

Acts 18 - John Karmelich

1. What does a Christian do during the real difficult times in life?
 - a) We all have those periods of our lives where we feel like everything is falling apart.
 - b) It isn't just that the world is falling apart around us, it is also the feeling that no matter what we do, and nothing is getting better.
 - c) I bring this up because Paul has one of those moments in Chapter 18.
 - i) About half way through the chapter, you can sense his frustrations and feelings of failing and wanting to quit.
 - ii) The great lessons to learn in Chapter 18 is *how* Paul renews himself. That lesson is one of the great secrets to Christianity.
2. The great lesson of Chapter 18 is: Christianity was never intended to be a solo act.
 - a) Whenever I meet a "spiritually weird" Christian who has a strange doctrine. I usually find they spend too much time alone and not enough time with other Christians. This is why the Bible stresses gathering together with other believers. (2 Thes. 2:1).
 - b) In Chapter 18 we get introduced a number of new characters.
 - i) The one thing you notice about how they work together.
 - c) When Paul gets down in the dumps, it is the encouragement of his friends that picks him up and gives him the strength to move on.
 - i) We are going to read of Paul's companions re-joining him and strengthening him when he's down.
 - ii) We will read of Paul making new friends during a time when his previous companions were still back at the last place on this mission trip. This is a husband and wife team named Aquila and Priscilla.
 - a) One of the great promises of the Bible is that God will provide for all of your *needs*. (Philippians 4:19). During a time when Paul's companions were not with him, God brings new friends into Paul's life for support and companionship. That is a wonderful way God works.
 - iii) We will also read of an evangelist named Apollos. One of the great misconceptions of early church growth is that "Paul did it alone". Other people were also instrumental in spreading the Gospel. The Book of Acts focuses on Paul's ministry as an example for us, but by no means was he solely responsible for early church growth.
 - a) We will read how Apollos did not have complete knowledge of Jesus when he first met our main characters. He was trained under John the Baptist, and then lived in Egypt. "The guy didn't have the full story". We'll read of Aquila and Priscilla filling him in on the details.
 - b) The encouraging thing to learn about Apollos is that he didn't wait until he had "full-knowledge" of Jesus before he started to preach about Him. He just preached what he *did* know, and God brought people into his lives to help him grow further.
 - d) Therefore, what we have in Chapter 18 is a whole bunch of people working together for the purpose of glorifying God through Jesus. They encouraged each other. They taught each other. They financially supported each other. Christianity is a team effort.

- e) Part of not being a "solo-gig" is also the dependence and encouragement from God himself to have persistence during the tough times.
 - i) We are going to read of God himself giving Paul a vision during this time. Think about all the rough things Paul has been through just in the past few chapters. Ask yourself why did God pick this moment in Paul's life to give him a vision of encouragement?
- 3. Chapter 18, Verse 1: After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.
 - a) After what? Remember that the chapter breaks were added centuries after the text was written. We last left Paul leaving Athens. Athens was the philosophical, educational and intellectual capital of the ancient world. Paul got up and used superior wisdom to show the futility of their religion and give a wonderful presentation for the true and living God. What happened? Not much. Only a few converts and no new church.
 - i) I surmise this from reading Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that Paul left Athens feeling rejected. He gave it his best effort and had little success.
 - a) "I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling." (1 Corinthians 2:3 NIV)
 - ii) From the same letter, you will notice Paul changes his attitude about preaching. He no longer focuses on trying to out-smart people, but simply preach the Gospel and let God worry about the results.
 - a) "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Cor. 2:22-24,NIV)
 - b) Notice that Paul left alone. Silas and Timothy were still back in Macedonia working on the setting up and supporting the churches in Thessalonica and Berea.
 - c) I should talk a little about Corinth before we move on. If Athens was the intellectual capital of the ancient world, Corinth was the "sin" capital. It was the sleaziest aspects of Las Vegas, Bourbon Street in New Orleans, the "red-light" district of Amsterdam and worst parts of Bancok all rolled into one.
 - i) The chief god of Corinth was Diana. At her temple were a 1,000 male and female prostitutes (think the worse!) who offered their service to local residents to help "stimulate" Diana. Diana was the god of sensuality.
 - a) In ancient Greek plays, the stereotype of a Corinthian was a pleasure-seeking drunk.
 - ii) Try to keep this in mind the next time you read Paul's two letters to the Corinthians and realize what type of background the church worked within. Imagine trying to have a church with *this stuff* going on in the background! The growth of that church shows the emptiness of the Corinthian lifestyle and the desire for something better.
 - iii) Corinth was also a good location for a city. It was located on a peninsula between two large bodies of water. Archeologists even found evidence of a train-like device that carried small boats over the land-peninsula from one body of water to the other as opposed to making the rough trip around the peninsula.
 - a) The City was destroyed approx. 50 years earlier in wars between Greeks and Romans. During Caesar's reign, Corinth was completely rebuilt.
 - b) Corinth was also a large city. It was estimated that the population was about 200,000. Athens in comparison was about 20,000 (Source – Bible Expositor's Encyclopedia).

