

God's Power in Broken Places

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Patrick McGinty

Acts 18:1-11

¹ 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.

SUMMARY

TBC-supported missionary Patrick McGinty shares from Acts 18:1–11, encouraging all believers to actively participate in God's Kingdom work. He also testifies to the Lord's faithfulness in Japan, celebrating His provision and presence even amid the challenges of overseas church planting.

Passage Outline

Let's dive into the book of Acts. One thing you may have noticed if you've studied the book of Acts before is that in most of Paul's missionary journeys, he would circle back to his sending church Antioch and give ministry reports of all God had done in his time preaching the gospel.



In a similar way it is such a joy for me (Patrick) to be here with you to share how God is working in Japan because of your prayers and support.

Today we are looking at Acts 18. Paul is on his second missionary journey. He travels onward from Athens to the city of Corinth, about 60km away.

Corinth was a major city and was notorious for its idolatry and rampant immorality as they worshipped the goddess of love, Aphrodite. It was like the Las Vegas of Greece.

YOKOHAMA Parallels. It was also a port city of about 3.7 million people. A city in great need of the gospel.

- Japan is the 2nd largest most unreached people group in the world (125 million).
- Less than 1% is Christian, less than 0.3% is Evangelical Christian (according to Joshua Project)
 - Declining by 0.4% each year
- 93.8% of the Japanese people are some combination of Buddhist and Shinto, but most are completely irreligious and do not believe in any God at all. Most people have never met a Christian or even been to a church

- They lack GOSPEL ACCESS

Corinth also had very little access to the gospel.

I hope you are greatly encouraged by the way God used Paul in the city of Corinth. Not from a place of power and strength, but from a place of brokenness and weakness.

Let's read Paul's Story: Acts 18:1-11

Paul arrives in Corinth, he meets a Christian couple named Priscilla and Aquilla. Paul preaches in Corinth but is violently rejected. So he moves his ministry to another side of the city and some people such as Crispus and his family believe in God. Lastly, God meets Paul in a vision at night.

Verses 9-10 is our focus for today.

Why does Jesus say to Paul, "Do not be afraid?" What is going on in Paul's life right now?

Paul is afraid. It turns out, many bible scholars believe Paul is in a pretty bad place emotionally when he arrives in Corinth. It's possible he could be on the verge of a breakdown. Look what He wrote in his letter to the Corinthian church about this time:

1 Corinthians 2:1, 3

"And I, when I came to you, brothers [...] I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling."

Paul is saying, when I first preached to you I was in a rough place. I felt weak, afraid and shaking at times. Think about what Paul has been through these past many months.

He split ways with Barnabas, likely his closest friend. He was severely beaten and jailed in Philippi, then mobbed in Thessalonica. He was hunted down by the same mob in Berea, then mocked in Athens. Now violently mocked in Corinth.

It's no surprise that Paul is feeling discouraged and afraid, perhaps traumatized from the severe abuse and near-death experiences.

Paul is likely wondering, "can I really go on?" The pain, the grief, the confusion, fear is just too much.

It is here in this place of Paul's brokenness where Jesus shows up. In this vision we see 3 powerful exhortations that God gives Paul in a time he needed it most. It's also the reminder all of us need when we feel discouraged and hurt.

1) Trust God's Heart

2) Trust God's Command

3) Trust God's Plan

If we understand these three exhortations it can give us the courage to stand back up again and boldly live for God.

Notice the first thing that God says to Paul:

“Do not be afraid.” When we are hurt and wounded, we are so easily controlled by fear. We're afraid someone will hurt us again. We're afraid we'll fail again. And on our darker days, we're afraid God has forgotten us.

When we let fear control us we easily hurt other people, we distrust, we put up walls, we fake it, or we try to control others because we feel out of control.

On the inside we know something is shattered and what scares us is we do not know how to put it back together.

God goes straight to the heart of pain and say, **“Don't be afraid.”**

Why can we not be afraid? Look what Jesus says to Paul:

“For I am with you.”

Knowing God is with you changes everything. I remember when my boys started Japanese elementary, like most kids they were afraid of walking by themselves to a new place. The school is about a 10 minute walk from our house, and in Japan the kids are trained to walk by themselves to and from school after a week.

