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By the Book™ A Chapter by
 Chapter Bible Study Series from
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Let's Begin

All of us experience, at one time or another, just giving up and quitting. Perhaps the pressures of daily life or difficulties deep in the spirit have you to the point of saying "I think I will quit." Paul was experiencing similar emotions in his own heart.

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he went through a period of depression and despair in his own ministry. He later wrote about it, "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). Those words seem to reveal the state of mind and the atmosphere of his heart and spirit at that particular time.

What are Christians to do when they feel like quitting? Let's keep the question before us as we explore Acts 18. And, to guide us, let's observe the following outline:

- I. The Security of Our Faith (vv. 1-17)**
- II. The Support of Our Family (vv. 18-28)**

I. The Security of Our Faith (vv. 1-17)

Paul was tired. In the earlier verses of chapter 18 we discover Paul was not only preaching the Gospel incessantly, but he was also working to support himself by tentmaking. So by day he was making tents with Aquila and Priscilla, but by night he was preaching the Gospel. In fact, verse 5 says, "Paul was pressed in the spirit." Literally you could translate that, Paul was "wholly absorbed" in preaching. Paul was worn out—working all day, preaching all night.

Of course we know that's true. When one gets a little down physically, not having enough sleep, irregular meals, etc., it's easy to get down. The condition of the physical body can affect the emotions and the spirit. So, Paul suffered *fatigue*.

Also, Paul probably suffered *failure* at this particular time. Keep in mind he had walked about 50 miles, going from Athens to Corinth. Along the way he had time to think about what he had just gone through in Athens. There were some results in his ministry in Athens, but for the most part, his results seemed to be very meager there.

In fact they had called him a bird brain in Athens. They basically said, "Let's see what this seed picker has to say." Engaging the world with the Gospel is no easy-street task. Every true man of God catches a glimpse of the magnitude of the ministry. Furthermore, he finally grasped the tremendous gravity of the responsibility God had given him to preach the Gospel. Therefore, he inevitably knew what it was to go through a sense of failure in his life.

Someone said the slights Paul experienced by the derision and scorn of the people of Athens hurt his spirit more than Roman rods or Jewish stripes ever hurt his flesh.

So perhaps a sense of failure plagued his heart. When failure seems to grip you and lays hold of your spirit you may say, "I think I'll just quit." Paul knew then what you're experiencing now.

Reflection Connection

Do you think it takes special skills to engage certain groups of people with the Gospel? Why or why not?

Finally, not only was Paul experiencing both *fatigue* and a sense of *failure*, but he also faced *frustration* as he arrived at Corinth. Corinth was unlike any place Paul had seen up until that time. Athens was much smaller and was full of idols, but Corinth was a thriving metropolis of 700,000 people and full of immorality.

One can say Corinth was the *Vanity Fair* of the ancient world, a city given to sports, the stage, and sexual perversion. In the temple dedicated to Aphrodite, a thousand sacred prostitutes plied their trade. In fact it



was so immoral they used the verb “to corinthianize” to describe any person who was depraved in their character. It was to this city that Paul came with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In one sense the challenge Paul faced in Athens pales in comparison to the challenge he faced at Corinth.

Was God punishing Paul for his failure? No. God knows what is better for us than we could ever know for ourselves. Paul did not need a tender touch of pity from God. Instead Paul needed to see the Holy Spirit was in control. If Paul watered, the Holy Spirit would take care of the increase.

Also, God spoke precisely when and what Paul needed to hear. He always comes when we need Him most. Whether it’s Moses in the desert, Isaiah in the temple, Jesus in the garden, or Paul at Corinth—God gives the word at precisely the right time.

Luke records God’s special word to Paul, “Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city” (vv. 9-10). In essence, God told Paul to cease fearing, continue speaking, and to stop thinking about quitting!

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God gave Paul *three promises* to get him through. The promises are for us as well.

First, God gave the promise of His presence. He said, “I am with thee” (v. 9). This promise is very personal. Indeed the promise is to every believer (cp. Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5).

Others may abandon us. Unfortunately, the abandonment we experience might include friends, family, or even children. God says, “I am with thee.” A promise like that is very powerful, a motivator to move us forward in both failures and sorrows. In fact when God says, “I am with thee,” we are able to overcome even our fear of death (cp. Psa. 23:4). Quit? No way! Because the Lord is with us!

The second promise God gave was His protection. He told Paul, “no man shall set on thee to hurt thee.” Paul knew what physical danger was. More than once he’d felt the lashes of a whip and the oozing of his blood from stoning. In our day, there are many things to cause us to be afraid. It could be the bad economy, lack of employment, failing banks, terrorist threats, depression, hurricanes, or any number of frightening circumstances. Nevertheless God promises His protection in it all.

The third promise God gave was His potential. God clearly revealed to the apostle, “I have much people in this city.” God owned the harvest; it belonged to Him. Paul may have forgotten that back when he was in Athens, where few people responded to the Gospel, and multitudes ridiculed him for preaching.