4. Verse 2: There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them,³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.
- a) Here we get introduced to Aquila and Priscilla. They are only mentioned in Chapter 18. They were such an influence on Paul's life that they are also mentioned in 3 of Paul's letters.
 - b) Commentators debate about whether Aquila and Priscilla were Christians *prior* to meeting Paul, or whether they were converted by Paul during this time they hung out together. The text doesn't say, so we can only speculate.
 - c) Claudius was the Emperor of Rome at this time. There are some historical records of him giving the order for all Jews to leave Rome. The date of this order is about AD 49 or 50. There are 2 theories for this expulsion. The Roman Historian Suetonius said that some guy named "Chrestus" was causing an uprising among the Jews in Rome. He wrote this 70 years after the event, and some believed it referred to Christ. Remember in Acts Chapter 2, some of the people who received gift of tongues were from Rome, and presumably, returned there and spread Christianity.
 - d) What *is* interesting is how God is working in the background:
 - i) Here is Paul feeling dejected after his rejection in Athens.
 - ii) All of a sudden, Paul meets another person with a Jewish background like himself, who *also* is a tentmaker like Paul.
 - iii) Notice how God provides friends when no others were around!
 - iv) I lean toward the theory that Aquila and Priscilla were converted by Paul. They were living and working with him day and night. If they were already Christians, then Paul's life stories must have been an influence for them to become missionaries like Paul.
 - v) In Paul's letters, he refers to Aquila and Priscilla as "his fellow workers in Christ" (Romans 16:3). They travel with Paul and form a home church in another city (1 Corinthians 16:19). Thus Paul's friendship encouraged Aquila and Priscilla to become ministers themselves.
5. Verse 4: Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.
- a) Paul still did what came natural to him. He hit the synagogue trying to convert those who attended there. During the week he made tents. Come Saturday, he was the guest preacher!
 - i) I suspect spending the weekdays with Aquila and Priscilla renewed Paul's strength and encouragement. It gave Paul a chance to talk about his life, his visions from God, the missionary journeys, the physical pain and life threatening incidents he has been through. Sometimes just talking those issues helps us to put things in perspective and give us the encouragement to move on.
6. Verse 5: When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.
- a) No more tent making for a while. It was time for Paul to do full time preaching and teaching. What was it about Silas & Timothy getting into town that changed Paul from part-time to full time preaching and teaching?

- i) Seeing Silas & Timothy again, and hearing their reports about the growth of the Macedonian churches renewed Paul. Paul confirms it in his first letter to the Thessalonians:
 - a) "But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you." (1 Thessalonians 3:6 NIV)
 - b) Silas and Timothy also provided an offering to free Paul up so he could preach full time. "And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so." (2 Cor. 11:9 NIV)
 - b) One of the themes I see in this chapter is the importance of friendship and working together as a team. We are not all called to be "Paul's" and be in the charge. Some of us are called to encourage, be financial supporters and simply pray for each other.
- 7. Verse 6: But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."
 - a) Here we go again. Those of the Jewish synagogues who didn't believe the gospel became abusive.
 - b) Here is where Paul "lost-it" as we say today. He just got fed up with the attacks, the rejections, the physical pain, the torture, and the arrests. Paul focused on the pain, and not on God, and thus he placed this curse on the synagogue.
- 8. Verse 7: Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. ⁸ Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.
 - a) You have to find it funny that Paul places this curse on the synagogue, and then where does he go? "All the way" to next door! Paul stayed at the house adjacent to the synagogue. Close enough to still be an influence.
 - b) Verse 8 mentions that the ruler of the synagogue, and his household became Christians. Why did Luke mention this?
 - i) God wanted to show Paul that despite what Paul's "pity-party" God is still working on convicting some of the Jews in the area.
 - ii) I also think, (but can't prove) this verse was shown to keep Christians from being too anti-Semitic. Let's say the Verse 6 (the "curse-verse") was there, but no mention of any other Jews being saved. Some people would then use that as an excuse to attack Jews, as they are "Biblically cursed". This view is flat out wrong and simply un-Biblical. Showing the additional people getting saved *after* that statement is there in support that God has not turned his back on the Jewish people. (For a further study of this, read Romans, Chapters 9-11).
- 9. Verse 9: One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."
 - a) Here's the verse to underline and keep for memory. Think of the implications. This means that God sent Paul a vision just to encourage him. (Remember Paul didn't have a New Testament to read all the promises!). God *didn't* send any vision during Paul's time in jail, the beatings, being chased out of cities. But God sends one now. Why? Paul was down.
 - b) God was telling Paul, "Don't worry Paul, nobody is going to try to kill you in this city. I've picked you to tell people the Good News about Jesus. Cheer up and get going!"

