

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Disciples, on the GO!

(Studies in the book of Acts)

Lessons for the Long Haul

Study #22

Introduction:

When I was a high school student in Dallas, I attended a Saturday morning Bible study taught by a retired Marine, Billy Houghton. Mr. Houghton told us, repeatedly, *“Boys, you can learn things the smart way or the hard way.”*

I’ve done it both ways. Smart is better.

- I’ve learned the hard way to not set up my tent in a major drainage area, even when it doesn’t really look like it’s gonna rain.
- I’ve learned the hard way that discount tools are worth what you pay for them
- I’ve learned the hard way how to recognize poison ivy.
- I’ve learned the hard way that sarcasm isn’t worth it and that some words can’t be unsaid.

Experience is the best teacher. And I’ve learned that I can learn from my own trial-and-error experiences, or I can learn from the experiences of others.

Can you think of life lessons you’ve learned?

Did you learn them the smart way, by listening to your parents’ wise counsel, or by observing those who have gone before?

Or did you learn by putting your hand on the stove top to see if it was hot, by trial-and-mostly-error, the hard way?

The hard way to live is to live as if nobody has faced what we’re facing or gone through what we’re going through. The smart way is to stand on the shoulders of the giants ahead of us and learn from them.

This morning, we’re going to open our Bibles, watch some giants, and learn.

Review...

We have been working our way through the book of Acts, seeing disciples on the GO for Jesus, since the Sunday after Easter. That’s a long time and we’ve seen a lot.

We’ve watched Jesus’ ascension into heaven and the wonders of the Day of Pentecost. We’ve seen jailed and martyred apostles, a scattered church and a spreading Gospel.

More recently, we’ve had front row seats to a First Missionary Journey¹ and a Jerusalem Council.²

We’ve watched a division between friends (Paul and Barnabas) result in a multiplication of ministry.³ And, we have seen Paul and some new friends wind their way through the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens on a second journey to share the Gospel.

¹ Acts 13-14: Paul and Barnabas - with John Mark as a helper - left the church at Antioch on the First Missionary Journey. They sailed first to Cyprus and then went north across the Mediterranean Sea to Asia Minor.

² At the end of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), everybody agreed that Gentiles could keep their culture AND follow Jesus, Jews could keep their culture AND follow Jesus, and that all should do all they could to avoid unnecessarily offending their brothers and sisters in Christ by their culture.

³ It was as they entered the dangerous region of Galatia that John Mark abandoned them and went back home to Jerusalem, leaving Paul and Barnabas to move inland with the Gospel, alone. For this reason, Paul didn’t want to take John Mark on the Second Missionary Journey, prompting a split with Barnabas.

Today, we continue to trace the travels of the Apostle Paul, watching what happened as he served Jesus in two cities, Corinth and Ephesus.⁴ We're going to learn the smart way and take home lessons from HIS experiences that are perfectly fit for today.

A bit different from a typical message, I'm going to start us off by simply walking us through what Luke wrote in Acts 18 and 19, highlighting details of his time in these two cities.

In Corinth (Acts 18)

First Steps (vv. 1-5)

Paul left Athens as he had spent his time there, alone and without teammates. When he landed in Corinth, he was determined that he not remain alone.

Now, it just so happened that living in Corinth at this time was a married couple, Aquila and Priscilla.

They were Jewish believers in Jesus who had been living in Rome. But when the emperor, Claudius, kicked all the Jews out of Rome,⁵ they made their way to Corinth and settled there.

When Paul got to Corinth, he found⁶ this couple (vv. 2-3), and, since he and Aquila were both trained tent-makers/leather-workers, they (Aquila and Priscilla) welcomed him (Paul) into their home.

All week long, Paul worked with his hands. But every Sabbath he would go to the synagogue to tell the Jews about Jesus.⁷ (v. 4)

⁴ Both cities, large and influential hubs of commerce and culture, were strategic locations for Christian ministry.

⁵ Claudius issued this decree because of the civil disturbances over "Chrestus" (likely a misspelling of Christ.) (roughly AD 49)

⁶ Because he was looking for them? Because they practiced the same trade? Because they just happened to bump into each other?

⁷ This was his habit throughout his ministry. 1 Corinthians 4:12 - Paul worked with his own hands to avoid being a burden to others. (also 1 Thessalonians 2:9)

Paul's tent-making days came to a halt, though, when two of his friends, Silas and Timothy, arrived in Corinth. (v. 5) These two men worked full-time PLUS to free Paul up to devote himself full-time to spreading the word.

