



Acts 18:1-28
Transience + Discipleship = Growth

Summary: Paul invests into people who invest into others and Kingdom of God expands.

Throughout the book of Acts we have seen people going through difficult times. In just the past several chapters we have seen Paul travel thousands of miles, mainly on foot, escaping from Damascus in a basket by night, kicked out of many other cities, worshipped as a god, then stoned and left for dead when he denied being deity, we've seen him arrested and beaten.

And yet it's not all bad news. He kept going and God kept working. New people became Christians, new churches were established - despite all the obstacles, all the difficulties, all the challenges, the Kingdom of God continued to grow and expand.

And friends, maybe you need to be reminded of that today – the Kingdom is here, it is real, and it is growing, expanding, even in these difficult times. God has not failed. He is not frustrated. He is not on vacation. The Scripture very clearly tells us:

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.

When you orient your life around the authority of God, there will still be times of hardship. There will still be trips to the emergency room. There will still be gut wrenching sobs and tears of disappointment, but your destiny is sure. The war is won. God cannot and will not fail.

And sometimes, there are even seasons of rest when the storms are calm and the conflict stops. There are sweet spots in life. There are times when it feels like things are going your way, you're gaining momentum, making progress. Friends, there are reasons to rejoice in life.

We discover one of those seasons this morning as the gospel comes to Corinth, and along the way we see the value of friendship and discipleship, or spiritual mentoring and what it can accomplish. Read with me now:

Acts 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.
2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. 3 So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

Three-quarters of a million people lived in Corinth, making it the largest city in Ancient Greece. It was also the capital of the province of Achaia (think of that like a state); it was a port city, full of trade with a vibrant economy. It also had a reputation for hedonism, like Las Vegas, and if you want to see what I'm talking about just read the first few chapters of 1 Corinthians, a letter Paul wrote to the early Christians in the city – they had a lot to sort out when it came down to figuring out what it meant to live for King Jesus in this place.

Paul is going to spend a long time here, and it's a place he sought out just as he has done with other big cities. Remember, he was in Athens before this, he's also been to Damascus, Antioch, Philippi, and Jerusalem several times; he has a strong desire to make it to Rome. Friends, Paul wanted to reach big cities. He knew they were places of influence, places of opportunity, and places where ideas spread.

Today, you live in one of the most famous cities in the world. All over the earth there are people who have heard of Washington DC and want to visit or live here. Don't forget that. And don't blow it off – it's tempting to do, the longer you've been here the easier it is to say: you can have it. But the fact is, this place is full of influence and opportunity and God has called you here.

So think about that: the sovereign God of the universe, the one who flung the stars and galaxies into space, the One who knows the sequence of the DNA of every animal that we haven't even discovered yet, the God who knows the end from the beginning and what will happen next, the God who has ordained and witnessed the rise and fall of whole empires and civilizations, He knows you're here.

He knows your name, He knows your address, He knows your logon and passwords, your hopes and your fears, what you're really good at and what you struggle with. And He brought you here. Put you here. Maybe had you born here - in this city, for such a time as this. He doesn't make mistakes and He doesn't overlook details. You are here, in this city for a reason, just like Paul.

And I want you to see what Paul did in the city. I want you to see that God used him to make friends and disciples and ultimately, to make an impact.

In Corinth Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple. He spends a lot of time with them over the next year and half or two and will keep in touch with them as the years go by. In fact, at the end of his letter to the church at Rome Paul says [“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that meets in their house.”](#)

It seems like this couple had a pretty important role to play in the early church, so let's notice a few things about them.

First – notice that Priscilla and Aquila are committed to the Lord and to ministry, just like Paul. They are fellow Jews and because we don't have any record here of their conversion, most commentators think they were already believers in Christ when Paul met them.

Second, Priscilla and Aquila always appear together in Scripture, they're *never* mentioned separately. And, when they are mentioned, sometimes Priscilla is listed first and sometimes Aquila.

So, what does that mean Jeff? I'm glad you asked! It indicates that Priscilla was very much involved in ministry – perhaps something like the Beth Moore, Kay Arthur, or Jen Wilkin of the early church. She's not a pastor, or an elder, but she's definitely a woman with a reputation for godliness, knowledge, and wisdom and she has a place of prominence in the ministry.

We have some women like that in this church – women who are strong in the faith, able to counsel, able to disciple, able to encourage and instruct and we should praise God for them. They are competent, capable and full of Godly character and for many of them, their marriages are thriving – they do life well together with their husbands. It's not Aquila, the husband doing all the work here and getting all of the attention, but it's not the other way around either, it's not Priscilla doing the ministry while her husband does his own thing. They're both engaged, serving with each other, the two have become one. Let that be a challenging witness to you: husbands, wives, grow closer together, be a unit, be a team, be known together in life and ministry.