- c) There is another implication. God says: "I have many people in this city".
 - i) What does that mean? It refers to people who are unsaved at this point. God knows all things. He knows *in advance* who is going to choose God and who isn't. God works through us to reach those people.
 - ii) Remember that we're in Corinth. The sleaze-capital of the ancient world. God has people in Corinth, just as God has people today in Las Vegas, in the immoral hot spots of the world. Ever wonder why God doesn't destroy some of those places? Because he knows in the end those things don't satisfy a person, and many of those people will come to God. (See also 2 Peter 3:9.)
 - a) "But he (God) is waiting (for the judgement day), for the good reason that he is not willing that any should perish, and he is giving more time for sinners to repent." (2 Peter 3:9b, The Living Bible)
- 10. Verse 11: So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.
 - a) That's Paul. God told him to stick around. Paul stays here 18 months.
 - b) How does Paul reach these people? Verse 11: "Teaching them the Word of God".
 - i) That's how you get people to be strong, devout Christians. Not by winning them over with great convincing speeches or good marketing plans. Just teach them the Word of God.
- 11. Verse 12: While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. ¹³ "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law."
 - a) Gallio is the Roman "governor" of this region. Achaia is the name of the region that includes Corinth. Apparently he came to power some time during this 18 months. Gallio is also famous in Roman history. He personally tutored the next Caesar, which was Nero. He was highly respected by Roman historians.
 - b) Some time during those 18 months, the Jews who opposed Paul made a new plan. They thought "Hey, we have a new governor in charge. Lets test this guy out and see if we can get Paul thrown out on legal grounds.
 - c) In verse 18, the opposition said Paul is "persuading people...contrary to the "law"
 - i) The "law" probably refers to Roman law. The Roman Empire had a list of "officially approved religions", amongst which is Judaism. They were arguing that Paul was teaching an illegal, new religion and thus, had to be stopped.
 - ii) Some commentators say that this is a reference to Jewish "law" and that Gallio was familiar enough with Judaism to understand their argument. In Verse 15, Gallio rules in favor of Paul and says he will not judge matters of "your law". Thus the argument that this verse refers to Jewish law.
 - iii) Its just one of those things commentators love to debate about where I have yet to see how either view makes a difference to my life as a Christian. ☺
- 12. Verse 14: Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. ¹⁵ But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law--settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things." ¹⁶ So he had them ejected from the court.
 - a) The first thing to notice is that Paul didn't even have to make a defense. Gallio threw the case out *prior* to Paul's argument. Gallio is saying that this is a religious issue over interpretation of the Old Testament. Since Gallio is stating that Paul is simply teaching a different form of Judaism, and Judaism is an accepted religion in Roman Law, there is no violation of the law.