The Long Haul (vv. 6-11)

For a while Paul spent all of his time trying to convince the Corinthian Jews that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah.

But when the Jews rejected the message, he **[6] shook out his garments**, turned away from them, and gave his attention to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

Paul went on to have a very successful ministry in Corinth, winning both Gentiles (Titius Justus) and Jews (Crispus, the leader of the synagogue) to faith in Jesus.⁸ (vv. 7-8)

Seeing Paul in Corinth gives us insight into just how human this apostle was. In all my years of reading about Paul, I've never imagined him being easily frightened.

Well, Corinth must have been pretty scary because God appeared to Paul in a night vision and told him, **[9] "Do not be afraid any longer."** Paul had been afraid. But with God's assurance of safety, he settled down for a full year and a half.

That's a pretty long time for Paul to have stayed in one place, but opposition from the synagogue eventually required him to leave.

Resistance, Rejection, Opposition (vv. 12-17)

The Jews became angry with Paul and accused him of **[13] "persuading men to worship God contrary to the Law."**

They brought their complaint to Gallio, the governor of the province. They wanted Gallio to tell Paul to stop talking about Jesus.

⁸ When he abandoned the Jews for the Gentiles, he didn't *thoroughly* abandon them. Notice that Crispus, the synagogue leader, came to Christ. (v. 8)

Gallio responded with a yawn. He wasn't interested. The matter seemed to him nothing more than a squabble over fine points of Jewish theology and he couldn't have cared less.⁹

He was so apathetic that when the mob turned their attention to a man named Sosthenes¹⁰ and started beating him, Gallio didn't even bother to stop them. (vv. 14-17)

Yes, God had promised that He would keep Paul safe in Corinth. But this riot told Paul that it was time to hit the road.

Transitions... (vv. 18-23)

A few days after this riot, Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila (notice that Priscilla is now mentioned first, probably indicating that she was the stronger of the two in ministry) left Corinth together, heading for Syria.

Along the way Paul got a haircut in the city of Cenchrea (vv. 18 - ?!)¹¹ and then they all stopped off in the city of Ephesus.

The people of Ephesus wanted Paul to stay, but he was so eager to get back to his friends in Antioch that he refused to stay.

Priscilla and Aquila did stay in Ephesus, while Paul made it to Antioch, wrapping up the Second Missionary Journey. (vv. 19-22)

In Ephesus (Acts 19)

Of course, Paul wasn't one to let grass grow under his feet. And very soon after getting back to Antioch, he left on what we know as the Third Missionary Journey.

⁹ We "get" how he might not have "gotten" the distinction between Judaism and Christianity. To a Roman, the differences between the two probably appeared less substantial than their similarities.

¹⁰ Sosthenes (see 1 Corinthians 1:1; same name and probably the same man) was a ruler of the Jewish synagogue, and evidently a recent convert to the faith.

¹¹ This is a very important detail. In Jewish culture, you would cut your hair when you made a promise/vow to God and you wouldn't cut it again until the promise was fulfilled. Paul never abandoned his Jewish, cultural roots.

He, along with Timothy and Erastus¹² (and probably Luke) went through familiar territory, passing through Galatia visiting the churches he and Barnabas had planted earlier, strengthening the Christians in those churches. (v. 23)

While Paul and his friends were traipsing around Galatia, Luke calls our attention to another man who was telling people about Jesus in Ephesus, the place Paul had just left and the place where Priscilla and Aquila stayed.

Apollos Takes some "Next Steps" (18:24-28)

The man's name is Apollos. He was an eloquent, well-educated, fervent Christian¹³ who was **[24] mighty in the Scriptures**.

He was a great teacher. But, while his teaching about Jesus was accurate, it was incomplete. He wasn't mis-informed. He was just under-informed. (v. 25)

So, Paul's friends, Priscilla and Aquila, recognizing Apollos' gifts, guts, and his gaps, pulled him aside and told him the whole story of Jesus. (v. 26)

Thus equipped, he traveled from Ephesus across the Aegean Sea to Corinth, where Paul had just been. (vv. 27-28) And the next scene finds Paul in Ephesus, where Apollos had just been.

Disciples of John Receive the Holy Spirit (vv. 1-7)

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he found the people Apollos had been teaching. These were twelve men (v. 7) Apollos had been teaching about Jesus, even though he hadn't known much about Jesus.

Essentially, these men were Jewish disciples of John the Baptist. Paul finished the job Apollos started by telling them all about Jesus.

¹² See Acts 19:22.

