

Acts 14: When It's Not Going Well!

I. Expectations and Experience:

A. Great Expectations:

Things had probably not gone as Paul had hoped. God had prevented him from preaching in the provinces of Asia, Misia, and Bithynia in Turkey. Then he received a vision of a Macedonian man begging him to come over to Macedonia and help them. So, Paul and his companions crossed the Aegean Sea. And because God seemed to leading them, I think they had hopes of greater fruitfulness. (Acts 16:6-10)

B. Difficult Experience:

If he did have high expectations, they quickly took a hit. His stays in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea had all been short. While a church had been started in each city; Paul had been severely beaten at Philippi and forced to leave the city prematurely. A riot at Thessalonica required him to leave in order to not bring unwanted attention to the new believers there. At Berea, despite a good response to the preaching of God's Word; his ministry had been cut short because the Jews from Thessalonica came and stirred up a mob at Berea as well. He arrived in the city of Athens alone having left Silas, Timothy and Luke behind to teach and encourage the believers in Macedonia. But only a few people believed there. Thus Paul left the Province of Macedonia for Corinth with some encouragement over the new believers and churches; but anxious over their welfare.

With deep anxiety because they were vulnerable, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians from Athens saying.

I Thes. 2:17 - 3:5 When we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might

have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.

C. Welcome to Corinth:

Macedonia had been a difficult experience for Paul and his companions. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul describes how he felt when he first arrived there. He was expecting more of the same!

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 1 Cor.2:1-3

This weakness and fear that Paul describes was not only because of his experience of opposition and rejection in every city in which he preached the good news. It was also because of the atmosphere of Corinth itself. This city did not look like a place that would welcome a preacher of righteousness.

- Corinth is located on the narrow isthmus of land connecting Central Greece and the large land area to the South known as the Peloponnesus. The isthmus separates the Adriatic Sea from the Aegean Sea.
- The isthmus is only 3 1/2 miles wide here and there was a port on each side.
- In order to avoid the long and dangerous sea journey around the Peloponnesus, smaller ships were actually dragged on rollers across the isthmus between the Adriatic and Aegean Seas. Larger ships usually unloaded their cargo on one side and had it transport over land to another ship on the other side. This made Corinth the crossroads for all land routes north & south, and all sea routes east and west. As a result, it was a wealthy city, a city of merchantmen who knew how to turn a buck. It was also a city of seaman and had the moral atmosphere that went with it.
- In the late 1800's, a canal was cut through the Isthmus to accomplish the same thing. It was started in 1881 and completed in 1893. However, due to the canal's narrowness, navigational problems and periodic closures to repair [landslides](#) from its steep walls, it failed to attract the level of traffic expected by its operators. It is impassable for large modern ships so it is now used mainly for tourist traffic.
- If you visit the ruins of Ancient Corinth today you can still see the Temple of Apollo with the Acro Corinth in the background.
- And here is the Fortress of Acro Corinth.

The Greeks had turned the name of the city into a verb long before Paul came there. "To

Corinthianize" meant to be sexually immoral. It was known for its temple to the goddess Aphrodite that employed 1,000 temple prostitutes. To use a modern expression, "Whatever happened in Corinth, stayed in Corinth!" Sex and sensuality was a dominant feature of the culture. Most Corinthians would have felt right at home in 21st Century North America. Sexual promiscuity was assumed. Those who advocated sexual faithfulness were considered prudish, uptight, and missing out on what life had to offer.

So Paul came to Corinth with the experience of opposition in every city he had preached in, and the expectation of rejection from the greedy and sensualized culture of the city to which he had come. No wonder he came to Corinth "in weakness and fear, and with much trembling." So, what enabled Paul to continue despite his experience and expectation of opposition and rejection?

Read Acts 18:1-28

II. Unexpected Companions: 1-5

A. Priscilla & Aquila:

We know very little about them, but we meet Aquila and Priscilla first here at Corinth. Aquila was a Jew from Pontus in Northern Turkey. He and his wife Priscilla are tentmakers who had lived in Rome. They had been forced to leave because of an edict by the Emperor Claudius. This edict is known from historical records and took place in 49 AD. They were Jewish Christians who worked in the same trade as Paul.

Paul came to Corinth around the Fall of 50 A.D. He went to look for work among the Jewish people in the city. He had little if any financial support so he set out to support himself in ministry. This is the origin of the term "tent making ministries". It refers to those who work to support themselves while carrying on in evangelism or church planting ministry.

