


**A Five-Day Devotional Journey**
**August 17 - 23, 2008**

Acts 18:1-17

# Uncensored Grace

## 1 There he met a Jew named Aquila

**Read.** Acts 18:1-6 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. Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was. 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. 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."

**Read.** 1 Corinthians 2:1-3 NIV

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.

**Think.**

- What evidently was Paul's frame of mind when he arrived in Corinth? What new friends did he make? What factors were behind this connection? What effect do you imagine this new friendship had upon his "fear and trembling"?
- When have you experienced a new friendship that really lifted you out of a lonely place? When have you been that kind of friend?
- What effect did the coming of Timothy and Silas have upon Paul? What success did Paul have in the synagogue? How did he handle the rejection he experienced? How would you grade or rate his response?
- How do you know when it's time to "shake off the dust" and move on when a relationship "goes south"? How challenging do you find it to move on when you need to? Why?

**Pray.**

Lord you have promised never to leave or forsake me — to be a friend that sticks closer than a brother. Instill that divine capacity anew within me for people that need a touch of friendship.

**Live.**

Be an Aquila to someone who's needing a friend.

The kingdom is not an exclusive, well-trimmed suburb with snobbish rules about who can live there. No, it is for a larger, homelier, less self-conscious caste of people who understand they are sinners because they have experienced the yaw and pitch of moral struggle.

*Brennan Manning, Ragamuffin Gospel*

**"I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling..."**

**That's how Paul described his frame of mind upon arriving in Corinth. We might say he was "off his game." Silas and Timothy hadn't shown up in Athens. So he went further south, perhaps hoping for a rendezvous in that port city on the isthmus connecting upper and lower Achaia — a city which was also the center of Roman power in all of Greece. His heart still ached for the fledgling church in Thessalonica — unable to get back to them himself, he longed to know how they were doing. His potential desire to get all the way to Rome itself was perhaps no more now than glowing embers. There had been no further divine direction, and so he just dug in and waited for his companions from the north.**

**Then two things happened. As he no doubt tried to set up shop in Corinth, employing his trade as a tentmaker, he met a couple to whom his heart and life would become entwined for the rest of his life: Priscilla and Aquila — also tentmakers. Partnering with them, he discovered that Emperor Claudius had expelled all Jews from Rome. The door to Rome was clearly shut. As Paul settled down to work, and then followed his usual pattern — going to the synagogue, preaching Jesus as Messiah, and, no doubt, then being run out of town yet again — it happened.**

**Another dream.**

**This time it was no Macedonian but the Master himself. And the message wasn't to leave, but to stay. Jesus had many people in that city. Another lesson in scandalous, uncensored grace. In the city widely known as the moral armpit of the ancient world, the apostle of grace is told to stay, that he hasn't begun to scratch the surface, to see and free the hearts of those who were His. And so he stays — not for a month or even six months, but for a year and a half sowing and reaping in an unlikely field.**

## 2) Many became believers & were baptized

**Read.** Acts 18:7-8 NLT

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.

**Read.** 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 Message

By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which he has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves—labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free—are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive.

**Think.**

- Despite rejection officially from the Jewish community, who does respond positively to Paul's teaching? What's significant about Crispus becoming a believer? Where does Paul relocate? How do you think the synagogue community liked having Paul as their "new neighbor"?
- How does Paul explain the significance of baptism to the Corinthian believers? What has been your experience with baptism?

**Pray.**

Holy Spirit, move me on from a piecemeal existence to the fullness of resurrection living. Let me drink deeply of you.

**Live.**

If you haven't done so yet as a believer, pray about being baptized.

## 4) Merely a question of words

**Read.** Acts 18:12-17 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.

**Think.**

- What legal move is made against Paul when Gallio comes into office? What was the charge? How does this backfire? What reason did Gallio give for his decision? Why is this such a significant ruling for the young Christian church?
- Why does the crowd beat Sosthenes? Why doesn't Gallio intervene?
- How do you usually respond when people try to pull you into the middle of someone else's argument? What do you learn, good and/or bad, from Gallio's example?

**Pray.**

Lord, teach me to draw healthy boundaries in my life — to know when to step in as a peacemaker and when to let people sort things out themselves. Deliver me from indifference that would keep me from caring to begin with.

**Live.**

Pray God's peace over conflict at home, school, church or at work.

## 3) Don't be afraid! Speak out!

**Read.** 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.

**Read.** Isaiah 50:4-6 Message

The Master, God, has given me  
a well-taught tongue,  
So I know how to encourage tired people.  
He wakes me up in the morning,  
Wakes me up, opens my ears  
to listen as one ready to take orders.  
The Master, God, opened my ears,  
and I didn't go back to sleep,  
didn't pull the covers back over my head.  
I followed orders...

**Think.**

- Perhaps with a faith community established, Paul was thinking about moving on. What does the Lord tell him to do through that vision in the night? What three commands is Paul given? What two reasons is he provided for carrying out these instructions?
- What does Paul do in response to the Lord's instructions?
- Would you say you have a "well-taught tongue"? In what areas of your life do you see a need to find your voice? Where might you need to be silent for a season?

**Pray.**

Lord, deliver me from the silence and the paralysis of fear. Help me find my voice. Give me an instructed tongue that I may know when and how to speak and when in silence to wait on you.

**Live.** If you sense you've been needing to say something, say it.

## 5) Don't squander one bit of this life

**Read.** 2 Corinthians 6:1-10 Message

Companions as we are in this work with you, we beg you, please don't squander one bit of this marvelous life God has given us. God reminds us, "I heard your call in the nick of time; The day you needed me, I was there to help." Well, now is the right time to listen, the day to be helped. Don't put it off; don't frustrate God's work by showing up late, throwing a question mark over everything we're doing. Our work as God's servants gets validated—or not—in the details. People are watching us as we stay at our post, alertly, unswervingly . . . in hard times, tough times, bad times; when we're beaten up, jailed, and mobbed; working hard, working late, working without eating; with pure heart, clear head, steady hand; in gentleness, holiness, and honest love; when we're telling the truth, and when God's showing his power; when we're doing our best setting things right; when we're praised, and when we're blamed; slandered, and honored; true to our word, though distrusted; ignored by the world, but recognized by God; terrifically alive, though rumored to be dead; beaten within an inch of our lives, but refusing to die; immersed in tears, yet always filled with deep joy; living on handouts, yet enriching many; having nothing, having it all.

**Think.**

- What do you find most striking in this radical, "uncensored" Christian lifestyle Paul describes here? How readily can you embrace these contradictions? In what ways do you think you may be "squandering life"? What's holding you back? How can you move towards living more fully?

**Pray.** Lord, let my life be an exclamation point, not a question mark over your work in me and in this world.

**Live.** Meditate on this passage. Write your own paragraph about what it means to you to be "terrifically alive."