My boys were nervous and afraid, but when I held their hands, they had courage to walk forward and face their fears.

That's what God does for us.

What's amazing is that God is not just with us in some sort of intangible way.

God is a good Father and he tangibly demonstrates his love and heart toward us.

Let's look closely at Paul's story, we'll see 4 ways God tangibly encourages Paul.

First, **God brings People** to encourage Paul. He does not just bring anybody, but Christians who understand pain and loss. Priscilla and Aquilla (Acts 18:2).

Priscilla and Aquilla had been forced to leave behind their home, and were refugees starting life over in Corinth. Like Paul, they had the same job of making tents. The text says, Paul moves in and lives with them. In the future we see they become dear friends, they travel and minister with Paul.

I have found that God often shows us his love by sending us people in our time of need to come alongside and encourage us.

God does not stop there, we see Paul has been without his teammates during this hard time, but Timothy and Silas return in verse 5.

We know from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians and to the Corinthians that Timothy and Silas bring more encouragement.

God brings Good news. Through Timothy, Paul learns the Thessalonian church is staying strong, trusting in Jesus despite the persecution (1 Thessalonians 3:6-10). In other words, God is reminding Paul, "Look, I'm taking care of things, you do not need to worry."

Next we see through Silas that **God brings Provision.** Silas brings back a major financial offering from the Philippians to support Paul in his mission work (2 Corinthians 11:8-9).

The tense of the Greek wording is a little tricky to know for certain, but it seems likely from verse 5 that Paul was able to then quit tent making and focus 100% on ministering the word because of this financial provision.

Lastly, we see **God brings fruit** by saving the family of Crispus. There are many days in the work of ministry that can be discouraging and hard, but I tell you each time I see someone baptized into the family of God, immediately I feel it was worth it a hundred times over. God saves!

We see that God reminds us to trust his heart because he is a good and caring Father. Because he is with us, we can take his hand and face our fears.

Next we see that we should: **Trust God's Command**

Notice that God gives Paul a command to focus on (Acts 18:9).

Speak the word! Do not be silent. When we are afraid and hurt we are in great danger of going silent. Maybe we feel it makes no difference to share about Jesus, or we're too tired. God wants us to keep sharing the good news and keep proclaiming his goodness to others.

Don't be afraid. Don't give up. Paul already knows this! He had even preached this to others.

Galatians 6:9

"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

Even the strongest of us, men like Paul need to hear this encouragement again and again from our Heavenly Father.

Paul could have been tempted to give up on Corinth and just move on to the next city, but God had a different plan.

God often works more mightily through our weakness than through our giftedness.

If you look closely you will see this pattern all throughout scripture. He takes a broken and enslaved people and turns them into his nation, Israel. He takes lowly shepherd boys and makes them kings and prophets like David & Amos. He takes fishermen and makes them his chosen apostles. And the one who denied him 3 times he makes the leader of his church. Why? Because He gets greater glory.

Paul clearly learned this lesson because in his second letter to the Corinthians, he writes this: "But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Instead of denying our weakness or pretending to look strong; if we invite God into our weakness and brokenness, we can experience the power of God. This is the Christian way.

When we trust God in this way his grace gives us power to obey his commands. Do you believe this?

As His church we must keep on sharing the good news of Jesus. Tomorrow we must share the gospel in Houston.

Did you know that when you step out courageously and obey, fear often melts away. You actually overcome fear through obeying and trusting Jesus! Most of our fears are baseless, we just don't want to take the next step.

We are so often just like a child doesn't want to go to a new school. We're afraid, we make excuses. But once the child actually steps out and gets to know people, the environment, the fear fades. It vanishes.

God in his endless grace does the same with us when we choose to trust and obey him.

You see, we often receive Grace by giving it away. For example, I have the immense privilege of leading bible studies and sharing the word of God with others regularly. Often, I feel that I receive so much more than I give. Because in preparing, in studying with others I'm so encouraged and reminded by the truths of God.

God reminds us to choose to trust His command, believing that his word has power to change us and change others.