Aquila and Priscilla not only gave Paul a job, they invited him to live with them. They became a key part of his support team in Corinth. Luke does not elaborate specifically on their role beyond hospitality and employment, but several indicators suggest they became much more.

- First, when Paul left Corinth, it was Priscilla and Aquila that he took along with him. (18:18)
- Second, Paul then left them in Ephesus where he hoped to begin his next ministry. They were the key people he left to establish a base of operations for ministry when he returned.
- Third, after Paul left them in Ephesus, it was Priscilla & Aquila who recognized the gifts

of Apollos and invited him into their home, taught and disciplined him, and then sent him back to Corinth to carry on ministry there.

- Finally, in his letter to the church at Rome, Paul concludes by mentioning, among other, Aquila & Priscilla who had evidently returned to Rome by that time. He says:

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

Romans.16:3-4

B. Team Ministry:

Aquila & Priscilla became a key part of Paul's support team in Corinth. Their gifts were quite different than Paul's, but this is exactly what makes "Team Ministry" more effective than Lone Rangers. They not only exercised hospitality, they taught and disciplined people quietly in their home. While Paul's style was often confrontive; they seemed to be more the "come alongside people" types. Perhaps one or both of them were also effective prayer warriors in praying the kingdom of God and the will of God down on the party people of Corinth. "Team Ministry" has received a lot of attention in recent years. So, Why Team Ministry?

- Service Is Based on God-given Strengths: An essential concept of team ministry is that people should serve God in the areas that God given spiritual gifts and passions. My brother-in-law travels all over North America training businesses and churches with a tool called "Strength Finders". Their core mandate is that our focus with people should be less on fixing their weaknesses and more on developing their strengths. One of my primary strengths is teacher. I love finding out new things. But then I can't not share it with pretty much everyone I meet! Just mention astrophotography, or CNC routing, dust collection in a woodshop and I can regale you for hours on details and intricacies of such things! Giving people too much information is what I live for! When we focus on our weaknesses we are working outside our strengths. Sometimes we have to, but that is not where we want to spend most of our time and effort. Team ministry allows you to do this.
- Strengths and Spiritual Gifts are Complementary: This is a second essential concept of team ministry. No one has all or even most of the spiritual gifts. None of us are strong in every area. God gives different spiritual gifts and innate strengths to his people so that we would be dependent on one another and on Him to achieve His goal of bringing people to faith in Christ and seeing them grow to maturity in Christ.

1 Corinthians tells us this was His intention all along. We are not simply LIKE a body. We actually ARE the Body of Christ in some mysterious way. And "the hand cannot say to

the foot, I don't need you." It's like having different parts to a car. I may be a great engine, but if the car doesn't have any wheels, I won't get very far!

I may be upfront on Sunday but it is of little value without the effective service of so many others. Ushering, musical preparation, sound and Power Point, coffee, clean up, custodial, Newsletter preparation, prayerful intercession, the list goes on . . .

Many churches and businesses are looking for "Visionary Leadership". But as Ron, my brother-in-law often points out; if you get 2 people whose strength is truly vision on a Board; they will kill each other. Truly visionary people usually can only see one vision for the future: THEIRS! They are almost by definition not good collaborators. And . . . they often can see a vision for the future, but lack the patience and detail orientation to implement it. There are almost always people in the background making it a reality if they are going to be effective!

- Teams Are Stronger at Multiplication: There is another reason why team ministry is effective. It is because we are not just called to do ministry; we are called to train others to do what we do. Ministry teams tend to develop others in ministry. Lone rangers may have a great ministry, but that ministry is rarely multiplied in others.

One reason why Paul was able to carry on in ministry at Corinth in spite of the opposition he faced, was because God led him to some great and unexpected Teammates in Ministry.

So, let me ask; are you part of a team? Have you given up in difficult circumstances because it's too scary or too hard alone? Is there somebody out there about to give up because you are not there to pray for them and walk with them and encourage them? When God leads us to a new pastor, he will need each of one to be part of the team; to bring our gifts, strengths and encouragement.

III. Watchmen and Witnesses: 18:3-6

A. A Watchman For Israel:

A second reason that Paul continued despite both his experience of rejection and expectation of opposition was his call from God to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles.

"When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching and testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ." vs.5

But when the Jews became abusive toward him, Paul does a strange thing.

"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." Acts 18:6

What did he mean by that? It comes from God's commission of Ezekiel:

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, speak to your countrymen and say to

them: 'When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, ³ and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, ⁴ then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head. . .

But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.'

