

Discipleship is a Process

Acts 18:1-28

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Caleb Greggson pastors an English-speaking church in Central Asia. Recently, he wrote an intriguing article called *Friendship: The Foundation of Paul's Global Ministry* in which he wrote: "*One of Paul's most consistent values may surprise us: friendship...consider how in nearly every letter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he devotes space to greeting specific believers [by name].*"

This caused me to dig a little deeper into Paul's partnerships.

- **Christianity is a team sport.** Are you aware Paul mentions over 100 people by name in his New Testament letters? In Romans 16 alone, he lists 26 people. If you're using the Edgewood Bible Reading Plan, on Friday you read these final words of Paul, written right before he died in 2 Timothy 4:19-21: "***Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorous. Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.***" Paul was not a lone ranger but was part of a team. Without supportive friends and partners throughout the world, the gospel would not have spread as quickly as it did.
- **Friendship is a key part of discipleship.** Our sanctification should extend to all our relationships. As we live out the supremacy of Christ in our lives, it will affect our interaction with others. Proverbs 27:17: "***As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.***" The church was created to be a community of interdependent people.
- **Friendships develop through shared experiences.** Most of Paul's relationships were nurtured in the crucible of ministry partnerships. Some of the best friends you will ever find are those you meet as you minister together. If you're relatively new to Edgewood, and haven't met many people yet, attend a ministry event, or look for a way to serve.
- **People are more important than programs.** It's important to remember ministry always flows along relational rivers. Every name matters to God and must matter to us because you will never look into the eyes of someone God does not love.

- **It's beneficial to have friends who are different from us.** Included among Paul's friends were a doctor and a runaway slave. He had friends who were Jewish in background and others who didn't know who Abraham was. He hung out with guys and had rapport with women. He was closer to some than others. Many were givers, a few were goers, several were old, and a handful were young. Most were faithful but some were fickle.

As we've been traveling verse-by-verse through the Book of Acts, I've been struck by how the gospel turned the world upside down. We've traced the explosion of evangelism from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth. We've looked at Paul's methods and pondered ways we can apply principles and practices to our church and to our lives.

Last weekend we established this truth from Acts 17: *"If we're going to reach unbelievers with the gospel, we must build bridges, not barriers."* In Acts 18, we'll see how *God providentially works through people in process to accomplish His purposes.*

We'll begin by reading a larger chunk of Scripture than we normally do. We're simply following the admonition found in 1 Timothy 4:13: *"Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching."*

I counted 11 different names in this chapter which I'll emphasize while reading. We'll circle back around for some exhortation and teaching.

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 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. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

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

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.

¹⁸ After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.¹⁹ And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.²⁰ When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined.²¹ But on taking leave of them he said, “I will return to you if God wills,” and he set sail from Ephesus.

²² When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch.²³ After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures.²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.²⁷ And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed,²⁸ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Let’s get our bearings by looking at a map [show map]. Most of the events of Acts 18 take place towards the end of Paul’s second missionary journey. Traveling the length of Greece, he ministered in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and now he’s in Corinth.

Corinth was known for international commerce and rampant immorality. Its main attraction was the Temple of Aphrodite or Venus, which employed 1,000 prostitutes. In the Roman Empire, when someone wanted to speak of the most immoral kind of life, they would say he or she was “*playing the Corinthian.*” In our culture, Corinth would be like Las Vegas.

God providentially works through people in process to accomplish His purposes. Let’s look at how God worked His purposes through people in process in very specific places. He does the same today. Several weeks ago, we defined the doctrine of God’s providence this way: “*Divine providence is the governance of God by which He, with wisdom and love, cares for and directs all things in the universe.*”

1. See your work as a platform for ministry. In verses 1-3, we see how God providentially arranged for Paul to meet two Jews named **Aquila and Priscilla**. Paul “just happened” to arrive in Corinth while Aquila and Priscilla settled in Corinth because of Emperor Claudius’ anti-Semitic edict in Rome. BTW, this gives us a time marker because this brutal policy was initiated in A.D. 49. This is more evidence Christianity is a historical faith, meaning the events which took place can be correlated with actual people, places, and events in history.

The three of them met in the work setting while making tents. These were small, portable tents made from leather or goat hair which were carried by travelers. We see here the importance and value of work. The English word “vocation” comes from the Latin for “*calling.*” Your occupation is a calling from God, which means you can worship God through your work as you seek ways to witness for Him.

As they worked together, they talked together. Paul ended up living with them and poured Jesus into them every day. On the Sabbath, he reasoned with Jews and Greeks, striving to persuade them to follow Christ. I’m sure Aquila and Priscilla attended these meetings, benefiting from both casual and formal times with Paul.

God loves to bring people together for His purposes. You are not here today by accident today. If you’re tuning in via livestream or COZI, God has drawn you to do so. Ultimately, He wants you to connect with Him and with others. Aquila and Priscilla were discipled daily by Paul. Eventually, when they returned to Rome, they hosted a church in their home. Their hearts, hands, and homes were surrendered to the Lord.

