**Sermon Based Community Group Leader Guide**

**Acts 18:1-23**

**\* Read Acts 18:1-23. Open in Prayer.**

**\* Sermon Overview**

In this sermon, Pastor Aaron will emphasize our need as Spirit-empowered witnesses to depend on the Lord, to know His presence, to listen to His promises, and to experience His power. His outline will address the following topics: (1) Fear not; (2) Be occupied with the Word; (3) Know the promise and power of God’s presence, through the promise of protection and the power of God’s people; (4) Staying is a testimony.

**\* Prompt Questions**

1. Was there anything that stood out to you in the pastor’s sermon? Are there any clarifying questions that you may have regarding the sermon?

2. How have you been seeking to apply the sermon in your own life this week? Or, what is one way that you can apply the sermon to your life this week?

3. What was the take away from the sermon for you? If you had to sum up the main idea of the sermon in one sentence, what would it be? What main themes do you see in the text and did you hear in the sermon?

4. How have you seen God at work this week in your life and in the lives of those around you? How has God been working in you this week through His Word, through prayer, through the body of Christ, and through service/evangelism? What were the highlights and lowlights of your week? How can we be praying for you specifically?

**\* Observation/Interpretation Questions[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to get through every one of these questions. I have given them in hopes that they will drive us back to the text so that we may diligently search the Scriptures as the Bereans did (Acts 17:10-15). These questions will give us a grasp of what the text says/means so that we can apply the text to our lives. I would encourage you to spend the majority of your time on application questions so that we can become “doers of the Word and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

**1. What is the context of Acts 18:1-23?**

*Luke wrote Luke and Acts (written around A.D. 62) to Theophilus in order to give him an accurate account of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and to tell how Jesus continues to work through Spirit-empowered witnesses to carry the gospel to the end of the earth without hindrance and with boldness. Acts 1:8 serves as the theme verse of the book and as the outline for the book, for chapters 1-7 focus on Jerusalem, chapters 8-12 focus on Judea and Samaria, and chapters 13-28 focus on the end of the earth. The risen Lord sends His Spirit to empower followers of the Way to be witnesses who proclaim the kingdom of God to the end of the earth.*

After some time in Athens, Paul journeyed to Corinth, a crucial political and commercial city about 50 miles west of Athens. He worked as a tentmaker with Aquila and Priscilla, who had come to Corinth after being run out of Rome by Claudius. Along with providing for himself, Paul was occupied with the ministry of the word, proclaiming Christ to the Jews until they rejected Jesus. Paul declared to the hostile Jews that their blood was on their own heads now, and he turned to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. In Corinth, Paul saw (1) Jews, like Crispus who was a ruler of the synagogue, (2) God-fearers, like Titius Justus, and (3) Gentiles believe in the Lord. Though opposition from the Jews came, the Lord promised Paul (1) that I am with you, (2) that you will not be harmed, and (3) that I have many in this city who are my people. In keeping His Word, the Jews who brought Paul before the tribunal were rejected by Gallio, the proconsul. Given the protection of the Lord, Paul spent a year and a half proclaiming the gospel in Corinth. After this time, Paul journeyed back to Jerusalem and to Antioch to report on the Lord’s work before going out on a third missionary journey.



*Note: This map of Paul’s second missionary journey (lasting from about AD 49-51) comes from the ESV Study Bible.*

**2. What is going on in Acts 18:1-8?**

*After Athens, Paul journeyed to Corinth, which was about 50 miles west. In Corinth, he joined up with Aquila and Priscilla, who were Jews kicked out of Rome by Claudius around AD 49 over a disagreement between Christians and Jews concerning Jesus. Though Paul was occupied with work, he still found time to proclaim in the synagogue that Jesus must suffer and die, that Jesus must rise from the dead, and that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. After Silas arrived from Philippi (more than likely) and Timothy arrived from Thessalonica, Paul was occupied with the ministry of the word full time, as it appears that Silas and Timothy brought financial contributions that allowed Paul not to have to work to provide for his necessities. Like in other cities, Jews opposed the gospel of Jesus Christ, but Paul shook off his garments and warned that their blood is on your own head now. Turning to the Gentiles, Paul operated out of the house of Titius Justus. In Corinth, Paul saw (1) Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, and his household, (2) Titius Justus, a God-fearer, and (3) many Corinthians believed and were baptized.*