⁷ "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. Ezekiel 33:1-7

One reason Paul carried on in spite of opposition was because of his call from God to be a watchmen, for which God would hold him accountable. "Apostle" means "one sent with a message". He was to give people a warning. His job was to blow the trumpet. God would hold him accountable based on how faithful he was in proclaiming the message, not on how successful he was in convincing people to believe it.

Application: This is a solemn responsibility indeed. Paul did not regard the proclamation of Jesus Christ as an optional part of his faith. Few of us would claim to be apostles; but we do regard the "Great Commission" as a responsibility directed to all of us. "As you are going, make disciples!" In our interactions with people; we are called to make disciples. Sometimes that is proclaiming with our words and sometimes that is proclaiming with our love and deeds. Sometimes we speak of the hope we have in Christ, sometimes we live out that hope sacrificially with others. Sometimes we tell people the Good News and sometime we are the Good News!

B. A Witness to the World:

But there is a problem with just emphasizing the "Watchmen" metaphor. In emphasizing our responsibility, we have turned witness for Christ into a guilt-trip. It implies that if you don't find a way to work Jesus into the conversation you are being unfaithful. As a result, Christians sometimes relate to people both artificially and manipulatively. And guilt is a terrible motivator because it does not produce lasting change. We do have a solemn responsibility. But I think the balance to it is the understanding of being witnesses.

Witnesses just tell people what's happened. If nothing's happened to us, we have nothing to say. I have no trouble witnessing to people about the great deal I found flooring or how quiet the bathroom fan is I got from Costco. I have no trouble witnessing to people about a police incident in my neighborhood. Telling people about God is the same. We tell people what we have experienced.

And please note: This is a completely Post-modern thing to do. Post-moderns value experiences, friendship, passion, and authenticity. The more passionate, authentic, caring and current your experience is, the more attractive it is to post-modern people! They are generally less concerned with the content of the message. They value a message delivered with concern and passion and authenticity. That is what moves them.

IV. The Encouragement of the Spirit: 7-11

A 3rd reason that Paul continued to proclaim Christ despite opposition and rejection was the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. After Paul left the synagogue, he went next door to the house of Titius Justus and carried on ministry there.

- A. The Work of the Spirit:** He was encouraged first because of the Work of the Holy Spirit in the people he was preaching to. First Crispus, the Synagogue ruler and his entire household believed in the Lord. Then many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. If there is one thing that makes me excited about ministry, it is seeing the Holy Spirit drawing people to faith in him. And I get excited when I see new Christians growing in their faith and obedience to Christ.

- B. The Word of the Spirit:** A second way that the Holy Spirit encouraged Paul was by a direct Word. In almost every city where Paul had preached there had been an initial encouraging response followed by sudden intense opposition and he would be forced to leave. But this time the Lord spoke to him 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.”* vs.10

The Spirit still speaks to those who are seeking Him and listening. Most often, the Spirit takes the Word of God which we have memorized and brings it into remembrance, or He speaks to us through the Word as we read it and meditate on it. Sometimes the Spirit speaks to people through dreams, or His still small voice. I have often had the Lord impress an instructional phrase upon me for a particular church I was serving in. Sometimes it was to encourage me and sometimes it has been direction in how I was to conduct myself there. A subjective word from the Spirit has frequently been a source of strength and endurance for me.

V. Conclusion:

Endurance can be hard at times. Especially when there are no crowds cheering you on and no victory music is rising to a crescendo! Hebrews tells us that though we can't see them from here, there is a great cloud of witnesses watching us run the race before us. Some in that crowd we probably know personally because we have seen them finished their race. I think together

with innumerable others they are chanting, “*Keep Going! Fix your eyes on Jesus. Keep your eyes on the prize.*”

Paul had experienced opposition and rejection leading up to Corinth. He had reason to expect even more. He came to that city “*in weakness and fear and with much trembling.*” But he endured in spite of his circumstances because of the encouragement he received from the Companions God gave him in ministry, because of the call from God as a watchman, and because of the encouraging Work and Word of the Holy Spirit.

Take a look around! These are the Companions God has given us in service. And He has commissioned as witnesses of His power and work in our lives. And He encourages us by his Holy Spirit working in us and speaking to us. So even when the journey gets hard, we can carry on to receive the prize He has for us.

Reflection Questions:

1. What was the best team you ever part of? What made it so good?
2. How would people describe you as a teammate?
3. What is God’s call on your life? How did that become evident to you?
4. How have you experienced God in a difficult situation? Who have you told (*witnessed to*) about it?
5. What was the last thing you felt God was speaking to you about? How have you followed through with that?