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2. Be quick to give what God has given to you. In verse 5, Silas and Timothy arrive in Corinth. We know from Philippians 4:15 they brought an offering from the Philippian church so Paul could stop working and focus on full-time ministry: ***“And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.”*** This allowed him to be ***“occupied with the word”*** which means, ***“to be seized by Scripture, to be pressed and compelled.”***

Because of the faithful giving of God’s people, Paul was able to devote himself exclusively to the exegesis and exposition of the Scriptures. Edgewood, thank you for giving so sacrificially, faithfully, and generously so your pastors can be occupied with the word without having to get another job, which many pastors must do. When you give, you’re also supporting our Go Team partners, ministries like Celebrate Recovery and Awana, our facility expenses, our mortgage payments, and many other ways we’re making a kingdom impact.

Many of you are also quick to give when you hear of a need. This week I was struck by how a new Christian gave some money to a family going through some challenges. With a big smile on his face, he told me this family needs it more than he does.

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3. Live on mission with your neighbors. In His providence, God moved Paul into relationship with another person in verse 7: ***“And he left there and went to the house of a man name **Titius Justus**, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue.”*** Paul went from living with a Jewish-background couple to hanging out with a Gentile.

Brothers and sisters, God has you living where you are for His purposes, whether you are in a dorm, an apartment, a condo, a mobile home, or a house. See your neighbors as your mission field. Check out verse 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.”*** The name ***“Crispus”*** means, ***“Curly.”*** For some reason that makes me smile. While Paul didn’t baptize many people, 1 Corinthians 1:14 tells us he baptized Curly. Also, he took his parenting seriously because his entire family came to faith in Christ.

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4. Keep speaking for God. It's easy to become discouraged and disheartened when ministering in a sin-soaked society. We don't think of Paul as one who became afraid but we know from verses 9-11 he dealt with fear: ***“And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, 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.’ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”*** The phrase ***“do not be afraid”*** means, ***“stop being afraid,”*** which tells us Paul was continuously worried. God encouraged Paul by reminding him of three promises:

- **His presence.** Paul needed to remember the Lord was with him. This goes back to the last phrase of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20: ***“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*** Spurgeon once said, ***“As sure as God ever puts His children in the furnace, He will be in the furnace with them.”***
- **His protection.** The Lord tells Paul, ***“No one will attack you to harm you.”***
- **His purpose.** Paul needed to keep preaching because God had providentially prepared many people to come to Christ. This is a good word for us. In the midst of a depraved culture, God wants to use us to reach people trapped in their sins. Jesus said it like this in John 10:16: ***“And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also.”***

As result of this encouragement, Paul ministered in Corinth for 18 months. When you're struggling, ask God for His strength. He's promised His presence, His protection, and to accomplish His purposes through you. *God providentially works through people in process to accomplish His purposes.*

5. Ask God to work through government officials. In verses 12-17, the Jewish leaders accused Paul of breaking the law and brought him before a government official named **Gallio**. In essence, Gallio honored the separation of church and state, threw the case out, and drove Paul's enemies away. His decision allowed the gospel a measure of legal protection in the Roman Empire for about 10 years. In a similar way, God used Cyrus, a pagan king to allow the Jews to return to Israel after 70 years of exile.

Having said that, don't you wish our government would be more conscious of God and His ways by recognizing religious freedom and morals? This, week I was grieved when both the Illinois Senate and House voted to repeal the Parental Notice of Abortion Act. I contacted my representative before the vote, but sadly it

still went through. BTW, that's why Christians should vote in every election and when we do, we must vote for biblical values.

The enemies were so upset they seized **Sosthenes**, the new synagogue ruler, and beat him. Later, Sosthenes came to Christ and served as a ministry partner with Paul according to 1 Corinthians 1:1: ***“Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes.”***

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6. View every place you go as a platform for ministry. After staying in Corinth, Paul set sail for Syria. We're not sure what kind of vow he made, but we know he kept it by cutting his hair. This is a good reminder for us to keep our vows, whether spiritual, or to our spouse. Paul's next stop was Ephesus where he went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. Incidentally, you may recall, he attempted to go to Ephesus years earlier, but the Spirit did not allow him to do so. God's timing is often different than ours.

In verse 20, the Ephesian believers wanted Paul to stay longer. Paul's answer showed his trust in the providence of God: ***“I will return to you if God wills.”*** This was more than a spiritual slogan. Paul knew his life was under the sweet sovereignty of God. James 4:15 says: ***“Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’”*** Later, Paul did end up returning to Ephesus according to Acts 19:1.

Paul continued his journey back to his sending church in Antioch, with layovers in Caesarea and Jerusalem. Verse 23 says, after Paul spent time there, he launched his third missionary journey, ***“through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.”*** Paul was so committed to helping Christians grow, he traveled far and wide to equip them. The word ***“strengthen”*** means, ***“to fix, establish permanently, to confirm.”***

When you're moving about in different places during the week, ask God what person he wants you to connect with. *God providentially works through people in process to accomplish His purposes.*

7. Be a disciple who disciples others. At Edgewood, we define discipleship this way: *A disciple is a believer who lovingly follows Jesus and intentionally helps others follow Him.*

Each of us must lovingly follow Jesus and then intentionally help others to do the same. When Jesus called some fishermen in Matthew 4:19, He also gave them their purpose: ***“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”*** We’re to grow and bring others along with us. 2 Timothy 2:2 says: ***“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”*** A devoted disciple is one who discipled other disciples who in turn discipled more disciples.