Third, notice that Priscilla and Aquila were tentmakers, which gave them something else in common with Paul and provided a reason to spend time together - no doubt Paul took time to disciple them while they worked on projects or waited for customers.

Fourth – notice that Aquila and Priscilla were refugees from Rome. Historians tell us that Emperor Claudius ordered all Jews to leave the city in AD 49 because of disputes about someone known as Chrestus – who many think was actually Christus or Christ.

We've seen Paul clash with certain Jews in various cities as he tried to testify about Jesus and occasionally it erupted into violence. Well, the same thing probably happened to other Christians in many other places, including Rome. But when problems broke out there, Claudius just said – “that's it, all of you, out of my city.”

Well, Paul knew what that was like, to be forced out of a city, even at a moment's notice, to escape with only what he could carry. So, he could easily empathize with this couple.

Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila seem to have a lot in common – which leads me to say: God is often gracious and brings us fellowship and friendship with people like us. Diversity is great, and necessary, but there's also something to be said for having something in common. And God often brings people your way who understand what you're going through, what you're facing, what your life is like.

Can you thank God for anyone like you in your life? Maybe you have a friend and both of your parents are battling cancer. Maybe you both play or watch the same sport or game. Maybe you're both military families. Maybe you both like the same author. Maybe you're both single. Is there anyone like you in your life that you can thank God for? Someone, or some couple, who understands a little bit of what it's like to be you? Companionship is a gift, a blessing from God, a way that He shows up in our lives, through other people.

Paul almost always has someone else in his life – and some of them are about to catch up with him again. Remember Paul left Silas and Timothy behind when he made a quick exit from Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, but they eventually catch up to him in Corinth.

They bring a good report of how things are going in Thessalonica as well as a collection of money that had been sent by the new church in Philippi to keep the ministry going. This means that Paul is now able to stop working on tents and devote himself full-time to the ministry.

In other words, things are looking up, the gang's all back together again, they've got some cash on hand... but, as usual, Paul's ministry is not universally well received:

5 When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus is the Christ*.

6 But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and said to them, "Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

This is the pattern we have seen so many times, right? First an attempt to reach out to the synagogue, the local version of a Jewish church, and then, if they wouldn't listen, he goes to anyone who will. And that's when things got much better:

7 And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain *man* named Justus, *one* who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. 8 Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

Which is all great news, right? But it seems like Paul was a little uneasy with all this success because, in his experience right after people start accepting the gospel, he's usually hit by a wave of persecution and chased out of town. So he's almost bracing for impact instead of rejoicing over what God is doing when God shows up to encourage him.

9 Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." 11 And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

There are going to be times when you need encouragement to keep going in life, in marriage, in ministry, at work – there will times when you get worn down, weary, or begin to doubt and question, and you need to hear the message: keep going. Do not fear, for God is with you.

Jesus reminded Paul that He was always with him, even in the bad stuff; then He gave Paul this special promise: he would not be hurt here in Corinth - God promised him an intermission from suffering.

Friends I want you to know: there are sweet spots in life and ministry. There are intermissions and time outs. They may not come as often as you want, they may not last as long as you want, but they do come. And then, we enter an eternal rest and find the forever healing.

There is no doubt: we are living through difficult times. These are the days that will make the history books, but they will pass. And we will press on. We will either pass away in the fight against darkness or we will see the sun shine again. Eternity is certain and God has promised to never leave us or forsake us.

God tells Paul I am with you. But that is just as true in this season of peace as it was when Paul was being chased from town or stoned to death by an angry mob. As Christians, we have the promise that God is always with us. Do you believe that? Do you trust? Do you believe that God does not change – that the same God who is there with you on sunny days with blue skies is also there with you when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death?

It can be hard to trust in the dark, it can be hard to endure the trials and the pain and the suffering, but do you trust God? Christian, He is with you. He tells you that over and over again in Scripture, sends people your way to remind you, and even whispers that truth to your soul – it doesn't matter what color the sky is, or what's going on in your life – you are not alone, and you are loved. Don't just go off of what you feel, remember what you know.

Now, if you're not a Christian, if you have never had a time when you intentionally said to God, I am a sinner, I have done wrong, I need your forgiveness; if there has never been a time when you said, I have been my own king or queen, and now I see that is wrong, rebellious, and defiant, and so I bow my knee in submission to King Jesus – if you have never done that, you need to know that He wants you to do that.

And if you will submit, if you will stop resisting God or just wandering around in life unaware of Him, He will receive you, He offers to be with you. He offers to guard you and guide and comfort you in those moments when you feel like you're all alone.

Now, that's no promise life is going to be full of rainbows, roses, and unicorns – there will be difficulties, but God will be with you – watch what happens next.

Paul has heard from God – no one will hurt you. And then, that claim is put to the test – did God really say that Paul? Watch what happens:

Acts 18:12 When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, 13 saying, “This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.”

