

The Setting: On Mission Wherever You Are

Summary and Goal

While on his second and third missionary journeys, the apostle Paul focused on two things: spreading the gospel and strengthening the church. Looking at parts of this ministry, we discover that God's primary calling on all of our lives is to be on His mission, regardless of what our day jobs are. As a result, we learn to see our occupations as platforms for proclaiming the gospel and discover new ways to mentor and strengthen those around us. Focusing on these two things will help us leave a legacy of faithfulness for those behind us.

Main Passages

Acts 18:1-4,24-28; 20:17-38

Session Outline

1. See your occupation as a platform for proclaiming the gospel (Acts 18:1-4).
2. Find ways to mentor and strengthen those around you (Acts 18:24-28).
3. Leave a legacy of faithfulness behind you (Acts 20:17-38).

Theological Theme

All God's people are called to live on mission wherever He has placed them.

Christ Connection

On his second and third missionary journeys, the apostle Paul saw whatever situation he was in as an opportunity for spreading the gospel and strengthening the church. His way of life reflected the selflessness and grace of Jesus, who taught us to tell the truth, help the weak, and give generously as an act of worship. Paul's endurance was a testimony to the supreme worth of Jesus Christ, the One who called him.

Missional Application

God calls us to see our earthly circumstances as opportunities to spread the gospel and strengthen the church.

Date of My Bible Study: _____

Session Plan

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? For Further Discussion

How does our present culture and technology serve to minimize human interaction?

How might this affect our evangelistic efforts?

Pack Item 3: Spirit-Led Giving

Call attention to this chart, which has Paul's tentmaking trade listed as a form of Spirit-led giving. Then ask your group the following questions:

- How does Paul's trade of tentmaking, in which he made money to provide for himself, qualify as a form of Spirit-led giving?
- What will it mean for you to consider your time, occupation, income, and resources as gifts from the Lord to be used for His purposes and glory?

Introduction

Recount the writer's story about wanting some "me" time on his flight home and how the Holy Spirit nudged him to have a conversation with the guy next to him (leader p. 154; PSG p. 119).

- ? When have you felt the leading of the Holy Spirit to share the gospel with someone? How did you respond? What happened?

Share how God wants us to see every interaction as an opportunity to spread the gospel and strengthen the church. Then summarize the session (leader p. 155; PSG p. 120).

1. See your occupation as a platform for proclaiming the gospel (Acts 18:1-4).

Ask a volunteer to read Acts 18:1-4. Highlight the reference to Paul's tentmaking trade (leader p. 155; PSG pp. 120-121).

- ? What do you see as the pros and cons of a fully-supported missionary? Of a working missionary?

Explain the rationale for Paul's tentmaking: he worked so that he wouldn't be a financial burden to the people he was discipling (leader p. 156). Discuss the providential meeting between Paul and Aquila and Priscilla, who were also tentmakers. Emphasize Paul's overarching commitment to proclaiming the gospel, which he supported through his trade (leader p. 156; PSG p. 121).

- ? How can you use your occupation as a platform for proclaiming the gospel?

2. Find ways to mentor and strengthen those around you (Acts 18:24-28).

Read Acts 18:24-28. State how Priscilla and Aquila did not see Apollos as competition but as a coworker in the gospel. Remark on Apollos' ability to use the Scriptures to preach about Jesus Christ, even though he only knew John's baptism (leader p. 157; PSG p. 122).

- ❓ How does Apollos' example challenge our excuses that we aren't ready to share the gospel with others?

Elaborate on why this scene with Apollos should encourage us on two fronts. First, the Lord can use anyone, regardless of their past and what they know or don't know. Second, we can find ways to mentor and strengthen those around us (leader p. 158; PSG p. 123).

- ❓ What are some ways you can participate humbly in the discipleship of your group?
- ❓ How have you benefited from a mentor or the encouragement of a fellow Christian?

3. Leave a legacy of faithfulness behind you (Acts 20:17-38).

Read Acts 20:17-38 (leader pp. 158-159; PSG p. 124). (Use **Pack Item 8: Paul's Life** to show that this meeting with the Ephesian elders occurred near the end of Paul's third missionary journey.)

- ❓ What parts of Paul's message to the Ephesian elders stick out to you and challenge you with respect to your faithfulness to Jesus' mission? Why?

