

BE ENCOURAGED

Acts 18:1-17

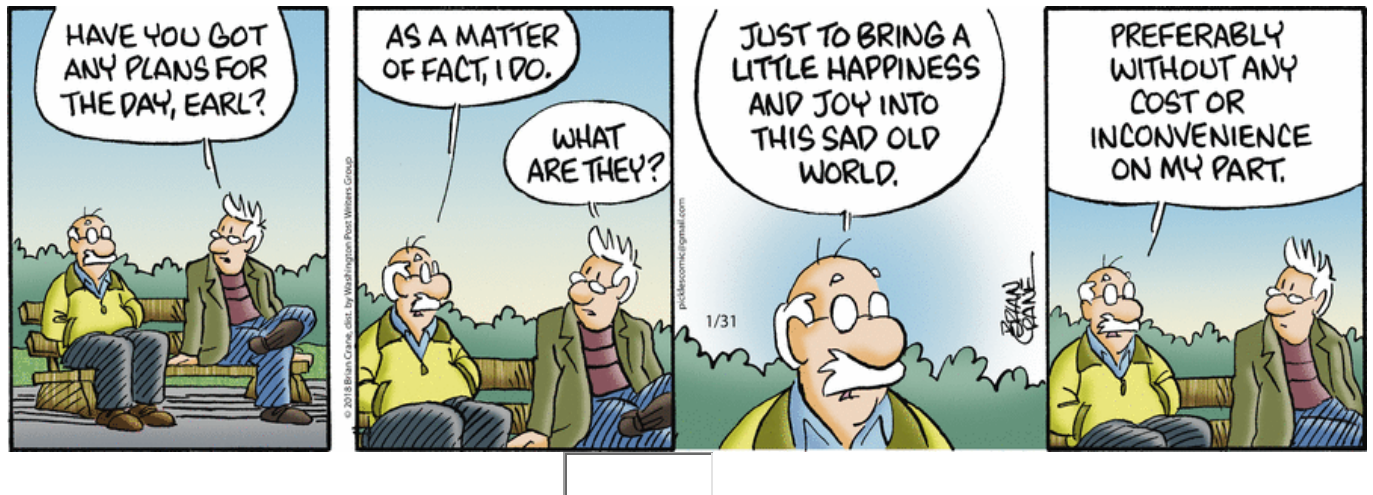
“Be the change.” That has been the focus of this four-week series in the book of Acts.

First, we need to be empowered by the **Holy Spirit**.

Second, we said that we need to be connected.

Third, we said that we need to be fixable.

This morning we are going to talk about our need to be encouraged to live completely and fully for Jesus. I want to start with a comic strip



This is not a sermon about working harder for Jesus or giving more to the church.

Mark 8:34 (NLT) — 34 Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me.” Jesus says that to follow him you have to give him your whole life. All through the NT we are assured that following Jesus will not just inconvenience us but will totally and completely disrupt our lives. It will not cost us a lot it will cost us everything. But Jesus continues, **Mark 8:35 (NLT) — 35 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it.** No matter how hard we hold on to our lives, our money, our time, our energy, the more quickly it slips through our fingers. When we give it completely to God, we are amazed how full life can become.

I want to look at how this encouragement worked in the life of Paul at the end of his second missionary journey.

Before we look at Paul I want to clarify that I’m not Paul and you are not Paul. Paul had a unique call to be the Apostle to the gentiles. While Paul’s call was impressive, I’m convinced it is not more important than the call God has prepared for each one of us. **Ephesians 2:10 (The Message) — 10 No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.** God has called us to different work but it is all his work.

We are going to focus on Paul’s ministry in Corinth, but we need to set it in context. Paul visited Corinth at the very end of his second missionary journey. They journey began by revisiting the places they had gone on the first missionary journey. In Lystra they add Timothy to the team of Paul and Silas. Then we

read **Acts 16:6 (NLT) — 6** Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time.

Map No one really knows what Luke meant by the HS preventing them from preaching in Asia but they end up in Troas. **Acts 16:9–10 (NLT) — 9** That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” **10** So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, having concluded that God was calling us to preach the Good News there.

God’s will does not result in an easy life – “Don’t question a decision made in the light, when you are in the dark.” > Paul & Silas beaten and thrown in prison > singing and praising God
Resistance > oppositions > hardships > do not mean we are outside God’s will.

