar with the Christ that Paul taught and, therefore, were likely already believers or would soon become them as they are recorded as discipling the Christian preacher Apollos. I'm confident in saying they would have at least been familiar with teachings about Jesus because of what the Roman Historian Suetonius says about this exact event during Claudius' reign:

“He [Claudius] banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus.”

- Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum*, Claudius, Ch. 25

Don't let the misspelling fool you; another Roman historian named Tacitus does a similar thing when speaking of followers of Christ as Chrestians. Furthermore, if you've been paying attention in the book of Acts, it should come as no surprise that arguments involving who Jesus was often caused disturbances at Jewish synagogues. Despite the question of the Jewish couple's faith when Paul meets them, he decides to stay with Aquila and Priscilla because they share the same trade: tentmaking. This is exactly what Paul was doing to support himself when, in his first letter to the Corinthians, he proclaims that he refused his apostolic right of financial support from them so that the gospel would not be hindered. So, what did ministry look like for Paul during this time?

Acts 18:4

⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Luke tells us that Paul, as he usually does, reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks, or God-fearing Gentiles who frequented the synagogue. Notice the rhythm. He works during the week, and he reasons on the Sabbath. Tentmaking required tedious, long hours of manual labor. And for Paul, that meant balancing gospel conversations in the synagogue with physical strain. Here, he demonstrates sustained, ordinary faithfulness by persuading consistently. Notice also that Paul's evangelism means engaging their minds by reasoning with them. He's explaining Scripture, patiently proclaiming how Christ fulfills the promises of God with persuasion rooted in truth. Week after week, Paul shows up. But then disappointment happens.

Acts 18:5-6

⁵ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶ And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

Many Bible translations say that after Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia, Paul “*Paul began devoting himself completely to the word*” (NASB), likely meaning they came with a large financial gift from the believers in Philippi (as Paul notes in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians). This gift of support allows Paul to leave tentmaking behind to devote himself fully to the ministry of the Word, testifying that Jesus is the Christ. And what happens? Opposition. “They opposed and reviled him.” So Paul, likewise, rejects them by dramatically shaking out his garments, similar to “shaking the dust of his sandals” and quotes the prophet Ezekiel on his way out the door when he says, “Your blood be on your own heads!” or “the judgment that's coming to you is your own fault!” Paul's ministry focus now turns to the Gentiles. Today's passage reminds us once again that you are only responsible for faithfulness; the Holy Spirit is responsible for the outcome. So, then, look what Paul does next:

Acts 18:7-8

⁷ And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸ Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

Here is one of my favorite details in the passage. Paul leaves the synagogue and sets up camp right next door, and immediately starts seeing results. He enters the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God or a Gentile convert to Judaism. Paul goes from synagogue ministry to household ministry, even

converting Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, and his entire household. Don't miss the irony: opposition in the synagogue, conversion next door, and the synagogue ruler himself believes along with his family and many Corinthians. God is not thwarted by rejection. In fact, sometimes the gospel advances precisely when we assume it's being resisted. In a city known for immorality and idolatry, God is gathering His people. The gospel is the power of God for salvation, and it must be preached so that people may hear. And yet, regardless of this success, we must remember that Paul is still only just a man, prone to the same fears and discouragements that we also have. Maybe he found the spiritual darkness and moral depravity of the city intimidating, and that he would be faced with even more opposition and rejection from the Gentiles. Or maybe he was discouraged by the rejection of his kinsmen. Whatever was going on, Paul needed encouragement, and Christ knew exactly what to say to him.

Acts 18:9-10

⁹ And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."

Why would the Lord say, "Do not be afraid," unless Paul was afraid? We sometimes picture Paul as unshakable. But Scripture shows us a real man, faithful, yes, but absolutely human. How could he not be afraid in those circumstances? Corinth was intimidating in more ways than one. The opposition from the Jews was very real. The cost of his ministry must have seemed high. And in that moment of discouragement and fear, Jesus speaks words of encouragement. The Lord anchors Paul's courage in three things: 1. A command: "Do not be afraid... go on speaking." Fear tempts us toward silence. Jesus commands speech. 2. A presence: "For I am with you." This is the same promise given throughout Scripture. God's presence is the strength of knowing we aren't doing this alone and that success isn't based on our efforts. 3. A purpose: "I have many in this city who are my people." Before they believe, they belong to Him. This is the sovereign grace of God, knowing who He will save. And that certainty fuels evangelistic courage. To be faithful in ministry, your fear of rejection and opposition must be left behind and replaced by the only thing powerful enough to cast out all doubt. You fear because you are trusting too much in your own strength and your own power, or lack of power, to persuade others, and I'm here to tell you that it doesn't depend on you! It depends on Christ! So leave your fear behind and just share the gospel with your neighbor