Ask the group to consider what keeps us back from the kind of devotion to our Lord and concern for others' spiritual well-being that Paul displayed, and bring up the likelihood that we just put a higher value on other things (leader pp. 159-160; PSG p. 125).

- ❓ What would it look like to leave a legacy of faithfulness in your home? At work? In your career?
- ❓ What objections and difficulties might we need to sort through to live with a full devotion to the Lord and His gospel mission?

Conclusion

Close by stating that our primary calling is not our careers, occupations, or families—it is to be on God's mission (leader p. 160; PSG p. 126). *Apply the truths of this session with "His Mission, Your Mission"* (PSG p. 127).

Point 2 Option

Play the video "6 Simple Ways to Make Disciples Without Adding Anything to Your Schedule" with Caesar Kalinowski.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qb7_YbdaDEQ

Then ask the following questions:

- Why might we fail to make disciples on an ongoing basis?
- How did the video encourage you to become a more faithful disciple-maker?
- How are you going to integrate the six ways commended in the video into your patterns of life?

Christ Connection: On his second and third missionary journeys, the apostle Paul saw whatever situation he was in as an opportunity for spreading the gospel and strengthening the church. His way of life reflected the selflessness and grace of Jesus, who taught us to tell the truth, help the weak, and give generously as an act of worship. Paul's endurance was a testimony to the supreme worth of Jesus Christ, the One who called him.

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Missional Application: God calls us to see our earthly circumstances as opportunities to spread the gospel and strengthen the church.

Expanded Session Content

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Voices from the Church

“St. Augustine taught that all people everywhere are longing to find the true happiness that lies in the distant memory of the human race from our original intimacy with God, lost since the fall. We search endlessly for this true happiness and goodness. Christians who give others a small taste of that goodness with such inexplicable acts of kindness can jog the memory, reawaken that desire for a God who is goodness itself.”¹

—Graham Tomlin

Introduction

I was flying home from a work trip quite tired. I had been talking to others all day and was looking forward to some time by myself reading a book. Usually, there’s standard protocol when it comes to plane etiquette. When you sit down, it’s customary to nod or say a polite hello to the person next to you. You might even have some light banter while everyone is getting seated. But if you or the other person either puts in headphones or takes out a book, that’s the cue for the end of the conversation.

At least, I thought this was the standard protocol. The gentleman seated next to me apparently didn’t read the memo since he kept trying to invite me into the animated conversation he was having with the lady next to him. When he nudged me the first time, I smiled and chuckled, while keeping my earphones in and my book open. I was trying politely to educate him in the ways of airplane etiquette without being rude. He just didn’t seem to get it.

A couple hours later, and many interruptions aside, the plane began its final descent. I felt like I had some good “me” time—despite the occasional interruptions. So I decided to take my earphones out in case my neighbor still wanted to talk. He did. In fact, both of them did.

With a grin across his face, he asked me, “What are you reading anyway?” I was reading a book on missional spiritual disciplines written by my friend, but I thought that might scare him. So I just told him that I was reading a book about cultivating my spiritual life. He and his lady friend were both intrigued. So over the next fifteen minutes, we had a vigorous discussion on spirituality, idols, and what it means to be a follower of Christ.

While I was having my “me” time and trying to ignore the party boy beside me, I felt the Holy Spirit nudge me a few times. I felt like God was telling me to put the book down and talk to him, but frankly, I just didn’t want to. It wasn’t until later on in the plane ride that I finally relented and took the earphones out. And guess what happened? The guy beside me initiated the conversation, and the rest is history.



When have you felt the leading of the Holy Spirit to share the gospel with someone? How did you respond? What happened?

God wants us to see every moment and interaction of our lives as opportunities to spread the gospel and strengthen the church. Sharing the gospel is not something you add to your schedule or something that has to happen at church. Instead, sharing the gospel is something that you can do while grocery shopping, while on a run in the park, and yes, also on an airplane.

Session Summary

While on his second and third missionary journeys, the apostle Paul focused on two things: spreading the gospel and strengthening the church. As we look at parts of this ministry in this session, we will discover that God's primary calling on all of our lives is to be on His mission, regardless of what our day jobs are. As a result, we will also learn how to see our occupations as platforms for proclaiming the gospel and discover new ways to mentor and strengthen those around us. Focusing on these two things will help us leave a legacy of faithfulness for those behind us.