They move to Thessalonica and end up being run out of town.

They go to Berea and are run out of town.

They decided to break up the team. Paul is the lightning rod of opposition, so Silas and Timothy stay behind to continue the ministry and Paul moves on to Athens.

Athens is the intellectual capitol of the world. Paul is invited to address the greatest philosophical minds in his day and we are told that when they hear Paul talk about the resurrection of the dead, they laugh in contempt. Now some came to believe in Christ, but Paul was no different than the rest of us, we allow the critical to have a disproportional influence on us.

Paul is discouraged

Special people are an amazing source of encouragement. . **Acts 18:1–3 (NLT) — 1** Then Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. **2** There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had left Italy when Claudius Caesar deported all Jews from Rome. **3** Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was.

When we are going through tough times and feeling discourage, our natural tendency is to withdraw and isolate. This is exactly the wrong thing to do. Instead we need to ask God to provide us a person or persons who might be a source of encouragement. When we are facing challenges in life we need to ask God for safe people, who will listen to us, and pray for us.

Acts 18:4–5 (NLT) — 4 Each Sabbath found Paul at the synagogue, trying to convince the Jews and Greeks alike. **5** And after Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul spent all his time preaching the word. He testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

The second source of encouragement is to stay focus on what God has called you to do. Paul is called to present Christ, first to the Jews and then the gentiles and he doesn’t stop. Often when we are facing challenges, and frustrations, we want to give up. Giving up only spirals us deeper into discouragement.

Acts 18:6–8 (NLT) — 6 But when they opposed and insulted him, Paul shook the dust from his clothes and said, “Your blood is upon your own heads—I am innocent. From now on I will go preach to the Gentiles.” **7** Then he left and went to the home of Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God and lived next door to the synagogue. **8** Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and everyone in his household believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also heard Paul, became believers, and were baptized.

This brings us to the third source of encouragement, that is hearing from God. **Acts 18:9–11 (NLT) — 9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, “Don’t be afraid! Speak out! Don’t be silent! 10 For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me.” 11 So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God.**

- 1) **Stop talking.** We pray as if it is one-way communications, we have to provide some space in our lives to listen to God and we need to do it consistently. This is difficult in our very busy, information over loaded culture.
- 2) **Be patient.** We want to treat God like he was Google, we ask a question and he answers. However hearing God, is more about relationship than information.
- 3) **Be obedient.** God does not nag us, if he speaks to us and we don’t obey him he will not speak again until we change our hearts.
- 4) **Understand that God speaks in many ways.** He still sometimes speaks in dreams and visions. He sometimes speaks to me directly through scripture, I remember a passage, or I see a familiar passage in a fresh way that applies to an immediate situation. He sometimes speaks directly to our hearts. I have had times where I’m not sure that there was an audible voice or not, but the words are in my heart and I know they are from him. He also has spoken to me through other believers.

We find encouragement by celebrating victories.

Acts 18:12–17 (NLT) — 12 But when Gallio became governor of Achaia, some Jews rose up together against Paul and brought him before the governor for judgment. 13 They accused Paul of “persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to our law.” 14 But just as Paul started to make his defense, Gallio turned to Paul’s accusers and said, “Listen, you Jews, if this were a case involving some wrongdoing or a serious crime, I would have a reason to accept your case. 15 But since it is merely a question of words and names and your Jewish law, take care of it yourselves. I refuse to judge such matters.” 16 And he threw them out of the courtroom. 17 The crowd then grabbed Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him right there in the courtroom. But Gallio paid no attention.

When we see God work in amazing ways we need to note and celebrate. We milestones in all the various endeavors God has called us to. We need to celebrate even little victories.

Paul stayed in Corinth for about 18 months and saw many people added to the church there. None of this would have happened if he had not received the encouragement God had for him.

Living out Kingdom principles in the situation God has placed you is going to be difficult and we need encouragement > Seek out safe people / Don’t give up / Make space for listening to God / commemorate the positive

Question for reflection:

- 1) What work is God calling me to do?
- 2) What factors do you find discouraging?
- 3) Who are the people God has given me for encouragement?
- 4) Who should I be encouraging?
- 5) What do I need to keep doing?
- 6) What positive events do I need to commemorate?