

Acts 18:1-11 (NIV)

¹After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²There 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 the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. ⁵When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. ⁶But when the Jews 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 clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” ⁷Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. ⁸Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.

⁹One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”

¹¹So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

44-18-01-Sources of Encouragement

ministry, discouragement, companionship, guidance, progress
Acts 18:1-11

Jesus knows our human need of encouragement and how to meet it.

INTRODUCTION:

–Jesus does His *earthly* work through “earthen vessels.” We are *His Body*: His hands & feet, His eyes & ears, His mouth & voice. But humans are emotionally frail and susceptible to something called *discouragement*.

–Jesus felt this emotion. When the disciples failed to free a child from a demon, He said in Mat 17:17, “O unbelieving and perverse generation... how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.” By being discouraged Himself and overcoming it, HOM.idea.

–On his arriving at Corinth, Paul needed encouragement. He testifies of this in 1 Cor 2:3, I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. No matter what caused these symptoms of discouragement, God provided three different sources to encourage Paul. The *first was...*

I. Friendly Faces in Unfriendly Places

- A. After discouraging results in Athens, seeing *few converts* and *no church established* from his preaching, Paul’s stay there was brief.
- B. He left a relatively small city of *intellectual snobbery* and entered a huge, intimidating metropolis filled with *loose living* people.
 1. Venus worship there [with a 1000 temple prostitutes] had so affected the city that “*Corinthian*” came to mean “*morally corrupt*.”
 2. In Acts 17:16, it says that Paul had been “**greatly distressed** to see that the city was full of idols.” (If religious intellectualism at Athens had upset Paul, imagine his response to Corinth’s sexual depravity!)
 3. Today’s *intellectual idolatry* and *sexual immorality* saturate our society and are intensified by the media. (Our *environment* can be emotionally discouraging, **but** a worse factor is loneliness.)
- C. As in Athens, Paul was **alone** when he arrived in Corinth.
 1. Being alone can be discouraging in places that are unfriendly to our faith, as Athens and Corinth were to Paul’s faith in Christ.
 2. God’s first source of encouragement was for Paul to meet “a Jew named Aquila... who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome.” (God didn’t cause the Roman decree but used it to put Aquila in Paul’s path.)

3. God can bring *like-minded people* into our lives to encourage us (If He does, we should take advantage of it, as Paul did— v.3, *and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.*)

D. Fellowship can encourage us to stay active and productive.

1. God's will for Paul in Corinth was, as he stated in 1 Cor 2:2, "to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."
2. But active obedience to his mission didn't start immediately:
 - a. Only after Paul met and was doing secular work with Aquila and Priscilla do we see in v.4, *Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.*
 - b. It took even more encouraging fellowship for Paul's preaching to reach the level God intended— v.5, *When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.*

TRANS: At trying times, it's uplifting to have like-minded around us. Jesus felt this in Gethsemane— Mat 26:37-38. He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." His sleeping disciples didn't meet that need, but God did— Luke 22:43. An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. Fellowship is one source of encouragement. Another is progress....

II. Fruitful Labors Among Your Neighbors

- A. When hopes are dashed, we may react in discouragement— v.6, *But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive [‘blasphemed’], he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”* (This reaction came from OT language, **not** from the spirit of the NT.)
 1. We might comment, "*Hey, didn't Paul treat the Gospel that way at first! And didn't Jesus say 'Turn the other cheek'?*" (It's true.)
 2. Jesus in us isn't done suffering yet, so we're to suffer with Him.
- B. But God encouraged Paul's heart by blessing him with immediate success right next door AND with a Jewish leader— v.7, *Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.* (This rebuked Paul's poor attitude but also rewarded his effort to share the Gospel, which we should do whether successful or not.)

TRANS: Jesus understood discouragement from unbelieving crowds. (Sense His emotion in Luke 13:34, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" **But** He also experienced the encouragement of unanimous successes— Luke 6:19, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. Yet, as uplifting as achieving goals and making progress are, they pale in comparison to the greatest source of encouragement:

III. When A Personal Word from the Lord Is Heard— v.9-10, *One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”*

- A. No sentimental "*there, there now, Paul... it'll all be OK.*" (God addressed Paul's needs for a right disposition and clear direction.)
 1. Paul had "much trembling" in Corinth; God said, "*Do not be afraid.*"
 2. Paul had been slow to start preaching; God said, "...keep on speaking, do not be silent."
 3. Paul had earlier been stoned by angry Jews; God said, "*I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you.*"
 4. Paul was in a decadent metropolis crowded with immoral people; God said, "*I have many people in this city.*"
- B. When facing any kind of difficulty or discouragement, there's no better encouragement than a word from the Lord, whether it comes in a dream, or in a quiet devotional time or in a church service.
 1. But God's personal word for us isn't just for our peace of mind; it's for our strength of mind to stay strong in the spiritual battle.
 2. Jesus wants all of our short earthly lives filled with "life abundant" in spiritual growth and in Kingdom service. (His encouragement is meant to spur us on in the paths He's set before us, which is the effect His personal word had on Paul— v.11, *So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.*

CONCLUSION:

—**Jesus knows our human need of encouragement and how to meet it.** Fellowship, fruitful progress, personal instruction: these aren't the only sources of encouragement, but we can be certain that, whatever our need, God will meet it, just as lovingly and faithfully as He did in Paul's life.