

LESSON 12

February 21, 2021

Unit III: The Call of Women

Risk Taker

DEVOTIONAL READING: Colossians 4:7-15

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Acts 18:1-26; Romans 16:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19

PRINT PASSAGES: Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26; Romans 16:3-4

Key Verses--Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. (Romans 16:3-4, KJV)

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Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. (Romans 16:3-4, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Research the lives and ministry of Priscilla and her husband, Aquila.
- Appreciate the ministry of those who explain the Way of God with accuracy.
- Seek opportunities to use your gifts or abilities to further the Gospel.

KEY TERMS

Commanded (Acts 18:2)—Greek: *diatassó* (dee-at-as'-so): to have arranged thoroughly; charged; appointed; "ordered" (NIV).

Departed (Acts 18:1)—Greek: *chórizó* (kho-rid'-zo): to have separated; went away; "left" (NIV).

Reasoned (Acts 18:19)—Greek: *dialegomai* (dee-al-eg'-om-ahee): to have discussed, mingled thought with thought, addressed, preached.

Remained (Acts 18:18, NASB)—Greek: *prosmenó* (pros-men'-o): continued with one; "tarried" (KJV); "stayed" (NIV).

Vow (Acts 18:18)—Greek: *euché* (yoo-khay'): a prayer to God; promise.

Worked (Acts 18:3)—Greek: *ergazomai* (er-gad'-zom-ahee): worked for; labored; "wrought" (KJV).

INTRODUCTION

There are many great women in our history that have successfully taken risks and reaped the rich rewards of reasonable risk taking. One such woman fought tooth and nail for every bit of her success. Following a turbulent and impoverished childhood in Mississippi and Wisconsin, she received a full scholarship to Tennessee State University, and eventually broke into the television and radio broadcasting industry. In the mid-1980s, she decided to risk her financial security by signing a deal to host her own television program. The show became the highest-

rated program of its kind in network history. By now you might have guessed that this woman is one of the most successful women entrepreneurs in the world—Oprah Winfrey. She has created a multimedia brand legacy and launched multiple philanthropic organizations during the course of her career, creating jobs and wealth for many others who have either spun success from her brand or were able to promote and/or launch business ideas because of her branding and marketing skills. With her own television network and media empire, Winfrey’s focus on literature, spirituality, and self-improvement has paved the way for a new era of confessional media. Today, she is the only African American woman on Forbes’ billionaires list, with a net worth of approximately \$3 billion. Winfrey proves that measured risk taking can yield great reward, even if it takes a few tries. She is quoted as saying, “Do the one thing you think you cannot do. Fail at it. Try again. Do better the second time. The only people who never tumble are those who never mount the high wire.”

THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Paul’s ministry in Corinth brought about dangerous opposition, including a criminal trial for promoting Christianity, an illegal religion (see Acts 18:12-13). Corinth was a major ancient city, one filled with iniquity. Paul recognized the risks taken by Priscilla and Aquila on his behalf (see Romans 16:3-4). Priscilla was an integral participant in vocation (tent making) and ministry in partnership with her husband, Aquila, and Paul. It is important to note that the mention of Priscilla’s name before Aquila’s should not be read as an implication regarding the significance of their respective roles—there is “neither first nor last” in Christ, for all are one (see Galatians 3:28). Some have suggested or implied that either Priscilla’s role in the ministry increased or that she came to Christ first, but neither thought can be confirmed or denied. What is certain is that Priscilla and her husband were both devoted co-laborers for the Lord, as everyone should be. The book of Acts portrays the husband and-wife team as an ideal partnership in the work of ministry, describing them as friendly, hospitable, and generous. Priscilla and Aquila are noted for their dedicated service to the cause of Christ and their loving, generous, and sacrificial commitment to the work of spreading the Gospel.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Similar in Trade (*Acts 18:1-3, 18*)

KJV

AFTER THESE things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; 2 And 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.

3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers

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18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

NIV

AFTER THIS, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 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 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

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8 Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken.

Paul's famous sermon at Mars Hill was received by some and rejected by others. Some, however, remained neutral and open to hearing the matter again regarding Jesus Christ and salvation (see Acts 17:16-34). Paul and his ministry team set sail from Athens to Corinth in southern Greece (verse 1). The city, similar to Athens, was filled with idolatry. Many people of Corinth worshipped the Greek god Apollo and the Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility, which led to the city's great fall into sexual immorality. While in Corinth, Paul met a Jewish couple from Italy named Aquila and Priscilla (verse 2). Aquila is a distinctive Roman name meaning "eagle." Pontus is located near the Black Sea adjacent to Bithynia, where the Holy Spirit did not allow Paul to go due to the deep Jewish presence and possible resistance to the Gospel there (see Acts 16:7). Pontus is also mentioned in Acts 2:9 on the Day of Pentecost, indicating there were people from the city who witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Priscilla and Aquila were present in Corinth because the emperor had issued an order expelling all Jews from Rome, likely due to public conflicts between Christian Jews and traditional Jews. Paul and the couple connected because of their love for Christ and their common trade of tent making (verse 3). Their common bond gave them extra opportunities to connect and serve the Lord on common ground. While Paul remained in Corinth for a little while, he would later leave for Syria with Priscilla and Aquila (verse 18a). Before they departed, Paul completed his Nicene vow and cut his hair (verse 18b).

What Do You Think? What possible benefits or hindrances do you see in partnering with others in ministry work?

Similar in Task (Acts 18:19-21, 24-26)

KJV

19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;

21 But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus

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24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25 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. 26 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.