¹³ I take it that Apollos was a Christian when Priscilla and Aquila mentored him, or else there probably would have been mention of his receiving baptism.

They believed. He baptized them. (v. 5) Then he watched and listened as these new Christians received the Holy Spirit. (v. 6)

And, just as had happened on the other great Gospel breakthrough days - like the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and in Samaria (Acts 8), and at Cornelius' house (Acts 10) - these new believers in Jesus spoke in tongues and prophesied.¹⁴

Given such a great start to his time in Ephesus, Paul decided to stick around.

A Shifting Focus of Ministry (vv. 8-10)

As was his custom, he began by spreading the word in the synagogue. As was also customary, the audience there soon rejected Paul and his message. (vv. 8-9)

With that rejection (at about the three-month point), Paul left the synagogue and rented space in the school of Tyrannus,¹⁵ remaining in Ephesus for two solid years of very positive ministry. (vv. 9-10)

Great Progress in Ephesus for the Gospel (vv. 11-20)

Paul performs miracles (vv. 11-12)

During those two years, God used Paul to perform miracles of healing and exorcism in Ephesus. People were being set free from disease and demons. (vv. 11-12)

However, Paul's exorcisms and healings prompted jealousy on the part of some others, who wanted to do the same things.

¹⁴ Were these men already Christians or not? I think probably not, but the debate rages. This section highlights that Acts is neither a theological treatise, nor is it a book that shows what God will always do. Acts is a book that tells us what happened. Passages such as Acts 19:1-7 can be frustrating if we're trying to put together a theological system. But our systems will never fully explain all that God does or allows. As Darrel Bock says in his commentary on Acts, "*We are caught in the special situation of a transition here.*"

¹⁵ We really don't know much about what the school of Tyrannus was. A Jewish school? A Greek philosophical school?

Jewish exorcists are overwhelmed (vv. 13-16)

When they - Jewish exorcists who didn't believe in Jesus - attempted to cast a demon out in the Name of Jesus, the demon responded (!), **[19:15] "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"** - and with that, the man with the demon jumped on these seven men, overpowering them. (v. 16)

Progress in Ephesus; faith grows (vv. 17-20)

That event, and no doubt others like it, got the attention of the people in Ephesus. The Gospel spread through the city like wildfire. Lots of people were believing in Jesus.

And lots of those who believed were turning from some very dark practices that were rampant in this city. They turned from things like magic, sorcery, the occult.

They were bringing their magic books and burning them. When someone got around to estimating the value of the books and other magical paraphernalia, it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver - an enormous amount of money. (vv. 18-19)

And...it's not surprising, given the economic impact of these turnings from sin, that the book burnings also got a lot of attention. (follow the money...)

Resistance, Rejection, Opposition (vv. 23-41)

Demetrius sparks resistance against Christianity (vv. 23-27)

One of the craftsmen in Ephesus, Demetrius, was a silversmith who made shrines for the goddess, Artemis.¹⁶ He called a meeting of the idol-making guild to explain something to his friends.

¹⁶ The shrines were not to the Greek goddess, Artemis (the goddess of the hunt), but to the more overtly occult Persian mystery religion's goddess of fertility. She is usually pictured with multiple breasts or eggs all over her body.

He pointed out that if Christianity continued to grow in Ephesus, the goddess Artemis would be dishonored, having no one to worship her anymore because everybody would be worshipping Jesus AND they'd all be out of a job, because nobody would be buying their shrines. (vv. 27)

Riot in Ephesus (19:28-41)

That message sunk in quickly. Those who were involved in the idol trade rushed out, started a riot, and, not finding Paul, dragged Paul's friends into the city amphitheater.

The situation quickly escalated and got out of control. With accusations flying and the scene on the verge of violence, the town clerk called the mob to order and warned them that if they didn't settle down, there would be real problems (i.e. - from Imperial Rome).

Well, that, too, got everybody's attention and that was the end of the riot and that brings us to the end of Paul's stay in Ephesus.

Today, you and I want to learn the smart way, not the hard way. So, here at the end, we're going to stand on Paul's shoulders and learn from his experience in Corinth and in Ephesus so that we'll be better equipped to live for Jesus in San Antonio.

I'm going to highlight three items as we close, the first concerning opposition.

You and I shouldn't be surprised, in fact, we should expect, that following Jesus will be a journey into disruption and trouble, even rejection, opposition, and persecution.

Lessons Learned

Disruption

The Apostle Paul faced all of that, in Corinth, Ephesus and elsewhere, as He served Jesus.

In Corinth, he was opposed by his fellow Jews.