Gallio is another figure from the book of Acts who is well known to secular history. His older brother was Seneca the famous Stoic philosopher, who was also the childhood tutor of the emperor Nero. Gallio ruled Achaia, a region including all of Southern Greece including the city of Athens for two years from 51-52 AD.

And here’s what’s happening - some of the Jews tried to press a legal attack against Paul. They bring charges against him in Gallio’s court, knowing that if they can get Gallio to rule against Paul he would be unable to do ministry anywhere in the region. So, this was a much bigger issue than just being thrown out of a city.

So what about God’s promise that Paul would not be hurt? Well,

14 And when Paul was about to open *his* mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. 15 But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look *to it* yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such *matters*.” 16 And he drove them from the judgment seat. 17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.

Gallio throws out the case and in twisted scene of poetic justice, the leader of the synagogue gets beat up for bringing a worthless case before the governor.

18 So Paul still remained a good while.

After Paul’s ministry is validated by the governor, no one is going to oppose it. Much like in Philippi where Paul and Silas were wrongfully beaten and imprisoned, the church is now basically in a protected status with nothing to fear from the government. *God used Paul to open a door that would serve and protect the infant church there for some time to come.* His suffering and difficulty led to the comfort and security of others – it was a sacrifice on his part, but also a great honor right?

After a while though, Paul decides it is time to move on.

(18 cont.) Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow.

Cenchrea is on the outskirts of Corinth – it was the port on the Eastern side of the city – and there he cuts his hair. Most scholars see this as part of a Nazirite vow, something

mentioned in the Old Testament as an act of dedication and devotion to God that could be temporary, like fasting, or life-long. We don't have any other information, and we always want to avoid speculation, but if it was a Nazirite vow, the hair that was cut off was to be presented at the Temple in Jerusalem as a burnt offering and it appears that was Paul's next destination.

19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they asked *him* to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, 21 but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus.

22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, [which is the nearest port for Jerusalem] and gone up and greeted the church [in Jerusalem], he went down to Antioch.

Now, we just summarized hundreds of miles and weeks of travel into a single sentence there in verse 22, so Paul is back in Antioch – the city that has been something of a home base for him. He tells them how things went on the second missionary journey, but he doesn't stick around for long because he is anxious to get out on the road again and see the churches he had planted.

23 After he had spent some time *there*, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

We'll pick him up again next week, but first we need to get back to another plot line and watch what God is going to do next with the friendship and discipleship formed in Corinth:

24 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. 27 And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; 28 for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

While Paul was traveling up through modern Turkey, Aquila and Priscilla run into Apollos.

It seems he knew of the ministry of John the Baptist, which was well known throughout Israel at the time. He may have known John was proclaiming the Messiah had come. But it seems he was missing key aspects of Jesus' life and teachings including His death and resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

So Aquila *and* Priscilla filled him in on those details and then sent him off to go back to Achaia where he settled in Corinth – the city they had all left recently - and it seems he took

on a prominent role in the ministry there. When Paul writes to the Corinthians he says, “I sowed, Apollos watered, but the Lord gave the increase.”

So, Apollos becomes the next link in a long chain of discipleship or spiritual mentoring.

Look at what the Lord has been doing: He brings Paul to Corinth where he spends time with Priscilla and Aquila teaching and discipling them. But then, they all move on to Ephesus where Priscilla and Aquila reach out to Apollos and disciple him. And then Apollos goes back to Corinth and continues the discipleship process there. Countless numbers of people are reached because of the friendship and spiritual mentoring happening among this group.

And it all begins with Paul the ministry multiplier. He pours himself out into the lives of the people around him, teaching them truth, encouraging them to serve God and others and as a result we see God glorified in the lives of countless people.

So let me bring things full circle and ask: why has God brought you here to this city?

It may be that God has you here for a year or two so that *He can teach you something like Priscilla and Aquila* **or** *use you, like Paul, to teach something to someone who is already here, and then much later, after you move on, they will meet and mentor someone like Apollos.*

I can't say exactly why God brought you here or what He wants to do with you. But I can tell you this with absolute certainty and authority, because I find it in Scripture: God has you here in *this* city, at *this* moment in history, and it's not a mistake.

He sees you. He knows you. And, if you are a Christian, if Jesus is your King, His message to you is the same as He told Paul, **fear not for I am with you.**

The promise that Paul would not be hurt was specific for that time and place – it's not for all of us. You may be hurt, you may be hurt badly, you may be driven out of town, but God is with you. He will never leave you or cast you out of His presence, He will never unfriend you or unfollow you, He will never ghost you. He is for you. He is a Father. And He wants more of you than you want of Him.

So press into the life, relationships, and ministry He has called you to and equipped you for, even if it takes place inside your own homes, and be strengthened and equipped by the God who is always there. You have no idea what God will do with your faithfulness, but you can count on His presence.

Let's pray.