1. See your occupation as a platform for proclaiming the gospel (Acts 18:1-4).

Poets, plumbers, and pastors all have the same primary calling in life—to know Christ and to make Him known. It's a fallacy to think that some are called to proclaim the gospel and others are not. If you consider yourself a follower of Christ, then you must see your occupation as a means to an end rather than as an end in and of itself. Just like Paul understood, God wants you to see your occupation as a platform for proclaiming the gospel.

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.

When Paul left Athens to go to Corinth, he did it to continue to spread the gospel throughout the world. Most of the time when we read about Paul in the New Testament, it is typically about him teaching, preaching, discipling, or evangelizing. Once in a while, we hear about Paul's other occupation: tentmaking. We see it here in Acts 18:3. And in Acts 20:34, Paul shares that the work of his hands—referring to his tentmaking trade—has provided for his needs and those with him.



Further Commentary

“Corinth was the kind of city which Paul’s strategic eye discerned as a promising center for intensive evangelism, and there he settled for a considerable time. Not long after, he met a married couple, recently come to Corinth from Italy, with whom he quickly formed a firm and lifelong friendship. These were Aquila and Priscilla, ‘tentmakers’—or perhaps, more generally, leatherworkers—by trade. It was this that first apparently brought Paul into contact with them, for he himself had been apprenticed to the same trade. This trade was closely connected with the principal product of Paul’s native province, a cloth of goats’ hair called *cilicium*, used for cloaks, curtains, and other fabrics designed to give protection against wet. In Judaism it was not considered proper for a scribe or rabbi to receive payment for his teaching, so many of them practised a trade in addition to their study and teaching of the law. Paul, as a matter of policy, earned his living in this way during his missionary career.”²

—F. F. Bruce

Voices from the Church

“Every believer is called to full-time paid ministry—God just chooses to route our paychecks through different sources.”³

—Jeff Vanderstelt



What do you see as the pros and cons of a fully-supported missionary? Of a working missionary?

In 1 Corinthians 9:14, Paul shared that “the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.” But in the very next verse, he said, “I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision.” Paul then went on to say in verse 18 that though it would be okay and right for him to earn a living through the preaching of the gospel, he had been called to do it “free of charge” because the Lord was providing for him via his tentmaking business. In 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:8, we also discover that Paul’s tentmaking business required him to work night and day, all so he wouldn’t be a burden to the people he was discipling.

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he providentially met two other newcomers to the city, Aquila and Priscilla, who were also tentmakers by trade. Obviously, this was not a coincidence. As much as Paul rejoiced in the fact that he was a tentmaker and able to preach the gospel free of charge, he knew that God was the One who ultimately provided him with his daily bread and his every need.

I’m sure that *small, little* incident on the road to Damascus helped him grasp this reality (Acts 9:1-9). After being confronted by Jesus, he could not see for three days. In hindsight, while it may only have been three days, when someone who has been able to see his whole life hears the voice of God, discovers that he has been persecuting the One he should have been honoring, and then becomes blind, it makes you think twice about who is ultimately in control.

When you read through the New Testament, most would think that Paul was a full-time preacher and evangelist based on his writing and travel schedule. However, as a tentmaker, Paul lived off of whatever he worked for and earned from this business. This was not passive income or a case of living off the interest from a trust fund or endowment. Paul worked hard in his occupation but committed his entire life to proclaiming the gospel.



How can you use your occupation as a platform for proclaiming the gospel?

2. Find ways to mentor and strengthen those around you (Acts 18:24-28).

It's so easy to see everything as a competition. Whether it's trying to get in line at the grocery store before the lady down the aisle or driving in the HOV lane with a mannequin in your back seat, many of us have this incessant need and addiction to win. Unfortunately, we have also learned that in order to win, we need to push others down. We say things like "There's only one gold medal, and the silver medalist is the biggest loser" because we believe that we need to step on others to win. But that's not always the case. It's actually possible to win by helping others win.