We Trust God's heart, Trust God's command, and lastly,

3) Trust God's Plan

Acts 18:10. This is an astounding statement. Jesus is telling Paul to go on preaching the good news. Why?

There are many people in the city of Corinth that will believe if they hear the Word! God knows who will repent and put their faith in Jesus.

In other words God knows right now in this city of Tomball, Texas who would turn to believe in him if they heard the good news of Jesus.

Notice, God knows this, but we don't. What does this mean for us then? We must relentlessly share the wonderful news of Jesus! Because though 100 reject us, one may say yes!

What freedom this gives us in evangelism! We can know confidently that God will certainly save people, all we have to do is keep on sharing and not be silent. Some may mock you, some will ignore you, but some, some will believe. And it is worth 10,000 rejections for one to be eternally saved.

I cannot preach this sermon without sharing how deeply God has used this bible passage to impact me personally. I haven't shared this story very much before, so bear with me if I get a little emotional.

4 years ago, before Ellen and I planted Cross Community Church, we were in a rough place.

We were beaten up by ministry and didn't know if we could go on. I had been forced to resign from my previous church, threatened to remain silent or we could lose our visa or finances, and the pastor lied to the whole church. I still remember talking to Larry Hoelscher and Carlos Garza right after all happened.

We knew God was calling us to plant a church in Yokohama, but then we lost our job, community, church, mission organization overnight. It wrecked us. How could this happen? And how could this be God's plan?

I've never felt so weak, afraid, and more uncertain about the future in my life. We considered quitting ministry and going back to America. But God met us profoundly in that place of brokenness. During that time, I read this very Bible passage.

Acts 18:9-10. I felt God was saying he was not done, and his purpose to plant a church here was not over but the beginning.

I was too afraid and wounded, to believe God. God took our hands, and showed us He was with us.

First he sent people to love us. A couple named Justin and Mariah welcomed us into their home, took us on vacation and prayed and cried with us. They encouraged us and became key members in helping us start the church.

At the same time, God also sent us good news. The pastor of Yokohama International Baptist Church welcomed us and said they would like to partner with us to help us plant a new church in North Yokohama, where we lived.

And before we had even publicly announced we wanted to plant a church God sent us the largest financial gift that I have ever seen in my life to provide for the church plant.

Most encouraging of all, God bore fruit in my dear friends So's life.

Paul's story of experiencing the love and power of God in a time of weakness and brokenness is my story.

Cross Community church was planted out of brokenness and need for God's grace. I now praise God for this.

Because I have seen the immeasurable goodness of God with my own eyes. I want to testify to you all how God is saving and working in Japan.

God is mighty to save and transform in your city.

God is with us. We can trust him. We don't need to be afraid, we can and must go on speaking the good news of salvation for all. Because God has people in this city he wants to save, waiting to hear the good news.

If you remember, Paul had a different vision from Jesus many years before, when he was a persecutor of Christians. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me." And God broke him of his pride.

How different Jesus's words are to him now, "Do not be afraid, I am with you." God lifts him up from his brokenness. The same Jesus Paul opposed and hated, now pours out his grace and comfort upon him.

The grace of Jesus Christ is limitless. No matter how dead you might feel, afraid or broken, there is endless love, joy and mercy to be had from him.

Why? Because Jesus the son of God was broken for us. He was rejected and despised by men, and crucified on the cross. How could that be God's plan? Even on the cross, Jesus didn't stop speaking, he led the criminal on his side to salvation.

And instead of experiencing the comfort from God his Father, he experienced the wrath of God for all of our sins, which he carried on his shoulders. But this was God's plan. Because through Jesus being broken for us, he paid for all our sin, so that we could be made whole.

Jesus was called Emmanuel, which means "God with us."

You see, we can put our faith and trust in God because He has demonstrated that He is with us and for us in the most profound way possible at the cross.

If you feel like giving up, if you are doubting, wondering is God really with me? Then look at the cross. If you wondering can God really use someone as messed up as me? Look at the cross. I am here to testify He can and He does.

Jesus died to save you. If you haven't put your faith in Jesus Christ yet, I invite you to do so today and you will experience forgiveness of sins and new life.

Whatever you may be going through, trust God's heart, trust his commands, and trust his plan. God is with us.