

UNSTOPPABLE

GOD'S WORK
IN THE WORLD

VILLAGE BIBLE
CHURCH

Encouragement from the Lord

Lesson 10

villagebible.church/unstoppable

DEVOTIONAL

And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9–10).

What the Lord literally said when he appeared to Paul in this night vision was, "Stop being afraid, but keep right on speaking." This reveals that Paul was indeed becoming afraid. It is quite understandable that he would, for a very familiar pattern was developing. He had seen it before many times. He had come to the synagogue and spoken to the Jews. They had rejected his message. He turned to the Gentiles and there was immediate response, a great flood of people coming in. This aroused the anger and hostility of the Jews, and he knew that the next step was trouble.

Is that not beautifully descriptive of the humanity of this man? We sometimes think of Paul as being so bold, so fearless — yet he suffered just as we do from apprehensions, forebodings, and fears. In fact, in a letter to these very Corinthians he says so. In First Corinthians 2, he says, "*When I came to you...I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling...*" (1 Corinthians 2:1a, 2:3 RSV). He was very much afraid of what would happen to him there.

The reason was that the city was responding to the gospel and the strongholds of evil were being broken down. The life of the city was being disrupted by the awakening which was spreading because of Paul's teaching. I find many churches today that measure their success by what is going on in the congregation, but that is not the mark of success. The church is successful only when things start happening in the world. The Lord Jesus said, "*You are the salt of the earth ... you are the light of the world...*" (Matthew 5:13a, 5:14a RSV). It is the world that God is aiming at. Until something starts happening in the community, the church is a failure.

This is so evident in our day. It bothers me greatly to come into a city and find it filled with church buildings on every side, but to find also that the city is locked into patterns of violence and hatred. It tells me that there is something wrong with the churches of that city, for God always aims at the world. All the evils we have in our modern day were present in Corinth. But now this revolutionary message of the gospel was striking right at the very core of the life of the city, breaking down the patterns of evil that had locked men and women into bondage. As Paul saw this beginning to happen, he knew that he was in for trouble.

But this is why the Lord appeared to him. How gracious and reassuring are his words: Paul, don't let your fears grip you! Stop being afraid and don't keep silent, but keep right on preaching, because I am going to protect you. No one is going to hurt you, for I have a lot of work for you to do yet in this city. Some of the Lord's most encouraging words are, I have yet many people in this city. They had not yet become Christians — but the Lord knew they were there. There is nothing more encouraging to me in going into a strange situation than the realization that God has brought me there because there are people who He already knows about and who will respond to what I have to say. So it was with the apostle. He was greatly strengthened, and for a year and a half he was able to preach the truth until there was a great stirring in this city.

Father, thank you for this account which encourages me, for I know that you are at work today just as you were then. Lord, help me to stay committed to the task given to me by the Lord when he gave me spiritual gifts and the power of His resurrection.

LIFE APPLICATION

Paul's experience tells us that fear is "common to man." Paul was God's man faithfully fulfilling God's calling when God promised His protective care. Are we boldly following God's calling to reach out to unbelievers with God's message of hope and redemption, confident in His promises to be with us always?¹

OPEN IT

1. **Share with your group a fear or phobia that you struggle with. When did you realize this fear? How have you tried to overcome it?**

READ IT

Acts 18:1–17

EXPLORE IT

2. **To what city does Paul travel from Athens?**
3. **Who does he meet in Corinth and what do they do?**
4. **What prominent leader believed in the Lord?**
5. **What six truths does God share with Paul in the vision?**
6. **What charge do the Jews bring against Paul?**

¹ Devotional by Ray Stedman entitled "Encouragement from the Lord" found @ <https://www.raystedman.org/daily-devotions/acts-13to28/encouragement-from-the-lord>.

APPLY IT

From the frying pan of intellectual, idolatrous Athens, Paul leaped into the fire of sex-saturated, materialistic Corinth. Traveling alone, he approached Corinth through the five-hundred-year-old Isthmian wall that spanned the five-mile Corinthian isthmus. He may have wondered if this hotbed of hedonism could possibly be convinced to respond to the invitation of the pure and selfless Nazarene he had come to introduce.²



WHEREVER I MAY ROAM

7. Paul must have had an overwhelming sense upon arriving in Corinth that the work before him was too great while the victories were far too small. What elements of our society today cause you to become discouraged that the gospel isn't really changing things?

"I came to you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3).

² Girard, Robert C.. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 3899-3901). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

PAUL UPON HIS ARRIVAL IN CORINTH

- 8. Paul had left his companions in Macedonia and continued on to Corinth alone. Do you work better with others or do you prefer doing things alone? What are the strengths and weakness to each approach?**
- 9. Take a look back at Acts 16 and 17. What things might have caused Paul to feel as he did as he entered Corinth?**
- 10. One commentator said that Paul entered the city experiencing four troubles. (He was worn out, lonely, worried about how people might respond, and broke). Which of these have you ever struggled with?**

How do these trials make you feel about yourself and your faith, and what is your typical response to them?

- 11. Paul seemed isolated and alone as he entered the city. What did God do to combat this isolation? How do we fight back when isolation and loneliness begin to creep into our own lives? What things can other Christians do to help those who are feeling this way?**

BIG CITY LIGHTS

Corinth was a flourishing center of political power, commerce, and sexual immorality.