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Proclaiming Christ Crucified

¹ And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

So when you find yourself ministering to others, show them the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. Show them that the wisdom of God in Jesus Christ is far above the false loftiness of the wisdom of man. Show them a life that has been transformed and is being led by the Holy Spirit. Tell them of the reality of Christ's sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins and show them the supernatural transformation of your sanctification, of being a new creation. Show them that all of human history and their eternal destiny hinge on the answer to one question: Who do you believe Jesus to be? The Apostle Paul speaks through his fear and trembling, not because he is confident in himself, but because he is an obedient servant. Are you one as well? He speaks despite his fear, because he knows the Lord is on his side. Do you believe that truth, too? He continues to speak the message of the gospel boldly despite his trembling because there are people that need saving, he doesn't know which, but what he does know is that he is confident in God's saving purpose. Are you

that confident in God's purposes? That even now there are people in this city who are already His before they even know it, and they are just waiting for you to say something?

Acts 18:11

¹¹ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

A year and a half. That is long-term ministry in a hard place. Sometimes faithfulness means staying when it would be easier to leave. Paul does not chase novelty. He invests deeply. Churches are not built overnight. Disciples are not formed instantly. Leaders are not shaped in a week. God often grows something lasting through long obedience in the same direction.

Acts 18:12-17

¹² But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, ¹³ saying, "This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law." ¹⁴ But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. ¹⁵ But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things." ¹⁶ And he drove them from the tribunal. ¹⁷ And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

Eventually, opposition escalates into legal action. The Jews bring Paul before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, accusing him of persuading people to worship God contrary to the law. Judaism was legally permissible under Roman law; the Jews believed they had a case against Christianity. But before Paul can even defend himself, Gallio dismisses the case. He sees it as an internal religious dispute and refuses to intervene. What does that mean? It means that this gave the gospel a legal foothold to spread freely. But even more precious than that, it means that Jesus kept His promise. "No one will attack you to harm you." Paul is protected, not because the opposition disappears, but because God governs even political authorities. This doesn't mean that we will always be guarded from persecution, but it's a good reminder that God is always in control. The scene ends with an ironic twist when Sosthenes, the new ruler of the synagogue, is beaten in front of the tribunal, and Gallio paying no attention to the matter. What does this mean for us today? 1. God Works Through Ordinary Faithfulness. Tentmaking, Conversations, Weekly reasoning, and Teaching. These things may seem ordinary, but God used the ordinary to grow his kingdom. Do not despise ordinary faithfulness. 2. Opposition Is Not a Sign of Failure. If anything, it often accompanies faithfulness. The question is not, "Why is this difficult?" The question is, "Am I being faithful?" 3. Courage Comes from Christ's Presence. "Do not be afraid... I am with you." The same Lord who stood by Paul stands by His church today. 4. God Has a People Yet to Be Reached. "I have many in this city." That should stir our evangelism. When you share the gospel, you are not starting from zero. God is already at work. Ultimately, Acts 18 points us beyond Paul to Christ. Jesus is the true missionary. He entered a hostile world, was opposed, reviled, and rejected. He stood before authorities and was unjustly condemned. But through His death and resurrection, He secured a people for Himself, from Corinth to today. And now He sends us. Not alone. Not unguarded. Not uncertain. But sustained by His presence and empowered by His Spirit. Let me ask you: Are you tempted to be silent because of fear? Are you weary in ordinary obedience? Are you discouraged by resistance? Hear the words of Jesus: "Do not be afraid. Go on speaking. I am with you." Some of you need renewed courage. Some of you need renewed endurance. Some of you need salvation. The same Lord who had people in Corinth has people here. And perhaps today, He is opening your heart. Acts 18 is not flashy, but it is faithful. It shows us a servant who works with his hands, reasons patiently, faces rejection, receives encouragement, stays committed, and watches God protect and build His church. It shows us a Savior who sustains His people. So do not be afraid. Go on speaking. Be faithful where you are. Because the Lord is with you. And He still has many in this city.