[12] But while Gallio¹⁷ was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat,¹⁸ [13] saying, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."

It hurts to read this. The Jews were Paul's countrymen, a touchstone of familiarity, and the people he most hoped would respond to his message about Jesus.

Instead, they brought him up on charges before Imperial Rome. They are united in their opposition to him. They accused him of something he would never dream of doing - opposing Moses.

Then, in Ephesus, Paul was violently opposed by the craftsmen of the city who started a riot aimed at getting him.

[28] When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" [29] The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. [30] And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him.

We could multiply examples like these from Paul's life because he very often suffered for Jesus. And honestly, when we look at the story of Jesus' church over time, Paul's experience is close to the historical norm.

You and I were reminded of that this summer when we watched the documentary, "The Insanity of God" at one of our Family Growth Gatherings.

¹⁷ We know a good deal about Gallio secular history. He was the son of Seneca the Elder (a well-known orator) and older brother of Seneca the younger (a philosopher). He was known to be anti-Semitic and described the Jews as an accursed race. He believed that Jews held to barbaric superstitions.

¹⁸ The *bema* was an elevated platform, about seven and a half feet high, at which judgments were made in the city.

We heard stories of believers in Central Asia, the Far East, and parts of Africa who routinely experience great suffering for their faithfulness to Jesus.

We will highlight this reality again, on November 5, when we observe the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. We'll remember then that many of our brothers and sisters around the world today suffer just because they identify as Christians. They are living Paul's experience.

Now, remember that early in his stay in Corinth, Paul was afraid. The Lord didn't say, *"Don't be afraid."* He literally said, ***"Stop being afraid."***

We're not told what prompted the fears, but for some reason, Paul, who had been stoned almost to death in Lystra, beaten in Philippi, rejected most everywhere, and ridiculed in Athens, is afraid in Corinth.

Whether these are left-over fears from previous experiences or some new, uniquely-Corinthian terror, we don't know. But the Lord spoke courage into Paul's heart.

[9] And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer,¹⁹ but go on speaking and do not be silent; [10] for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city."

Paul took the Lord's words to heart and kept on serving.

Who is to say that we who follow Jesus in America will continue to enjoy the relative goodwill we do now? As our culture changes, our experience may well begin to mirror what Christians have experienced through the centuries and what many are experiencing now.

Paul's life tells us who follow Jesus to expect disruption. He says, *"Don't let anything - an emotionally down day, a child's rebellion, a spouse's insensitivity, financial loss, physical pain, opposition - derail you from following Jesus."*

To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

And we who live to hear Jesus' ***"Well done, good and faithful servant!"*** know that serving Him will often result in disruption or inconvenience or outright rejection.

Second, I want us to notice something from Paul's time in Corinth and Ephesus about time.

Time

In Corinth, ***[18:11]...he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.***

In Ephesus, ***[19:9]...[he was] reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. [10] This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.***

That's a good, long time to stay in one place.

Most scholars believe that the First Missionary Journey lasted between two and three years. That journey consisted of nearly a thousand miles of travel on land and sea, plus visits - coming and going - to four cities that involved pioneer evangelism and church-planting.

On that first journey, Paul and Barnabas spent precious little time in any of the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

Things were different in both Corinth and in Ephesus. He stayed longer in both Corinth and in Ephesus than he did in any city on the first journey. He stayed longer in these two cities than he did in Thessalonica, Berea, or Athens.

Paul stayed in Corinth and Ephesus long enough to sink deep roots and to develop life-changing relationships. My theory is that Paul discovered that fruit comes from staying, hanging in there, going deep.

Ken and Denise Case left Northwest in April to serve Jesus in Thailand. They've passed a significant milestone in their overseas service: six months.

¹⁹ Literally, ***"stop being afraid"*** (Greek, middle imperative).

Six months is a point at which missionaries are often homesick and ready to call it quits. Ken and Denise and Bryce, Benjamin, and Brooke are staying. Watch them. They're hanging in there. Fruitfulness is coming.

When you stay, you bond with people. You learn to work through challenges, you establish deep ties.

A big part of our vision here is to be a church known for the passionate pursuit of life-changing relationships.

Imagine how well you could get to know people, how well you could serve them, how meaningfully you could impact them if you gave yourself to full engagement with them - say, in a Care Group or in a kids Sunday School class - for a few months, for two years.

The time frame says something about not being a flash-in-the-pan person, here one day, gone the next. It also speaks to how much can get done in a couple of years.