Politically, Corinth was a Roman colony, and it was the capital of the province of Achaia.

Commercially it had “location, location, location” working for it. There north-south land routes intersected with east-west sea routes. Corinth had two ports, Cenchreae to the east, opening into the Aegean Sea, and Lechaeum to the west, giving access to the Adriatic. One could sail goods to Cenchreae, transport the goods by land over the isthmus, and then send them on ships to places like Italy.

Morally, as in many port cities, Corinth was known for sexual promiscuity. In fact, the word translated “to live like a Corinthian” (*korinthiazesthai*) came to mean to live immorally (Polhill, Acts, 381). Despite the moral depravity, however, the city also had a well-established synagogue.

All of these factors made ministry to the city challenging; outreach required strategy. And those who became part of the church in this location soon found that living a godly life in the midst of Corinth was a major challenge.... In spite of such things, however, the city was a strategic spot for gospel advancement due to the city’s influence and to the mobility and diversity of the people there.³

12. Take a moment to think about the Chicagoland area. Describe what you see of this area politically, commercially, and morally. Does this make sharing the gospel easier or harder than other areas around us?

I CAN’T GET NO SATISFACTION

The temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, was at the city’s center; it stood on a nineteen hundred-foot tall hill overlooking the city. Thousands of female slave-priestesses related to the cult at this temple walked through the city as prostitutes in search of “worshippers.” Paul thus had to give the church much-needed instructions about sexual purity (cf. 1 Cor 6: 12-20).

13. Corinthians made it a practice to worship sexual activity and they even built temples to house such activities. In what ways is sexual activity worshipped in our culture today?

14. While the world both in the 1st and 21st centuries seems to be enamored with all things sex, it seems important for Christ followers to have a robust understanding of biblical sexuality. What truths from Scripture help guide believers so as to protect us from falling into similar patterns of the world?

³ Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Acts (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (Kindle Locations 5830-5841). Holman Reference. Kindle Edition.

15. While everyone seems to be talking about sex in our world today, some churches and Christians seem to be silent on the matter, while others seem to focus on it. What good can come from Christians being transparent about the temptations and struggles that so many believers face in this area? How should churches practice caution in this area?

DREAM ON

Paul had faced opposition in every city — mob violence, stoning, beating, imprisonment, sickness, threats, ridicule, rejection, hatred, and verbal and personal abuse. In Corinth he was confronted with sin so open and glamorized, morally degenerate lifestyles so foreign, that his mind went into overload. He may have been tempted to move on before the Lord's work in Corinth was solidly established. At that crucial moment, Jesus spoke to Paul in a vision, telling him to keep talking without fear (Acts 18:9–10 NKJV). The Lord gave three reasons he shouldn't cut and run:

- ❖ The Lord's presence: "I am with you."
- ❖ The Lord's protection: "No one will attack you to hurt you."
- ❖ The Lord's people: "I have many people in this city."

Paul stayed a year and a half, teaching God's Word to anyone who would listen. One of the greatest churches in the New Testament emerged. A burgeoning fellowship of previously lost souls came to Christ out of the depths of moral and spiritual darkness.⁴

16. God encouraged Paul with some important promises. What biblical promises from God speak to your heart most when you are confused, anxious, or downtrodden?

17. Besides the vision from God which served to encourage the apostle, Paul was also given some wonderful glimpses of God's unstoppable work in Corinth with the salvation of the household of Crispus and many others. How are you seeing God work in the lives of those around you? How can seeing such things encourage each of us?

⁴ Girard, Robert C.. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 4007–4011). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

WE'RE NOT GONNA TAKE IT

Paul's enemies thought they could buffalo the new proconsul into silencing Paul and the Christians. Judaism was a protected religion under Roman law. By charging that Paul "*persuades men to worship God contrary to the law*" (Acts 18:13 NKJV), they hoped to convince Gallio that Christianity was not Jewish and could not be included in the protections the government granted Judaism. Gallio, however, ruled that what Paul was doing was no crime against Roman law. He saw the whole case as nothing but a fuss among rival Jews over theology, and he had no intention of getting the government involved in it (Acts 18:14–15).⁵

Gallio's ruling meant in effect that Paul and his associates, so long as they committed no breach of public order, continued to share the protection which Roman law granted to the practice of Judaism. It meant that for the next ten or twelve years...[until Nero reversed this policy] the gospel could be proclaimed in the provinces of the empire without fear of coming into conflict with Roman law.⁶

18. There are times when government can help Christians and the cause of the gospel. How should a Christian balance political activism and gospel mission when it comes to changing lives?

19. We see in verse 17 that a good outcome in the court on one issue doesn't always guarantee good in another. What things must we be wary of when putting trust in our elected officials to make being a Christian easier?

20. Paul's start in Corinth was difficult at first, and yet, by His grace, God would allow Paul to have a vibrant ministry in the city. In what ways or areas could you use God's grace this week as you seek to serve Him in the difficult settings to which He has called you?

⁵ Girard, Robert C.. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 4040–4042). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁶ *The Book of Acts* by F. F. Bruce in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* series, (c) 1988 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing

Note: This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups