

Acts 18:1-11

1 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. **2** There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, **3** and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. **4** Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

5 When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. **6** But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

7 Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. **8** Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. **10** For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” **11** So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

How do you feel about personal mission statements? The kind you might see on inspirational posters. Here is a sampling I pulled from a website (I think it was called awakening the greatness within).

- “My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive.”
- “The only permission, the only validation, and the only opinion that matters in our quest for greatness is our own.”
- “A man with money is no match against a man on a mission.”
- “The most extraordinary people in the world today don’t have a career. They have a mission.”

If I can believe the often-quoted statistic that only about two percent of us are “self-starters”, my guess is that most of us find this either exhausting or intimidating! Perhaps not unlike how many of us feel about our responsibility to God’s Mission. As his people we are to go into the world and preach the gospel. Paul calls us “ambassadors for Christ” with God’s message of reconciliation entrusted to us – making his appeal through us! How is that for intimidating?

That said, I want us to find encouragement for mission from today’s text. Being part of God’s mission is a responsibility, but it is not something we do alone.

Acts 18 finds us in the middle of Paul’s 2nd missionary journey (Acts 15 -18) as he arrives in Corinth. Now Corinth was a significant Greek city in the first century. The Romans sacked in 146 BC, then rebuilt it under Julius Ceasar by 44BC. Population estimates vary widely, but there were likely at least 100,000 people in Corinth during

Paul's ministry (some estimates are much higher). In those days a very large city indeed. It was a bustling port town, full of trade and commerce. But being an influential seaside town meant it was also full of nasty stuff like greed, corruption, and sexual immorality. In fact, the immorality of Corinth was so renowned that to be "Corinthanized" was to mean you were morally corrupted. We often think that sharing our faith is more challenging today than ever. Although we do have challenges that may be particular to our day, it has never been easy. To the Corinthians Paul covered all the bases saying the gospel was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Greeks; in other words, a challenge to both Jew and Gentile.

I wish to encourage us with four things from today's text.

1. Paul's Ministry was **Purposeful**

Verse 1 records Paul leaving Athens and going to Corinth. Paul is on the move, and with him goes the gospel. He goes because he had a vision for his ministry outlined in his letter to the Romans:

*"It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. ²¹ Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."
-Romans 15:20-21*

Where is this today? Other side of the world? Immigrant population clusters in our cities? How about your neighbour!

Paul was neither whimsical nor random in his approach to mission. He chose cities of influence, cities that drew visitors and commerce. Places with synagogues.

This urgency of Paul to know Christ, as he wrote to the Philippians, but also to make him known isn't new to him. His mission-heartedness reflects our mission-hearted God. Although there is a renewed emphasis upon mission in the New Testament, a new driving power (following the giving of the Spirit), God has always been "mission-hearted". He is the God who reveals himself to humanity, He is the God who sought out Adam following his sin, He is the God who made a covenantal promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 that "through him all the nations of the world would be blessed." Following that great promise, the bible records simply, but powerfully, "So Abraham went ...". Of course, mission is about a message, but it is also about movement, the movement of God, through his people, to those who would be his people.

Likewise, Paul goes: "He *went* to Corinth".

Examples ...

- This works out at local levels within our churches as well.
- CBC Ilderton as a "go and tell church", not a "come and see church"

- Purposeful as in “fit for purpose”
 - When you share your faith with someone is it contextual or are you fitting the same message to every situation.
 - Why is the gospel good news to my neighbour?
 - Jesus exercise
- Implications and applications of the gospel
- Contacts you already have
 - already in deed, add some word

2. Paul’s Ministry involved **Partnership**

Secondly, we see the importance of partnership throughout Paul’s ministry. Paul, obviously, casts a massive shadow upon the early church. Incredibly focused upon his calling. He may have been of singular purpose, but he was not singular in his ministry. He highly valued partnership. Granted, he travelled to Corinth alone, with Silas and Timothy following later. But he quickly found Aquila and Priscilla. A couple with whom he had a shared profession and a shared faith. This couple became key partners in Paul’s ministry. Other Pauline partnerships include:

- fellow ministers of the gospel
- pastors to follow his apostolic work
- elders to order and shepherd churches
- prayer
- giving
- serving

That said, all of us are ministers of reconciliation as Paul calls us. We are all called to evangelize, but we do so within a church.

- i) How can we partner better in our churches?
 - know each other, partner in hospitality, Mack Stiles wedding example
- ii) Evangelism think-tanks (our Life Groups)

3. Paul’s Ministry **Persevered**

Look again from v4

“Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

5 When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. 6 But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

7 Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. 8 Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.”

Ministry is hard work. By the time Paul reaches Corinth he has faced new challenges in his initial mission work in Europe. In his first letter to the Corinthians he tells them he came to them in “weakness, fear, and much trembling”. Paul was human. His ministry was frequently opposed. In Athens, some “joined him and believed”, but many mocked and dismissed him. Perseverance requires us to look beyond setbacks and failures, keeping our eyes upon our callings. When his partners, Silas and Timothy arrive, they find Paul “occupied” with the Word. Yes, he is discouraged, and probably short of finances which is why he is tent-making and only evangelizing weekly at the synagogue, but he is found doing the Lord’s business. What fuels perseverance (more on this in a moment)? Certainly one component is Paul’s commitment to mission. The word “occupied” is also translated “devoted” and even “constrained”. Constraint is more than just restraint, it is the focused application of Paul’s energy and gifting. Do you have the constraint of vision and purpose in your life?

With Timothy and Silas comes financial support from Macedonia. With this welcome support comes a renewed and greater commitment to the Word, and Paul commits again to full-time gospel work. This renewed preaching of the Word led quickly to great opposition. Verse 6: “they opposed and reviled him”, and so he moves his attention from the Jews to the Gentiles. Perseverance speaks to the integrity Paul had to his calling, not necessarily persisting in one particular outreach, regardless of the fruit. Churches and individuals can learn from this. The result? Many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized (v8).

4. Paul’s Ministry Needed the Lord’s Presence

“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. 10 For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” 11 So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.”

Most importantly, Paul’s ministry needed the Lord’s presence. Paul needed encouragement and found it in the Lord.

- i) Do not be afraid
 - “Fear not”
 - what is your self-talk?
 - what does the Lord say to you and about you?
- ii) I am with you
 - Example of Moses in Exodus 33: If your presence does not go with me...”
 - prayer!!
 - listen
- iii) Protection
- iv) I have many people in this city
 - God sees things that we don’t
 - look at no man according to the flesh
 - rest and work in God’s sovereignty
- v) Paul obeyed!



THE STORY OF
Everything
LUKE 24:27

Good, local church, gospel ministry requires purpose, partnership, perseverance, and presence. I could add one more great “P” word – promise. Jesus promised that he will build his church, the only question is what part you will have in it?