

## Acts 18

### *Ministry, Work, and Culture*

#### Learning Objectives

- Examine how our ministry fits together with our daily lives, including work and friendships.
  - Show that God is ultimately in control of how the Gospel spreads.
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**Pray for your time together today.**

**?** Have you ever done anything unusual to fit in with a group? What happened?

#### Read Out Loud: Acts 18 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup>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, <sup>3</sup>and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. <sup>4</sup>Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

<sup>5</sup>When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. <sup>6</sup>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.”

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

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

<sup>12</sup>While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment. <sup>13</sup>“This man,” they charged, “is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.”

<sup>14</sup>Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to them, “If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. <sup>15</sup>But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things.” <sup>16</sup>So he drove them off. <sup>17</sup>Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever.

*Leader's Note: We are going to talk about the challenges Paul faced while spreading the Gospel in Corinth and how it relates to us as modern Christians also trying to share the Gospel to those in our communities. In order to better understand the context of this passage in Acts, we are going to look at Paul's later letter to the Corinthians. Feel free to read this aloud to provide context to your group.*

## Ministry & Work

### Read out loud: 1 Corinthians 9:11-19 (NIV)

<sup>11</sup> If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?<sup>12</sup> If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. <sup>13</sup> Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? <sup>14</sup> In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

<sup>15</sup> But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. <sup>16</sup> For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! <sup>17</sup> If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.<sup>18</sup> What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.

<sup>19</sup> Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

? What advantages in spreading the Gospel might we have as laypeople (people not paid to do ministry)?

*Possible Answer: We may gain credibility as a follower of Christ but not a pastor or clergyman and thus not a "professional Christian." Being laypeople may make us more relatable or give us a common denominator. For people who expect the church to be after our money, it may show we have no ulterior motive.*

? Paul, Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers and supported themselves as they shared the Gospel. How do you think having a vocational skill helped their ministry?

*Possible Answers: They were able to make money to support themselves. Also, they may have met people outside the synagogue they wouldn't normally have met.*

Paul may not take payment for his ministry, but he does advocate for pastors being paid. In 1 Timothy 5:17-18 (NIV), he says, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages.'"

? How do we see God providing for Paul while he is in Corinth?

*Possible Answer: A tentmaking business with partners. His friends join him in Corinth and support him so he can focus on ministry full time. God speaks directly to Paul reminding him to be faithful.*

? What frustrations does he experience even with God's provisions? What frustrations have you experienced in your attempts to spread the Gospel?

*Possible Answer: Paul still faces serious opposition, including abuse and being dragged in front of the authorities.*

? Paul says his reward for preaching the Gospel is simply the joy of offering it free of charge. What would our lives look like if we were compelled to preach the Gospel as Paul did?

*Possible Answer: Paul preached freely with no care of monetary gain or fame. He was compelled to preach the Gospel to win over as many people for Christ as possible. For us, we might be less concerned with how we appear to others, or with the potential gain or loss that comes with sharing the message with people.*

? How does God fulfill the promise He made in vs. 10 through Gallio's actions in vs. 12-17?

*Possible Answer: Gallio proves to be one of God's "many people" in Corinth. He provides protection for Paul against the Jews who seek to imprison or kill him.*

? As a non-Christian judicial officer, Gallio was an unlikely ally for Paul in Corinth, and his actions were certainly unexpected for someone in his position. Have you ever seen God work through someone unexpected or in an unexpected way? What happened?

*Possible Answer: Answers will vary.*

*Leader's Note: This account of Gallio might be confusing. We are not specifically told who the crowd is, Jew or Gentile, or if the synagogue leader is the same one that converted earlier in the passage. The main point is that Gallio was not at all religious but was still used by God in a significant way.*

## Ministry & Culture

### Read Acts 18:18-27 (NIV):

<sup>18</sup> Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken. <sup>19</sup> They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. <sup>20</sup> When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. <sup>21</sup> But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus. <sup>22</sup> When he landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

<sup>23</sup> After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

<sup>27</sup> When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. <sup>28</sup> For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

Numbers 6:2-21 lays out the rules regarding Nazirite vows, including that the one taking the vow may not cut their hair for the duration of the vow. Once the vow is completed, cutting the hair is part of the ritual that completes the vow. According to the ESV Study Bible, "One would have undergone such a vow in seeking divine blessing for an undertaking or to express thanksgiving."

? How can assimilating to cultural norms, such as Paul cutting his hair, help spread the Gospel?

*Possible Answers: Those hearing the Gospel may be more willing to hear and more accepting of the one spreading the Gospel, and may avoid taking offense to the messenger rather than the message.*

? Blending in with the surrounding culture can be a helpful way to reach people who would otherwise be unwilling to hear the gospel, but at some point assimilation could be harmful. How do we know where to draw the line between trying to spread the Gospel and cultural conformity?

*Possible Answers: Standards of Christian living still need to be maintained; we are called to be in the world rather than of it.*

? How was Apollos ideally equipped to spread the Gospel?

*Possible Answers: He was a Jew, he knew the Scriptures, he was a good speaker, he taught accurately and, perhaps most importantly, was open to correction.*

**Read 1 Corinthians 3:4-7 (NIV):**

<sup>4</sup> For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings? <sup>5</sup> What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. <sup>6</sup> I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. <sup>7</sup> So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

? Why do we need to keep God the central focus of sharing the Gospel?

*Possible Answers: God is the one who ultimately makes people receptive to the Gospel, not anything we do to share well or fit in. It also prevents us from succumbing to pride if our efforts are well received.*

**For Discussion and Accountability**

? How can you use where you are currently to spread the Gospel, planting the seed for God?

? In what areas do you need to be more reliant on God to do the work? In what areas do you need to be reminded of God’s sovereignty?