- i) This is actually a major victory for Paul. It now meant that Paul had a legal precedent to preach Christianity. The court has ruled it is an "official" religion.
 - ii) The modern application is our constitutional view of "separation of church and state". The state should not be involved in the *affairs* of religion, so long as they are not violating other laws (violence, oppression, etc.)
 - iii) I personally like to think of Christianity as an offshoot of Judaism, like this judge did. We worship the same God. The God of the Old Testament is the same God of the new. A common buzzword in American Christianity is a "completed Jew", as you accept the completed work of Jesus to fulfill the requirements of the laws as taught in the Old Testament.
 - b) Now let me re-quote verses 9 and 10 with this incident in mind. "Do not be afraid (Paul); keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."
 - i) Paul was afraid (verse 9). God stated no one is going to harm you. God kept that promise here in Verse 14. Again, Paul didn't even have to make a defense.
 - a) "Most of the things we fear in life never actually come to pass" (Source unknown).
13. Verse 17: Then they (Jewish opposition) all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio showed no concern whatever.
- a) The Jews who lead the charge against Paul were so angry about what happened, they beat up Sosthenes. I suspect they said something like "This is your fault Sosthenes. It was your idea to bring Paul into this court. Now the Romans will accept the followers of Jesus as a legal religion. You ruined everything."
 - i) You'll remember back in verse 8 that Crispus was the synagogue ruler, who became a Christian. Sosthenes was probably his replacement.
 - b) The interesting thing is that after this beating, Sosthenes also became a Christian. We know this in Paul's opening verse of his first letter to the Corinthians:
 - i) "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes," (1 Cor. 1:1 NIV)
 - ii) Personally, I don't recommend physical assault as a method of evangelism, but it seemed to work in this case! ☺
 - iii) What I suspect happened is, Sosthenes saw the hypocritical attitude of the Jews. They profess love of fellow Jews (Leviticus 19:18), yet, here they were beating this guy up after he lost the case.
 - a) Remember that when you are telling others about Jesus. Your actions speak a lot louder than any speech.
 - b) When we make a mistake and those around us (say, our neighbors) are aware of it, simply apologize. You would be surprised how good of a witness it is to say, "I should have done this..."
 - c) Verse 17 said, "But Gallio showed no concern whatever."
 - i) Why didn't Gallio care about this beating? Some commentators speculate that Gallio was angry that these guys even brought Paul to him on trial in the first place, and was "teaching them a lesson".
 - ii) I suspect it is further application of God's promise to Paul in Verse 9 that "no one will harm you in Corinth!"

- d) This verse has a controversy if you read the King James or New King James Version. Those versions imply that "Greeks" beat up Sosthenes. It implies it was more of an anti-Semitic violent attack.
 - i) Most of the other translations (NASB, NIV, NRSV) lean toward the original argument that the Jewish leaders beat him up. Most commentators I read lean toward the modern translations.
 - ii) Again, its not a major issue, but the modern version supports the facts of the story better (in my humble opinion, that is! ☺)
- 14. Verse 18: Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken.
 - a) Corinth is in Greece. Syria is just north of Israel. Paul was heading home to end his second missionary journey. Priscilla and Aquila were traveling with him. It appears Silas and Timothy are staying behind to strengthen the new church in Corinth.
 - b) What's the deal with Paul having his hair cut?
 - i) Most commentators believe this is a "Nazirite Vow". It can be found in Numbers Chapter 6, Verses 1-21. In summary, it is a personal vow made to God, usually out of gratitude. You shave your head, and don't cut it again, until you can offer a sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem. It also involves not drinking any wine during this time period, among other things.
 - ii) Why would Paul do this? Didn't Paul preach keeping the law is not necessary?
 - a) This is more about culture than it is custom. Paul was still a Jew. This was not a requirement, just something he wanted to do to show gratitude to God for the vision God gave him in Corinth and protecting him from harm. (Source of this opinion: Barklay, et.al.)
 - b) There is nothing wrong with doing something special, say to another person, just to show your gratitude to God for something He did in your life. The key is your attitude. The danger is not to do it out of obligation or "pay-back" to God. Simply a free-will way to say thank you.
 - iii) Part of requirement is that it does not end until you make your sacrifice at the Temple. With that bit of information, you will notice the urgency of Paul to get to Jerusalem on the rest of this missionary trip.
- 15. Verse 19: They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.²⁰ When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined.²¹ But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus.
 - a) Paul is going to spend a lot of time in Ephesus in Chapter 19. Ephesus is roughly due east of Greece, across the Aegean Sea, into what-is-today Turkey.
 - b) It appears Priscilla and Aquila stayed in Ephesus, as Paul went alone into the synagogue. We will get back to Priscilla and Aquila in Verse 26.
 - c) Paul received a positive reception at the synagogue. I'm sure it was tempting of Paul to skip his vow and stay for a while. God will test you that way sometimes. Even if Paul taking the Nazirite Vow was not necessary, God expects you to *keep* whatever vow you make to him, no matter what the cost. It is a matter of integrity before God and your fellow man.
 - i) "That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth. (Deuteronomy 23:23 NKJV)