²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. ²⁷ And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, ²⁸ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Instead of viewing Apollos as competition, Priscilla and Aquila saw him as a brother in the Lord and a coworker in the gospel. And so, they helped him "win." After all, if he was able to powerfully and eloquently use the Scriptures to preach about Jesus Christ, even though he only knew about John's baptism, how much better would he be able to proclaim the gospel after he learned from more knowledgeable believers "the way of God more accurately"?

Apollos was able to preach about Jesus Christ because he had been taught the way of the Lord, and he knew this corresponded to the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures. But something in his understanding and experience was deficient because he only knew of John's baptism of repentance, as opposed to Christian baptism in the name of Jesus (see 19:4-5). Yet even with this shortcoming, Apollos had made proclaiming this Christ to others his first priority in life; everything else paled in comparison.



How does Apollos' example challenge our excuses that we aren't ready to share the gospel with others?



Further Commentary

"Apollos's understanding of Christianity deviated in at least one important respect from the form of Christianity, based on Jerusalem, which is depicted for us in Acts: the only baptism of which he knew was the baptism administered by John the Baptist; baptism in the name of Jesus, as proclaimed by Peter on the day of Pentecost (cf. 2:38), was evidently unknown to him. It has been suggested that his 'accurate' knowledge of the story of Jesus came to him from a primitive gospel writing not unlike our Gospel of Mark; it is doubtful, however, if the word 'instructed' would be satisfied by a reading knowledge; it rather implies listening to a teacher."⁵

—F. F. Bruce

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

86. Discipleship

Discipleship is a process that takes place both formally and informally to effect spiritual maturity as people follow Jesus. Informal discipleship, as passages like Deuteronomy 6:4-9 suggest, happens everywhere, in every arena of life. Growing in our faith and deepening our walk with Christ is something that requires our whole life, not just the mind. Formal discipleship refers to periods of instruction. We make disciples through our words and actions, providing verbal instruction from God's Word and non-verbal examples through our lives (Acts 20:17-24).

Further Commentary

“This unit shows how growth can occur in the church. Priscilla and Aquila minister to and encourage Apollos in his new ministry. They instruct him. Apollos, for his part, is open to their instruction. Thus these ministers encourage each other in a task they know they share. They are aware that it is a task bigger than any one of them. This encouragement even extends to letters of recommendation so that people will be more likely to receive what he is saying. This kind of mutual cooperation and encouragement in pursuit of a theologically faithful ministry enables the church to carry out its mission. Apollos ministers even though he has more to learn. On the other hand, Priscilla and Aquila encourage him to grow even as they recognize that he is an effective minister.”⁴

—Darrell L. Bock

Voices from the Church

“Having called his men, Jesus made a practice of being with them. This was the essence of his training program—just letting his disciples follow him.”⁶

—Robert E. Coleman

May this be an encouragement to you on two fronts. First of all, understand that the Lord can use anyone, regardless of their past and what they know or don't know. God is looking for those who are faithful, who possess a humble heart, and who want to do His will whenever, wherever, and whatever. We see this in Jesus' disciples and here with Apollos.

Second, find ways to mentor and strengthen those around you. A funny thing happens when you begin pouring into the lives of others—you continue to grow! Sometimes we think that we need to grow to a certain point, memorize enough Scripture verses, or know how to refute particular arguments before we can disciple others. But this cannot be further from the truth.

Just look at Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42) or Jesus and the demon-possessed man in the region of the Gerasenes (Mark 5:1-20). After experiencing the power of Christ, both the woman and the man went and told others about Him. They did not take a class on evangelism or go to seminary. They simply went and testified about what they had experienced.

So, we should help others take their next step. Guide others into a deeper relationship with Christ and help them live out the Great Commission. You can do this one-on-one as the Lord lays individuals on your heart, or you can do this as a peer in the Bible study group that you are a part of. Or perhaps this session itself is God's call for you to step up and lead a Bible study, trusting that God will go before you and give you what you need to help others draw nearer to Him.



What are some ways you can participate humbly in the discipleship of your group?



How have you benefited from a mentor or the encouragement of a fellow Christian?