Discipleship is to go from me to you to faithful men (and women) to others.

This is illustrated beautifully in verses 24-28 where we’re introduced to Apollos, a disciple in process: ***“Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus.”*** Alexandria was the second-most important city in the Roman Empire, located in northern Egypt. It was a city of scholars and became home to men like Philo, Tertullian, and Augustine. It also became home to a million Jews. One of those Jews was Apollos who was born and raised in Alexandria but had a Greek name. Due to the number of Greek-speaking Jews in Alexandria, the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament, was put together.

Here are some things we know about Apollos:

- **He was eloquent.** He was an educated orator.
- **He was competent in the Scriptures.** To be ***“competent”*** means to be, ***“fixed, firm, mighty, and strong.”*** This word is where we get the word ***“dynamite”*** from. Like Ezra in Ezra 7:6, he was skilled in the Scriptures.
- **He had been instructed in the way of the Lord.** He was humble enough to be taught. The phrase, ***“way of the Lord”*** refers to the first coming of the Messiah.
- **He was fervent in spirit.** He was filled with zeal. The word refers to ***“boiling.”*** Are you fervent in your faith?
- **He taught correctly but incompletely.** Apollos knew a lot about the Scriptures, but he had a discipleship deficit, only knowing about the baptism of John. John emphasized a repentance of works to prepare people for the Messiah. In essence, Apollos didn’t comprehend grace because John preached a gospel of works. Apollos didn’t have a full understanding of the finished work of Christ, His glorious resurrection, and the promised filling of the Holy Spirit.

I love what happens next in verse 26: ***“He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”*** Priscilla and Aquila, who were discipled by Paul, initiated a discipling relationship with Apollos. Note how they took him aside privately to fill in the gaps for him. They took the time to intentionally teach him.

After Apollos was discipled, he wanted to disciple those who lived in Achaia. Listen to verses 27-28: ***“And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.”*** Because he was discipled privately, He was able to declare Jesus publicly.

After he was discipled, Apollos received a lot of encouragement from a band of brothers in Ephesus. They wrote letters of recommendation on his behalf and sent him off to the Christ followers in Corinth (see Acts 19:1), which is in Achaia. When he arrived, he ***“greatly helped”*** those who ***“through grace had believed.”***

On this anniversary of the Reformation, we affirm we are saved by God’s grace. Historically, this has been summarized by five statements of faith:

In Scripture Alone
By Grace Alone
Through Faith Alone
Because of Christ Alone
For the Glory of God Alone

After being fully equipped, Apollos was able to make powerful arguments from the Scriptures about how Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies as the Messiah.

The Apostle Paul discipled Aquila and Priscilla. In turn, they discipled Apollos, who discipled many others in Achaia. However, this discipleship chain didn’t start with Paul. It goes back to a lesser-known guy named Ananias who spoke into Paul according to Acts 9:17: ***“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”*** Later, Paul referred to Ananias with great fondness in Acts 22:12: ***“And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well-***

spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me.” He was the one who urged Paul to get baptized.

Shortly after, Barnabas stood up for Paul. Also, we read in Acts 9:19 how other believers poured into Paul: ***“For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.”***

We could diagram it like this: Ananias → Paul → Aquila and Priscilla → Apollos → Individuals in Achaia.

Pastor Kyle has a white board in his office which visually demonstrates the intentional discipleship relationships taking place at Edgewood. While there is discipleship happening in many other ways, this is encouraging to me.

When we examine Paul’s ministry in Corinth, we see how it follows the Great Commission mandate in Matthew 28:19-20: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

Paul came to Corinth (that’s the “go” part), he discipled believers (“make disciples”), he baptized, and he taught them to obey. He even experienced the assurance of the Lord being with him ***“always, to the end of the age.”***

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Action Steps

1. If you want to jumpstart your growth, and meet some new friends in the process, why not attend one of our weekend Growth Groups or electives? We offer a group on Saturdays at 3:30 pm, one at 8:00 am on Sundays, and many which meet during the 9:00 and 10:45 hours on Sundays.
2. Look for ways to intentionally live on mission on your campus, in your workplace, and in your neighborhood. Do that by putting into practice what we learned last weekend – find a way to compliment and then make a connection to the gospel.
3. Identify a Christian you know who has some gaps in their doctrine or practice and reach out to them this week.
4. If you’re not presently in a discipling relationship, what steps will you take to begin one?

5. If you're a parent or a grandparent, how can you intentionally disciple your children or grandchildren? Listen to the admonition found in Psalm 78:5-6: ***“He commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.”***

This week, Pastor Kyle visited two different discipleship groups held in the home of EBC members Matt and Laura Williams. Matt leads the guys and Laura pours into young women. When they're finished, they have a meal together. Check out this video.

Closing Video