

## Mission Possible

### **“No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problem”**

Acts, Chapter 18

---

Life's relentless pounding on us has a way of catching up with us all at once in ways that we didn't see coming. In Acts, chapter 18, we see that Paul the mighty apostle had a similar experience as he entered the city of Corinth.

Acts 18:1 NLT

*“Then Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.”*

Everything was starting to catch up with Paul. He was tired after walking 2500 miles preaching the Gospel for five years all over the region. He was alone, beaten, and overwhelmed, and was starting to get afraid. Fear was coming over him like a virus, even though he had seen God move in so many miraculous ways.

1 Corinthians 2:3 AMPC

*“And I was in [passed into a state of] weakness and fear [dread] and great trembling [after I had come] among you.”*

Paul had given and given and given. He had been poured out like a drink offering - he was drained. He might have neglected his “inner garden” on the altar of ministry and serving, or maybe he lacked a sense of God's presence and closeness in this time. We, too, can be so busy, overwhelmed, distracted, and consumed by what we have going on - even if it's “good” things - that we lose sight of the presence of God. It can all start to catch up with us.

At that time, Corinth was the main shipping thoroughfare in the Roman Empire. Everything and everyone came through *Corinth*. It was also home to the temple of Aphrodite, which promoted and glorified sexual immorality above any other city in the Roman Empire. It was corrupt, dark, perverted, and completely given over to wickedness. It was a demonic principality and stronghold.

Paul was affected by the spiritual atmosphere there, as are we affected by the spiritual environments we find *ourselves* in. At this point, Paul's life was like a country music song - “*His truck broke down, he was out of money, and the bad guy was against him.*” But, God had another country response to what Paul was experiencing (as Kenny Chesney sang), “*No shoes, no shirt, no problem!*”

God says to us, *“No shoes, no shirt, you’re afraid, you’re broke down, you’ve got nuthin’ - no friends, no job - no problem, I’ve got this!”* In the same way, God gave Paul exactly what he needed in the most unlikely place and circumstances to revive him and make him more effective than he had ever been before. God will do the same thing for us if we’ll just *cling* to him rather than lose heart. *“No shoes, no shirt - no problem!”*

Like Peter, who got out of the boat and walked on water, as he got his eyes on the wind and waves, he became afraid and started to sink. Paul was feeling like *he* was sinking after having been successful, until Jesus stretched out his hand and lifted him up, and he’ll do the same for us right where we are today.

God was getting ready to pour into Paul by bringing him three things: the right people around him, provision for his needs, and a fresh encounter with the presence of God that would strengthen him for the rest of his life. God promises that he will bring the breakthrough to us before our circumstances can break us, if we will just cling to him.

Galatians 6:9 AMP

*“Let us not grow weary or become discouraged in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap, if we do not give in.”*

Paul didn’t try to compensate for his weakness and vulnerability with bravado, showiness, or false confidence. He did the right thing by doubling down on the basics.

1 Corinthians 2:1,2 NKJV

*“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*

Acts 18:1-3 NLT

*“Then Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had left Italy when Claudius Caesar deported all Jews from Rome.”*

At his lowest moment, Paul was joined with new companions, Priscilla and Aquila, an amazing couple who had just themselves been deported from Rome and found their way to Corinth after losing their home and everything they owned. They came around Paul to strengthen and encourage *him*, and Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was.

Priscilla & Aquila were a God-send to Paul. They were not pastors but were a special couple - a dynamic duo of lay people. Emperor Claudius had enacted a racist purge of Jews from Rome in AD 49 after riots surrounding the subject of "Chrestos". Likely, they and others had been at Pentecost and brought news back to their synagogue about Jesus and the Holy Spirit, sparking riots. God showing up in power in your life doesn't smooth the road but will put it on-purpose for the first time!

1 Corinthians 16:19 NKJV

*"The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house."*

Aquila and Priscilla were involved - serving, facilitating, supporting what God was doing.

Romans 16:3,4 NKJV

*"Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus who risked their own necks for my life..."*

They were now back in Rome, restored to their former home and positions. God brought Paul people because *"it's not good for man to be alone!"* We need people whom God sends us like he did for Moses when he was overwhelmed with the responsibilities of leadership. (Numbers 11:11,14,15). The enemy wants to isolate us - to get us alone and thinking crazy thoughts. God wants to bring us around godly people at key times, and we need to be alert to recognize them when they come.

God doesn't intend for us to bear our burdens alone - that's *our choice* if we do. God's ready to surround us with people who will breathe life - *his life* - into us, but we have to open ourselves up to it and ask God for it, not to complain or grumble, but to say, *"I believe that this is what You want to give us."* He also wants us to ask, *"Lord, who do You want to send me to?"* We might have our own stuff going on but God still wants us to be an encouragement to somebody else. If we're not available then they can't get what *they* need, but first we have to ask God to tell us who that person is.