NIV

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

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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.

25 He 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.

26 He 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.

The team left Corinth and arrived in Ephesus (verse 19a). While there, the team apparently split up and proceeded to share the Gospel. Paul went alone into the Jewish synagogues and engaged discourse regarding the Gospel (verse 19b). It appears that Paul’s discussions with the Jews in the synagogue proved effective, as they asked him to stay a little longer with them, which Paul declined to do (verse 20). Paul explained as he left Ephesus in verse 21a (NIV) that “if it is God’s will” he would return to complete the discourse and fellowship with them. Paul’s stated reason for his sudden departure was the need to return to Jerusalem for the feast, which was likely the Passover. Paul understood the significance of the Passover and likely desired to reconnect with his countrymen and share the Gospel there. At the time of Paul’s encounter in the synagogue, Priscilla and Aquila were engaging in discourses of their own. There was a Jew named Apollos who was native to Alexandria in Northern Egypt, on the continent of Africa. This urban epicenter had been renamed (loosely recorded as being “discovered”) by Alexander the Great during his rampage through Northern Africa, pillaging and destroying historic monuments. The area, however, maintained its scholarly nature—as Apollos proved to be a gifted orator and well-regarded Jew, one with deep knowledge of the Holy Scriptures (verse 24). Apollos spoke with sincerity, conviction, and fire while teaching accurately about Jesus, but had only a limited understanding and knowledge of Jesus. His reference to the baptism of John implied that he had no knowledge of the events at Pentecost and the baptism of the Holy Spirit (verse 25). When Priscilla and Aquila heard his teaching, they invited him home to engage him in the Gospel on a deeper level (verse 26). Note that there was no demeaning confrontation, no public humiliation, nor any challenge of his authority or effectiveness in proclaiming the Gospel. Priscilla and Aquila had no desire to alienate Apollos—they were working toward the same goal. While incidents such as this might occur in different settings and on a different level, it offers an example of the need to respond to ministry concerns by reasoning together and engaging in healthy, godly dialogue.

What Do You Think? When you feel that the Gospel is being misrepresented, how do you respond? Describe a healthy, Christ-focused response to misguided or mistaken teachers of the Gospel.

Salute of Thanks (Romans 16:3-4)

KJV

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:

4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

NIV

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus.

4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

Paul was at the end of his run of missionary journeys and was facing execution in Rome. His closing salutation made mention of various groups and individuals. After a recommendation for the church in Rome to accept Phoebe, he mentions his two fellow servants and friends, Priscilla and Aquila. He asked that the church would greet them, or salute and receive them on his behalf with gratitude as co-workers in Christ Jesus (verse 3). Paul also noted that they risked their lives for him and the church (verse 4). Paul offered no detail regarding the risk they incurred for the benefit of Paul and the Gentile churches, but one might reasonably conclude that the couple's experience, engagement, and exposition of God's Word were very effective. It is additionally possible that the couple provided essential aid and support, which saved Paul and others during either the incident in Corinth when Paul was dragged in for judgment at the seat of Galileo (see Acts 18:17), or the riot in Ephesus around AD 53 (see Acts 19:23-42). Some believe that the phrase "laid down their own necks" (verse 4) was more than a figure of speech—as they could very well have faced beheading or other execution for their actions in support of Christianity. Paul's note of both Priscilla's and Aquila's helpfulness indicated that women were regarded as beneficial to the ministry and work of Jesus Christ in the early church. Paul sent additional salutes regarding Priscilla and Aquila to the church in Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 16:19) and to the young minister, Timothy (see 2 Timothy 4:19).

What Do You Think? Do people still risk their lives for Christianity and the cause of Christ? Share examples to support your answer.

A CLOSING THOUGHT

We are all called to minister, to serve, and to support the kingdom of God in various ways. You might not have the title, but everyone has a charge. Consider those who have paved the way so that you can worship freely. Your Life Your Life Consider some of the unsung heroes of your church. Find a way to thank them for their work to serve the Lord by ministering to others.

YOUR LIFE

Consider some of the unsung heroes of your church. Find a way to thank them for their work to serve the Lord by ministering to others.

YOUR WORLD!

Partnering with at least one other person, analyze your community's spiritual, social, and other needs. Identify areas in which evangelism is needed. Assess the risk, keeping in mind that the risk is not always life-threatening but could pose a considerable threat to your time, treasures, and even talents as you seek to share the Gospel in new territory.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, help us to see the present need and opportunities for evangelism. Show us resources that are available for successful ministry. Also, Lord, send us partners and co-laborers to help implement Your plan and vision. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

CONCLUSION

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

While reading the Background Scripture, consider this thought: "How have I demonstrated my gratitude to God?"

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(February 22-28, 2021)

Lydia: Called to Serve

MONDAY, February 22: "Don't Complain but Serve One Another" (1 Peter 4:7-11)

TUESDAY, February 23: "Everyday Expressions of Hospitality" (Romans 12:9-19)

WEDNESDAY, February 24: "Hospitality Practiced in Jail and Home" (Acts 16:35-40)

THURSDAY, February 25: "Hospitality Practiced by Widow and Bishop" (1 Timothy 5:9-10; 3:2)

FRIDAY, February 26: "Christ, God's Power and Wisdom" (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

SATURDAY, February 27: "Know Jesus Christ Crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

SUNDAY, February 28: "Lydia, Model of Hospitality Practice" (Acts 16:11-15, 40; 1 Corinthians 1:26-30)