*Note the following details concerning Corinth: (1) It was the largest city in Greece at this time (depending on who you read the population varies from 250,000 to 750,000); (2) It was a major political, cultural, and economic center, given its location along the main north-south land routes and east-west trade route; also, it had two ports, Cenchreae to the east leading to the Aegean Sea and Lechaeum to the west leading to the Adriatic Sea; (3) It was known for its immorality and idolatry (temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, located in the center of the city), leaving one commentator to call it the Las Vegas of Paul’s day; (4) It was a rebuilt city less than 100 years old when Paul arrived; (5) It was the location for the Isthmian Games (similar to Olympic Games), held every other year.*

*Note that shaking garments is a sign of rejection. For background passages to shaking of garments, see Ezekiel 3:16-19; 33:1-7. John Polhill writes, “If the watchman blew the warning trumpet, anyone who failed to heed would be responsible for the consequences that came. If the watchman didn’t blow the trumpet, then the watchman would be responsible. Paul was a watchman to Israel, proclaiming the coming of the Messiah and the coming judgment. When he had borne his witness, he had fulfilled his responsibility.”*

*For Aquila and Priscilla, see Acts 18; Romans 16:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19. For Paul on his work as a tentmaker, see Acts 18:3; 20:34; 1 Corinthians 4:12; 9:12; 2 Corinthians 11:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9. For financial gift brought from Macedonian churches, see 2 Corinthians 11:8-9; Philippians 4:14-15.*

*Tony Merida notes six challenges to practicing hospitality: (1) Overcommitment; (2) Intentional Isolation; (3) Addiction to Comfort; (4) Selfishness; (5) Pride; (6) Wanting Recognition for Acts of Service. When we think about inviting believers and unbelievers into our home for the sake of the gospel, which of these challenges provides a barrier for you? Why is it important for believers to practice hospitality (see Romans 12:13)? Tony Merida writes, “Your job gives you the opportunity not only to provide for basic needs but also to love neighbors, to display Christ-honoring integrity, to speak the good news (either during work or in conversation after hours), and to make the gospel known around the world using whatever means the Lord gives you.”*

*John Polhill writes, “How would the gospel have reached Rome? Here is the perfect example before us—by Christians like Priscilla and Aquila traveling the routes of trade and commerce and carrying their faith wherever they went.”*

*Tony Merida writes, “Timothy Keller helpfully says Athens was like Boston, an intellectual center; Corinth was like New York City, a commercial center; Ephesus was like Los Angeles, a popular culture and occult center; and Rome was like Washington DC; it was the political center.”*

**3. What is going on in Acts 18:9-17?**

*In Corinth, the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision, emphasizing one command (do not fear, but rather speak boldly) and three promises: (1) I am with you; (2) I am protecting you; (3) I am redeeming people in this city for myself (like in all other situations, the command is grounded in the promises; put another way, because of who God is, Paul can trust His Word and obey His Word, knowing that God will fulfill His promises). Shortly after the Lord spoke to Paul, the Lord vindicated His Word as he protected Paul from the hostile hands of the Jews and the judicial power of Gallio, who was the chief judicial officer in Corinth around AD 51-52. The Jews brought Paul before the tribunal and charged him with proclaiming an illegal religion. Before Paul could give a defense, Gallio spoke up to dismiss the case, due to it being an internal disagreement between Jews and Christians. In response to Gallio’s ruling, the Jews (or possibly the Gentiles) beat Sosthenes (perhaps he later became a believer, see 1 Corinthians 1:1), the ruler of the synagogue. In response to the vindicated word of the Lord, Paul stayed in Corinth for 18 months to teach the word of God.*