16. Verse 22: When he (Paul) landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.
 - a) Caesarea is the port-town closest to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is higher in elevation. Thus Paul went "up" to greet the church and then "down" to Antioch.
 - b) Antioch was the home base of Paul and the Gentile church.
 - c) Thus ends the 2nd Missionary Journey. The 3rd begins in the next verse.
17. Verse 23: After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.
 - a) As the 3rd Journey begins, Paul apparently set out alone. He focused on going back to the locations he had visited on his previous two trips to strengthen those churches.
 - i) The heart of a missionary isn't just to win converts, but to strengthen and mature fellow Christians.
 - ii) Remember my theme of this lesson on the first page. Christianity is not a solo act. We all work as a team to support fellow Christians using our God-given talents and passions.
18. Verse 24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.
 - a) The focus of the Book of Acts ignores Paul for a few verses and focuses on Apollos. When we get to Chapter 19 this will become more clear as to why. Remember that the original Book of Acts did not have any chapter breaks.
19. Verse 25: He (Apollos) had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.
 - a) Here was this guy Apollos.
 - i) He was a Jew with a Greek name and was from Alexandria, Egypt. (Verse 24).
 - ii) He knew his Old Testament (Verse 24).
 - iii) He had a gift for public speaking (Verse 25).
 - iv) He only knew about Jesus based on what John the Baptist taught. Apparently he was around Israel during the days of John the Baptist. He probably only knew of the "coming Messiah", or possibly some of Jesus' earthly ministry.
 - b) There is a great application for all Christians based on this verse:
 - i) You don't have to be a seminary graduate to preach Jesus.
 - ii) Apollos only had limited knowledge of Jesus. Did that stop him? No he just preached what he did know, and when he got further instructions, he preached what he knew at that point.
 - iii) Don't let your limited knowledge of the Bible hold you back from teaching others about Jesus. God is always looking for availability, not ability. That is why God is using Apollos. That is why God *gave* him the gift of being a good orator.
 - a) But you say, I'm not a great speaker (That's the excuse Moses gave!). First of all, walk in faith. God may use you anyway. Or, if you have some other gift from God, (writing for example! ☺) use that!
20. Verse 26: He (Apollos) began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.
 - a) Pastors like to use this verse for Biblical support for the idea of inviting pastors (like Apollos) home for dinner after church! ☺
 - b) Give Apollos credit for being teachable. Despite his popularity, he was willing to learn more about Jesus.

- c) Notice how God works. For whatever reason, Priscilla & Aquila become Christians in Corinth under Paul's teaching. They pick up their tent making business and decide to travel with Paul. They further decide to stay in Ephesus and not travel with Paul further to Jerusalem (remember they were Jews). Now God uses them to teach Apollos.
21. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. ²⁸ For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.
- a) Apollos probably went to Corinth. Corinth a city in the region of Achaia. We surmise that fact as Apollos is latter recognized as a leader in the church of Corinth in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. (1 Corinthians 1:12)
 - b) Here is Apollos, a man with great knowledge of the Jewish Scripture, and previously, his only knowledge of Jesus was through the ministry of John the Baptist. Look how far God took him in only a short period of time. God used his gifts of Scripture knowledge and public speaking to encourage believers in Achaia and to defend Christians in public debates in Verse 28.
22. The "big picture" to see in this chapter is how God works *through* Christians working inter-actively. Each Christian had their own strengths and weaknesses and individual talents. By cooperating as a team, God uses our zeal, our God-given abilities and interests to grow the church.
- a) If Apollos continued to work by himself, he would have never learned the whole story about Jesus.
 - b) Paul was discouraged and fearful early in the chapter. Encouragement from his friends gave him the strength and courage to move forward.
 - c) Priscilla and Aquila, who are mostly background characters, are just as important to God as speakers just as Paul and Apollos. It is working interactively that God can use us to Glorify Him!
23. OK, all done at 9 ½ pages. I'm cutting it short today. I thought I'd make up for running way too long the last few chapters. ☺
24. Let's Pray: Father, We, look back on our lives, and we see the obvious ways how you have miraculously worked in our lives. Yet, we still make the mistake of focusing on our problems, and not on you. Like Paul and his companions, help us to work in unity, as a team, to lift each other up, help one another and focus on the specific ministry you have called for each one of us. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.