3. Leave a legacy of faithfulness behind you (Acts 20:17-38).

¹⁷ Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. ¹⁸ And when they came to him, he said to them:

“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ²² And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

²⁴ *But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.* ²⁵ *And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.* ²⁶ *Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all,* ²⁷ *for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.* ²⁸ *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.* ²⁹ *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;* ³⁰ *and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.* ³¹ *Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.* ³² *And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.* ³³ *I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.* ³⁴ *You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me.* ³⁵ *In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*"

³⁶ *And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.* ³⁷ *And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him,* ³⁸ *being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.*



What parts of Paul's message to the Ephesian elders stick out to you and challenge you with respect to your faithfulness to Jesus' mission? Why?

Think about the conversations you've had with school friends, coworkers, and family members. Moments around the bonfire, on a bus with friends, or at camp. Have you taken advantage of every single opportunity to share and proclaim the gospel to those you live, work, and play with? I know I haven't. What keeps us back from this kind of devotion to our Lord and concern for the spiritual well-being of others?

Perhaps we just put a higher value on other things. Paul, however, put his value in completing his gospel mission that he received from Jesus, and to that end, he was willing to sacrifice his own life (v. 24). Nothing mattered more to him than Jesus and sharing His gospel.

Further Commentary

"Paul encouraged people through his *presence*. The arrival of the key leader of the Gentile mission in a city must have been an event of great encouragement to the believers there, especially since the visit was made primarily to encourage them. Paul's presence was not the detached presence of a specialist who does his public ministry and then retreats to his private world. He really became one with the people, identifying with their hurts and aspirations"⁷

—Ajith Fernando



Voices from Church History

“There are two things that the gospel teaches: contrition (*poenitentia*), which is repentance of mind and life, and faith, which is founded on Christ Jesus’ death and stirs up courage (*fidutia*). Indeed these things should be proclaimed not only to Jews, but also to all Gentiles.”⁸

—Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575)



Further Commentary

“Paul’s early ministry in Ephesus is covered in Acts 19. The foundation for his work thus established by his three coworkers, Paul commenced a three-year sojourn earmarked by four major episodes...Paul could not have chosen a more strategic city in which to establish his ministerial base of operations...Land and sea trade helped establish Ephesus as the chief commercial center in the province of Asia...Ephesus and its province were critical in Paul’s network of Gentile provinces. The formation of churches in Asia tightened the link between the Greek provinces Macedonia and Achaia and Galatia. Ephesus was a free city and therefore not encumbered with the rule of on-site Roman officials. Ironically, through Rome’s regulating and unifying efforts in the Mediterranean world, the empire ensured that a traveler like Paul could embark on extensive journeys in a manner never before possible.”⁹

—Paul N. Jackson, *Biblical Illustrator*

Let’s be honest here. Most of us like our pleasures, comforts, and privileges too much to live this kind of unashamed life. We give our tithes and offerings, serve at our church, pass an Easter invitation card to a neighbor, and say to ourselves, “That’s better than most!” But it’s not!

You can’t judge your Christian walk compared to your next-door neighbor’s standards. You need to see how your life compares to the Scriptures. And when looking at the life Paul lived, the only thing that I can do personally is get on my knees and say, “Lord, have mercy. Give me the strength to stand up and unashamedly proclaim your gospel to those I live, work, and play with. Help me to stop valuing the things of this earth so much, and help me to count my life as of no value to myself. May I be about Your kingdom rather than my own. Reorient my priorities and my perspective in life.”

May this be your prayer as well.



What would it look like to leave a legacy of faithfulness in your home? At work? In your career?



What objections and difficulties might we need to sort through to live with a full devotion to the Lord and His gospel mission?

Conclusion

Your primary calling is not your career, occupation, or family. You have the same primary calling as the missionary who is leading people to Christ in central China, the janitor in your neighborhood school who walks the halls and prays for the students, the pastor in rural Kentucky who is preparing a sermon, and the investment banker on Wall Street who is struggling to figure out how his faith meshes with his morals. If you are a follower of Christ, your primary calling is to be on God’s mission proclaiming the gospel to those far from God and strengthening those around you. Let us answer that call in faith and share the good news about Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

CHRIST CONNECTION: On his second and third missionary journeys, the apostle Paul saw whatever situation he was in as an opportunity for spreading the gospel and strengthening the church. His way of life reflected the selflessness and grace of Jesus, who taught us to tell the truth, help the weak, and give generously as an act of worship. Paul’s endurance was a testimony to the supreme worth of Jesus Christ, the One who called him.