*For Paul receiving visions, see Acts 16:6-10; 18:9-10; 23:11; 27:23-24. For God encouraging His saints like He did for Paul, see Moses (Exodus 3:2-12), Joshua (Joshua 1:1-9), Gideon (Judges 6:16), Elijah (2 Kings 1:15), Elisha (2 Kings 6:16), servants of King Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:6), King Jehoshapat (2 Chronicles 20:15), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5-10), the servant of the Lord (Isaiah 42:1-4; 43:2), the disciples (Matthew 14:27; Luke 5:10), the women at the tomb (Matthew 28:10), and the church (Matthew 28:18-20). For God having a people, see Acts 13:48; 15:13-14; Revelation 7:9-10.*

*As you dwell on this passage, think about these questions: Which of these promises apply generally to all of us and which of these promises apply specifically to Paul? Why do you think these words of the Lord came to Paul at a pivotal time (put yourselves in Paul’s shoes as you think back over the last couple of chapters—run out of town, mocked, opposition, loneliness of mission at times, etc.)? What is the significance of Gallio’s decision related to the hindrance or the spread of the gospel and how does this example shed light on us for seeing God’s sovereignty at work in spreading His gospel in spite of differing political contexts?*

*Derek Thomas writes, “But when God is at our side, assuring us of his providential governance of all things, securing victory over evil power and promising help and sustenance in our fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil, we have no need to be afraid.”*

*J. I. Packer writes, “So far from making evangelism pointless the sovereignty of God in grace is the one thing that prevents evangelism from being pointless. For it creates the possibility—indeed, the certainty—that evangelism will be fruitful. Were it not for the sovereign grace of God, evangelism would be the most futile and useless enterprise that the world has ever seen, and there would be no more complete waste of time under the sun than to preach the Christian gospel.”*

*Derek Thomas writes, “We are called to be faithful in evangelism and prayer, leaving the results to the sovereign power of God.”*

*Derek Thomas writes, “Gallio’s verdict is an example of God’s providential oversight in the political realm that ensured the further advancement of the gospel. God is sovereign, not just in the sphere of the church, but in the entire universe.”*

*NIV Zondervan Study Bible: “Gallio’s decree also has important implications for the legal status of Christianity. By identifying the conflict as an internal Jewish debate, Gallio essentially rules that (1) Christianity is a protected religion, like Judaism, under Roman law and (2) Christians are innocent of breaking Roman law. This provides a measure of protection for the Christians in the near future.”*

*John Polhill writes, “Had Gallio decided against Paul, it would have been a dangerous precedent that not only would have ended his effectiveness in Achaia but hindered his witness elsewhere.”*

*Tony Merida writes, “Now you might be tempted to think, I wish I had such promises to go on when it comes to sharing about Jesus. Take heart because you do! The Lord has already told us that he is with us (see Hebrews 13:5) and that he is drawing people to himself (see John 6:37, 39). And while we can’t claim God’s final promise to Paul exactly, we do have God’s promise to work for the good of his people (see Romans 8:28). With that in mind, we must daily fill our minds with the promises of God. That, in fact, is how we fight fear today. So saturate your mind and heart with the Lord’s sovereign and sweet promises.”*

**4. What is going on in Acts 18:18-23?**

*In this passage, Luke gives us the travel itinerary of Paul as he concludes his second missionary journey (vv. 18-22) and begins his third missionary journey (v. 23). Before he moves into the third missionary journey, he inserts a transition story concerning Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos (vv. 24-28). Concerning the details of this journey, the following observations may be noted: (1) Aquila and Priscilla are left in Ephesus, where they equip Apollos and they host the church of Ephesus. Businessmen/businesswomen, do you have opportunities to leverage your job for the sake of the gospel by moving to strategic cities where there is a desperate need for disciples of Jesus to go and make disciples? (2) Paul apparently made some kind of vow (likely the Nazirite vow, see Numbers 6:1-21; Acts 21:20-24), as an expression of devotion and gratitude to God. (3) Acts 18:19-21 prepare us for Paul’s further ministry in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. (4) Paul checked in and reported to the churches of Jerusalem (“went up” in Acts 18:22 most likely refers to Paul going to greet the church at Jerusalem) and Antioch of what God was doing around the world by the power of His gospel. In the same way, how have you seen God at work in and through you this week? Take time to share how God is working. (5) Beginning his third missionary journey, Paul revisits places he has been in order to encourage, strengthen, and equip the disciples. In a similar way, how can we strengthen the disciples in our body? Also, how can we strengthen and encourage the disciples who have been sent out from our body?*