Acts 18:4-5 NKJV

*"Each Sabbath found Paul at the synagogue, trying to convince the Jews and Greeks alike. And after Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul spent all his time preaching the word. He testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah."*

Silas and Timothy brought a massive offering to Paul which freed him up to preach the Gospel.

2 Corinthians 11:8,9 NLT

*"I robbed other churches by accepting [more than their share of] financial support for my ministry to you. And when I was with you and ran short [financially], I did not burden any of you; for what I needed was fully supplied by the brothers [Silas and Timothy] who came from Macedonia [the church at Philippi]. So I kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so."*

Acts 18:6-8 NLT

*"But when they opposed and insulted him, Paul shook the dust from his clothes and said, 'Your blood is upon your own heads - I am innocent. From now on I will go preach to the Gentiles.' Then he left and went to the home of Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God and lived next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and everyone in his household believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also heard Paul, became believers, and were baptized."*

They went "next door". God was saying, *"Even when you reject and oppose Me, I'll remain right beside you and give you every opportunity to turn to Me and know that I still love you! There's still time - there's still grace. This thing's not over yet. There's still time to turn and repent."* God's people and his provision had breathed fresh boldness into Paul. His job, and ours, is not to convert people, but to show and tell and declare Truth - to declare *Jesus*. Only God can do the work of saving people and converting hearts.

Maybe some of us have been rejecting and resisting what God wants to do in our life, and we feel like he's a hundred miles away from us, but really he's right next to us saying, *"I'm ready when you're ready."*

1 Corinthians 2:4,5 AMPC

*"And my language and my message were not set forth in persuasive (enticing and plausible) words of wisdom, but they were in demonstration of the [Holy] Spirit and power [a proof by the Spirit and power of God, operating on me and stirring in the minds of my hearers the most holy emotions and thus persuading them], so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men (human philosophy), but in the power of God."*

Acts 18:9-11 NLT

*"One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, 'Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent! For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me.' So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God."*

God showed up with his presence and said to Paul, *“Don’t be afraid!”* Even in the wicked city of Corinth, God had people everywhere that were serving him.

Romans 11:2-4 NLT

*“Do you realize what the Scriptures say about this? Elijah the prophet complained to God about the people of Israel and said, ‘Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.’ And do you remember God’s reply? He said, ‘No, I have 7,000 others who have never bowed down to Baal!’ ”*

In the worst environment God says, *“Put down roots a while, we have work to do.”* Satan realized the strategic value of that place to God and he fortified it, (just like in the promised land with the giants), but the gates of hell can’t prevail!

Our peace, refreshing, and success is not dependent on the environment or on our circumstances, but on a Word from the Lord.

Acts 18:12-18 NLT

*“But when Gallio became governor of Achaia, some Jews rose up together against Paul and brought him before the governor for judgment. They accused Paul of ‘persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to our law.’ But just as Paul started to make his defense, Gallio turned to Paul’s accusers and said, ‘Listen, you Jews, if this were a case involving some wrongdoing or a serious crime, I would have a reason to accept your case. But since it is merely a question of words and names and your Jewish law, take care of it yourselves. I refuse to judge such matters.’ And he threw them out of the courtroom. The crowd then grabbed Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him right there in the courtroom. But Gallio paid no attention.”*

Gallio’s decree inadvertently paved the way for the next ten years of Christianity. He was the Provincial Governor of the region of Achaia and he had much authority. That ruling had great implications and influence for the smaller governors in the Roman Empire. Paul’s accusers hoped Gallio’s ruling would prevent Christianity from spreading throughout the empire. Instead, it gave Paul and church officials Roman approval to continue spreading the Gospel until Nero’s reign in AD 64, showing that God is in control in every circumstance.

Acts 18:18 NLT

*“Paul stayed in Corinth for some time after that, then said goodbye to the brothers and sisters and went to nearby Cenchrea...he set sail for Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him.”*

What keeps us going in tough times is knowing that we're in the middle of *God's plan* - that we're *on-mission*, and that he knows exactly how to strengthen us with the people, provision, and with his presence that we need. Without this, true despair creeps in. God knows what we need, when we need it, and how to get it to us right on time in a way that keeps us in the center of His purpose for *our* good and His Glory!

Our job in every season is to believe him, to cling to Him, to wrap our arms around him, and to tell him that we're determined to know nothing *besides* him, his crucifixion, resurrection, and commitment to us, as we trust him to bring everything we need to strengthen us *...for whatever we're facing.*

Isaiah 40:31 AMPC

*"But those who wait for the Lord [who expect, look for, and hope in Him] shall change and renew their strength and power; they shall lift their wings and mount up [close to God] as eagles [mount up to the sun]; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint or become tired."*

## **Prayer**

*Father, in Jesus' name, we thank You for Your Word. We need Your fresh strength and fresh power. Breathe on us now Your fresh presence. You are all we need when we feel like we're at the end and can't take another step. You give us fresh power and fresh life. Give us grace to submit every area of our life to You right now. We love You and honor You. In Jesus' name. Amen*