Eighteen months in Corinth. Two years in Ephesus. Two churches firmly established and **[19:10] all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.**

It doesn't take years and years to go deep with somebody, to make an impact. If you're committed to maximizing the time you have, a few weeks or months will do just fine.

A year and a half is plenty of time to establish new believers in the faith. It's enough time to plant a church.

Encuentro started one year ago. Today, it is a thriving ministry. People are coming to Jesus, families are being transformed, faith is growing.

One year ago, involvement with a dozen churches in central Chile wasn't on our radar. We are now pursuing a partnership with them, one that will involve regular trips, correspondence, training (going both ways), and prayer.

Passionately pursued for Jesus' sake, I wonder what relationships you don't even have right now might flourish over the course of the next year?

I wonder what ministry initiatives Jesus might bring to fruitfulness if we're faithful here over the next eighteen to twenty-four months - disciple-making, leadership development, launching ministries, planting churches?

Jesus has given us time. He calls us to be wise stewards of the time. And one more thing.

Teammates

When Paul took the Gospel to the city of Athens, he displayed unsurpassed ministry skills, gifts, and strategies. He gives us a brilliant example of A+ "apostling." There was...

- ...boldness - with both Jews and Greeks - and the kind of boldness appropriate to each group. There was...
- ...sensitivity to the unique needs of different people.
- ...an acute awareness of the divergent worldviews of the audience he was addressing.
- ...intimate familiarity with the secular culture of his day.

Christians who are eager to impact their world (missionaries, church planters, us!) spend long hours poring over Paul's work in Athens, looking to learn as much from his ways as possible.

However, separate from extreme ministry savvy, there was *something* about the time in Athens that Paul would never repeat. And his refusal to repeat this part of his Athens experience says volumes to us, today, about serving Jesus.

Paul stayed in Athens long enough to see a few people come to Christ, and then left, heading south, until he go to the city of Corinth.

As soon as he arrived, he looked for partners.

He quickly located a married couple - Priscilla and Aquila - who provided him housing and connection. He was soon joined in Corinth by Silas and Timothy who provided support and friendship.

He served with teammates, in community. The “Athens Anomaly” never repeated. Paul never served alone, again.

When he left Corinth, he didn’t leave alone. **[18:18] Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila.**

When he was invited to stay longer in Ephesus the first time he passed through, **[18:20]...he did not consent, [21] but taking leave of them and saying, “I will return to you again if God wills,” he set sail from Ephesus. [22] When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch.**

He was so eager (desperate?) to see his friends in Antioch that he couldn’t bear to stay in Ephesus.

Almost every letter Paul wrote is rich with reference to good friends, brothers and sisters - Timothy, Gaius, Aristarchus, Priscilla, Aquila, Luke, Silas, Apollos, Phoebe, Tychicus, Archippus, Clement, Artemas, and so many more. These friends in Jesus refreshed and energized him.

Paul’s life shouts the essentially *relational* nature of life with Jesus. And Paul’s not alone in this.

Apollos was serving in Ephesus alone when Priscilla and Aquila came along. They saw he needed some help, so, **[26]... they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.**

Notice how freely Priscilla and Aquila gave of what they had to help Apollos. Notice how graciously Apollos received their help.²⁰

Friends, this is how we grow. We accept the help of someone who wants to help us take next steps with Jesus. We take the initiative to help someone else take next steps with Jesus.

You were created by God to serve Him in community. So, here is a series of some pretty pointed question.

- With whom do you serve Jesus? Paul served Jesus with Priscilla and Aquila.
- Who helps bear your load? Silas and Timothy helped shoulder Paul’s load.
- Who are you nurturing in the faith? Paul was always looking for those younger in the faith to encourage and strengthen.
- Who is nurturing you in the faith? Apollos was a faithful and effective servant of Christ. He became more faithful and effective by the accepting the nurture of Priscilla and Aquila.
- Who encourages you? Paul was encouraged by the “many people” God placed in Corinth.

Do you have people, Christian teammates, in your life?

Yes? Great! No? Can you see how important the Encourager, the Nurturer, the Teammate would be if they were in your life? Seeing it, are you willing to pursue such relationships? Starting today?

Without teammates, we don’t live the Christian life we were designed to live. Without teammates, we’re not as effective for Jesus as we could be. Without teammates, our fiery zeal for Jesus will flicker.

Jesus intends that we serve Him with all our hearts. That kind of service rarely happens when we are “lone ranger-ing” the Christian life. If we would be “on mission” we must be “in community.”

²⁰ Being a “learn it all” rather than a “know it all.” - WSJ interview with Bill Gates and Satya Nadella (current CEO of Microsoft)