

Logan Reynolds
First Belton
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Series: The Story Continues
Title: Friendship, Faithfulness, and Fearlessness
Text(s): Acts 18:1-22
Big Idea: God gives us what we need to faithfully continue His mission

INTRODUCTION

Good morning! Great to be with you all this morning. I just want to say in advance thank you for your patience this morning. We know that the schedule change may feel a bit chaotic, but remember, we are not preparing for life in this building but in the new one. **This is a season of preparation, not perfection.**

Also, if you are looking for ways to serve, we have plenty of needs right now in our kids ministry. And there is no better place to invest your time than with the next generation! Please head to Connection Central after the service to find out more information.

Alright, here we go. The book of Acts is an interesting book – it tells the story of God working through ordinary people like you and me to accomplish His mission to lead all generations to know and follow Jesus. But what we have seen so far is that it is anything but easy! In fact, it is very difficult. So, when it gets hard, how do we keep going?

This morning, I want to tell you that **in your pursuit of God and His mission, He will give you exactly what you need when you need it to help you get going.** In Acts 18, we don't know all that Paul was going through when he walked into Corinth, but what we do know is that God met him there and gave him exactly what he needed to keep him going – friends, encouragement, and uncommon strength.

There are 3 lessons that I want us to learn this morning...

1. Friendship Matters

"After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 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, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks."

When we read through the book of Acts, it would be easy to assume that Paul was a bit of a loner. He appears to be like the guy that you drop deep into enemy territory on his own to gain reconnaissance against the enemy. But that really isn't true. Paul deeply valued friendships. At this point, Timothy and Silas are still in Macedonia and Paul has just finished up in Athens and now he moves on to Corinth without them.

But here is the cool thing – God doesn't leave him alone.

In Corinth, Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla. They become lifelong friends and partners in ministry. Paul lives with them, works alongside of them, and even travels with them. Then, at just the right moment, Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia to bring encouragement and support him in the mission from them and the church in Macedonia.

And here is a beautiful principle here: ***God often provides the strength we need through the people He puts around us.***

Don't miss the significance of that. Growing up, I didn't really have anyone I considered a Christian friend. The people I went to church with, I didn't have much in common with. And the people I did have things in common with, I was bringing to church – and I'm pretty sure they were only there because I invited them and there were a few pretty girls! So, when I went to school, I often felt alone in my faith. I didn't have much support.

Students: don't overlook friendships at church just because someone isn't exactly like you. And don't forget **it is really hard to be faithful by yourself**. Parents: make sure your kids are here and are developing deep friendships that will support them during the week.

But that isn't just true for students! We tend to celebrate individual faithfulness, but the Christian life and mission were designed to be carried out in community. So, who has God placed in your life to help you keep going?

Like Paul, look for people who love Jesus, who are following Him on mission, and with whom you share some common ground – and invest in one another.

And don't miss this about Paul: **while much of his mission was to those outside his church, much of his support came from those within the church**. That matters. As you seek to reach people in your circles, make sure you have the friendship and support of those who are also on mission with you. Paul needed friends and so do we!

2. Faithfulness is the Goal

Notice what Paul is doing when Timothy and Silas arrive in v. 5. Luke says, *"Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus."*

No matter what he faces, Paul stays faithful to the mission to lead all people everywhere to know and follow Jesus. Even when opposed, rejected, or misunderstood!

Look at v. 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.' And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshipper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized."*

Paul's life demonstrates what true faithfulness really looks like. He keeps showing up even when opposed and reviled. By the way, to be reviled is to be strongly criticized, hated, or verbally abused. So, what does he do? He just moves next door and keeps sharing the gospel.

And then we get an important detail at the end of this section. In v. 11, Luke says that despite all that, Paul stayed there *"A year and six months, teaching the word among them."*

That is remarkable because in Acts, Paul is moving from place to place. But in Corinth, he stays. He teaches. He preaches. He disciples. He endures opposition. And he keeps showing up.

Sometimes when things get hard, our natural tendency is to leave. **But Paul shows us that we can do hard things!** Sometimes faithfulness means staying long enough to do the work God has called you to do even when it's hard or uncomfortable or doesn't make sense.

This is true in all of life! It's true in ministry. It's true in marriage. It's true in parenting. It's true in church life. It's true in serving. It's true in careers and true in relationships. In our instant everything world, we want quick results. **But the kingdom of God often grows through what Eugene Peterson calls, "A long obedience in the same direction"** – showing up, working hard, teaching truth, sharing your faith, loving people well, and trusting God with the results. This is what faithfulness looks like!

And here is why this matters – despite being resisted and reviled, Paul's faithfulness bears fruit. Crispus, the ruler of the Synagogue comes to faith. Titius Justus believes, and so do many of the Corinthians. **Fruitfulness is born through faithfulness.**

3. God's Presence is the Basis of Our Courage

Do you kind of get a picture of Paul as being fearless and unaffected by all that he has experienced? I do. In fact, I can, to the point that I often discount him because I have a hard time relating to him. But here is the deal – Paul himself tells us that when he walked into Corinth, he was anything but fearless.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:3 that when he walked into Corinth, *"he came in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling."* He goes on to say that he even stumbled over his words and presentation of the gospel.

Wait, the great apostle Paul experienced fear and wasn't perfect? Okay, now I feel like I can relate.

Now, notice what God does in the midst of Paul's fear. V. 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, 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.'"*

In this moment, we are learning an important distinction: **fearlessness isn't the absence of fear; it is faithfulness in spite of the fear.**

Notice that God doesn't shame Paul for being afraid; rather, He meets him in his fear and gives him what he needs to continue. Look at the basis of His encouragement:

He **commands** Paul: *"do not be afraid."*

He reinforces the **mission**: *"keep on speaking."*

He gives him a **promise**: *"I am with you."*

He provides him with **protection**: *"No one will lay a hand on you."*

And He encourages him in the **purpose**: *"I have many in the city who are mine!"*

Paul's courage isn't rooted in his skill, personality, or performance. Paul stayed in Corinth despite his fear because **his courage is rooted in God's presence and promise.**

And check this out – God shows up and delivers on His promise.

Paul continues his ministry and more opposition arises. Paul is attacked and hauled off to Gallio, the governor in the region. V. 13 tells us their accusation: *"This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law."* Now, notice this: *"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. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves.'"*

Paul didn't even have to speak up or defend himself before God showed Himself faithful to His promise. As a result, they let Paul go and v. 18-22 tell us that Paul continued his mission as he and his new friends Aquila and Priscilla hop on a boat and head to Ephesus. Eventually, Paul will wrap up his second missionary journey by landing back in Antioch.

I want you to remember this: **fearlessness doesn't come from knowing nothing bad will happen. It comes from knowing God will be with us whatever happens.** I think sometimes we get that backwards, we are slow to do something, or make a decision, or share with someone because we fear that something bad will happen. And that fear is understandable! God doesn't promise us that bad won't happen, but He does promise that no matter what happens, He will be with us in it.

CONCLUSION

In this mission to lead all people everywhere to know and follow Jesus... God gives us everything that we need! Friends? He provides them. Strength to stay? God provides it. Courage when we are afraid? God provides it. Fruit? God is already at work.

We don't have to have it all figured out and we don't have to do it all alone. We don't even have to be unafraid. We simply need to trust the God who is with us and faithfully take the next step in the mission He has given us.