*Derek Thomas writes, “But the vow involved here is one of thankful acknowledgement of what God has done for us and a desire for a season to live in a measure of extraordinary self-denial as a way of concentrating on giving ourselves to God.”*

*John Polhill writes, “During the course of a Nazirite vow, one was forbidden to cut one’s hair, to consume wine or strong drink, and to come into contact with a corpse. Vows could be taken for various reasons—to seek divine blessing in an undertaking, to express thanksgiving, or to seek deliverance from an illness.”*

*John Polhill writes, “One should note the recurrent pattern of Paul’s three missionary journeys. Each began in Antioch. Each ended in Jerusalem. Each had a major speech: in Pisidian Antioch (first journey) Paul preached to the Jews; in Athens (second journey) he preached to Gentiles; at Miletus (third journey) he preached to Christian elders.”*

**\* Application Questions**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to use every question, for you will have time for 3 to 5 questions. I’ve tried to offer enough for you to pick the ones you think will best fit your group, as you know what your ladies or men are going through at this time and may need to hear. Also, please note that these questions might be adjusted to reflect what the pastor calls us to do in application of the sermon.

1. In Acts 18:2-3, Luke introduces to a couple by the name of Aquila and Priscilla, who were Jewish Christians and disciple-makers (see Acts 18:19, 24-28). Businessman/businesswoman, how can you leverage your profession for the sake of the gospel? Would it be possible for you to move somewhere around the world to a major urban area that is unreached so that you could leverage your profession to make disciples of all nations? Stay-at-home mom, how can you leverage your opportunities to make a gospel impact on other stay-at-home moms? Retiree, how can you leverage your retirement for the sake of the gospel? In this passage, we see that Aquila and Priscilla are moving to major urban areas (they lived in Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus that we know of) to work and to share/show the gospel, and we are reminded that the gospel goes forth through ordinary, everyday people who obey the Great Commission by viewing all of life under the Lordship of Christ.

2. Once again, in Acts 18 we see Paul’s pattern of reasoning in the synagogues and then turning to the Gentiles to proclaim the gospel to them. We’ve been talking about our customs/habits for intentionally sharing the gospel the last couple of weeks. Have you found an avenue/custom to engage unbelievers? If so, can you share a story of God giving opportunities for gospel conversations? If not, write down two or three ways/places (not necessarily going out of your way but finding ways within your current flow of life) where you can begin engaging unbelievers with the gospel

3. What principle might Acts 18:6 give us for how to relate to those who reject the gospel? As you think about this verse, how might it relate to family members, coworkers, neighbors, and friends who reject the gospel? How do we continually engage unbelievers who are hostile to the gospel?

4. As you look at Acts 18:9-11, how can this word of encouragement to Paul also be a word of encouragement to us? What part of these verses apply generally to us and what part of these verses apply specifically to Paul (hint: to me, it appears that the only part that applies specifically to Paul is the part where the Lord states that “no one will attack you to harm you.” The last part on “for I have many in this city who are my people” specifically apply to Paul in Corinth, but the idea of God having a people who He will redeem and restore is applicable generally as well—see Revelation 7:9-10)?

5. Remember, Paul has been run out of cities through imprisonment, beating, mocking, opposition, etc. In Corinth, once again opposition arises. God’s promises in Acts 18:9-11 is a timely word and encouragement to Paul at this season of his life. As you’ve been in the Word this week, has the Lord given you a timely word of encouragement this week? How might the promises of God, the character of God, the Word of God, the presence of God be encouragement to us in the mission of being Spirit-empowered witnesses, of being disciple-makers?

6. One our 4 commitments for community groups is relationships (the other three are growth, love, mission—see Acts 2:42-47). In this passage, how does community provide encouragement and accountability for Paul? How do we see the community doing mission together? In our own community groups, how can we encourage one another, hold one another accountable, and spur on one another in mission? Write down 3 to 5 ways that you can practically do that this week.