Genuine results were in God’s hands, not in Paul’s giftedness or skill. Paul learned his lesson well, later writing back to Corinth these insightful words, “And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:3-4). Armed with God’s

Reflection Connection

Reflect upon the last time you recall being discouraged in your Christian life. Did you think about quitting? What means did God use to encourage you to carry on? Be specific. If possible, share some of the circumstances with the entire group.



promise, Paul learned no situation is too hard for God. Many people were in Corinth who would believe on Christ. Quit? No way! The sure promises of God secured Paul in the faith and guaranteed the Gospel's success in Corinth.

II. The Support of Our Family (vv. 18-28)

The security of our faith keeps us from quitting. However, there's a second resource which also strengthens us in our moments of fatigue, fear, and frustration — the support of our family. Paul met a beautiful, supportive family upon arriving at Corinth, “[He] found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers” (vv. 2-3). Though unknown to Paul at the time, Aquila and Priscilla would be lifelong co-laborers in the Gospel.

Reflection Connection

Do you think the church places enough emphasis upon the family? Why or why not? What ways would you suggest for the church to help strengthen the family?

The Bible teaches Christianity is to be a family affair (cp. Acts 16:31; Mark 5:19). If Christianity is not lived at home, it is probably not lived anywhere else. Three other times Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned in the New Testament (Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19). From these references, we discover *three needs* for today's family household.

First, today's family household needs to be a Christian household. From what we gather, Aquila and Priscilla were prominent citizens. She was probably a Roman while he was definitely Jewish. Of interest also is the fact the Priscilla appeared to be more prominent. She seemed to be strong in spiritual matters.

Upon the emperor's edict to restore the ancient Roman religion, Aquila and Priscilla had to uproot and find another place to live. It was a time of real crisis. Some families fall apart during crisis. Difficulty divides them. Yet, the family built on faith is the family that refuses to divide during difficulty. Instead they bond tighter still, becoming more durable instead of divided.

Aquila and Priscilla's move was under the direction of God. Though they did not know it at the time, He planned for them to settle in Corinth and to meet the Apostle Paul. Being tentmakers as well, Paul felt right at home with them. His stay changed their lives forever, “And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (v. 11). Aquila and Priscilla became the catalyst for untold numbers of souls coming to Christ. We have no idea how many churches this family started in their home. Their home was a Christian home, the kind of home today's family needs.

Second, today's family household needs to be a concerned household. As we observe the portrait the New Testament paints of Aquila and Priscilla the evidence of their concern is unmistakable. We can see the *companionship* of their work. Paul calls them “helpers in Christ” (Rom. 16:3). Tentmaking was a sideline, a part-time job. The main business of their life was to work for Jesus.

Aquila and Priscilla not only moved with Paul to Ephesus, but also appeared to lay groundwork for Paul's mission there. Undoubtedly they led in evangelistic efforts, sharing the Gospel with whomever they met. And, upon Paul's arrival



Reflection Connection

What is the main business of your life? Are you a part-time Christian with a full-time job, or are you a full-time Christian with a part-time job? Explain.

back to the city, it was ripe for revival! It's almost impossible to overestimate the need for concerned families. The church needs concerned households to share the work for Jesus and until Jesus returns. A question we all should ask is, is our family household a Christian household, a concerned household?

In addition to the *companionship* of their work, we can see the *communion* of the Word. Here Luke's description, "And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (vv. 24-26). From this incident, we learn Aquila and Priscilla evidently had been tutored by Paul himself.

Though Apollos obviously was steeped in the Scriptures the couple immediately detected an inadequacy in his Biblical theology. Under Paul's guidance they became scholars themselves. In addition, they handled the situation properly, taking Apollos "aside and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." Observe further: Apollos was willing to learn. How common for Christians

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today to resist even the most gentle corrections to their beliefs. Apollos became a great preacher. Much of his success can be attributed to Aquila and Priscilla. The courage of their witness is hardly equaled among New Testament saints (Rom. 16:4).

Third, today's family household needs to be a church household. Aquila and Priscilla possessed a *simplicity* of church life: "The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house" (1 Cor. 16:19). They opened their home to the church of Jesus Christ. For them, their family extended far beyond biological ties. The church was their household; the church was their family. They may have had little money but what they had they gave — a house in which the church could meet. The sincerity displayed by this simple sacrifice is remarkable. Everywhere they went they had a church in their house. They allowed their home to be used for the Gospel. We need families today to make Christianity a household matter.

Golden Greek Nugget

In verse 9, Luke records God's intervention in Paul's life, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace." In the Greek, the first two verbs are imperfect, which could be translated as, "stop continuing being afraid, but continue on speaking." It's as if Paul's spirit was twirling around within, driven by fear. He may have been fearful for his life, making God's promise in verse 10 vivid and needed, "no man shall set on thee to hurt thee."

Wrap Up

All of us have thought about quitting at one time or another. As we've gone through Acts 18, perhaps a sense of disappointment, discouragement, or perhaps defeat has virtually overcome you. Don't quit! God's presence is with you. You can continue because of the security of your faith and the support of your family.