7. In Acts 18:12-18, Paul sees the outworking of God’s promises from Acts 18:9-11. God is faithful to His Word and God sustains His mission. In your own life, how have you seen God at work through the Word, prayer, the body of Christ, and the situations/circumstances of your life to grow you in Christlikeness and to guide you in mission?

8. Acts 18:18-23 details the travel plans of Paul, with verses 19-21 setting up the mission to Ephesus in Acts 19 on Paul’s third missionary journey. One of the things that Paul does at the end of every missionary journey in Acts is report to Antioch. In a similar way, what report of the work of God in and through your life do you have to report to the community group this week? With this Sunday being the kick-off to our missions emphasis week, how has God been at work through our mission partners this past year and how might this be an encouragement to us? How can our community group engage, support, encourage, etc. our mission partners over the next year? How can our community group participate in the mission of God this next year?

9. As you look at this passage, how does it call us to obedience and an others-focused mentality? Remember, Pastor Aaron is challenging us to be about obedience and others in 2018.

10. Here are some good questions to reflect on and act on this week (these were passed along to me by Pastor Aaron and Dr. David Jones):

A. What do you take as the main theme from this sermon?

B. What have you learned today about Jesus’ character that has affected you daily?

C. Do you have any clarifying questions concerning the sermon?

D. What did the Holy Spirit convict you of because of His Word today?

E. Will you ask forgiveness and what will you change?

F. Will you be willing this week to pass on to someone else what you’re learning about Jesus? How will you be intentional this week to do so?

11. In his book, Asking the Right Questions, Matthew Harmon gives the following instructions/questions for understanding and applying the Bible:

A. Understanding the Bible

1. What do we learn about God?

a. Look for God’s character (who he is, what he is like).

b. Look for God’s conduct (what he is doing).

c. Look for God’s concerns (what things, events, people, he is concerned about).

2. What do we learn about people?

a. Look for aspects of what it means to be created in God’s image.

b. Look for the fallen condition.

c. Look for how God’s people should live.

3. What do we learn about relating to God?

a. Look for things to praise and thank God for.

b. Look for sin to confess and repent.

c. Look for promises and truths to believe.

4. What do we learn about relating to others?

a. Look for how we should interact with and treat others.

b. Look for ways to pursue reconciliation with others.

c. Look for specific ways to love, serve, and care for others.

B. Applying the Bible

1. What does God want me to think/understand?

2. What does God want me to believe?

3. What does God want me to desire?

4. What does God want me to do?

**\* Sermon Take Away**

As we go as Spirit-empowered witnesses, let us daily know and follow Jesus, let us remember the encouraging words of God, and let us turn our fears over to the Lord.

**\* Bible Reading Plan**

1. Monday—Romans 7; Job 3

2. Tuesday—Romans 8; Job 4

3. Wednesday—Romans 9; Job 5

4. Thursday—Romans 10; Job 6

5. Friday—Romans 11; Job 7

6. Saturday—Romans 12; Job 8

7. Sunday—Romans 13; Job 9

**\* Unhindered: A Study of Acts (Part 2)**

1. March 4th—Acts 18:24-28 (Passage Will Be Different; Will Pick Back Up on March 11th)

2. March 11th—Acts 19:1-41

3. March 18th—Acts 20:1-16

4. March 25th—Acts 20:17-30

--. April 1st (Easter Sunday)—Passage To Be Determined

5. April 8th—Acts 21:1-26

6. April 15th—Acts 21:27-22:29

7. April 22nd—Acts 22:30-23:35

8. April 29th—Acts 24:1-27

9. May 6th—Acts 25:1-12

10. May 13th—Acts 25:13-26:32

11. May 20th (Mother’s Day)—Acts 27:1-44

12. May 27th—Acts 28:1-31

1. For this discussion guide, I used the following resources: Darrell Bock, *Acts;* I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*; John B. Polhill, *Acts*; Derek Thomas, *Acts*; R. Kent Hughes, *Acts*; R. C. Sproul, *Acts*; John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of* Acts; Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesu in* Acts; ESV *Study Bible*; *NIV Zondervan Study Bible.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)