

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE LORD (vv. 9-11)

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We begin to realize the depth of Paul's discouragement, when the Lord intervenes to encourage him. The Lord promises him that he is with him, and that his work will bear fruit in spite of the opposition.

VERSES 9-11: One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." ¹¹ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

1. How does the Lord encourage Paul?
2. How are the Lord's words an encouragement to us as well?
3. While Paul received a direct word from the Lord, what is the way we most often receive encouragement from the Lord?

OPPOSITION IN SPITE OF ENCOURAGEMENT (vv. 12-17)

While Paul was encouraged by the gospel, close friends and a word from the Lord, he still experiences difficulty. In verses 12-17, Luke repeats a familiar plot line. Paul continues to experience difficulty and face opposition as he takes his stand for the gospel.

¹² While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment. ¹³ "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law."

¹⁴ Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to them, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. ¹⁵ But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things." ¹⁶ So he drove them off. ¹⁷ Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever.

1. What are some of the realities that make difficulty and opposition part and parcel of our walk with Christ?
2. What are some of the difficulties we can expect to face?
3. What part of this study was most encouraging to you, and why?

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THE STORY CONTINUES

WHEN WE ARE DISCOURAGED | ACTS 18:1-17

By the time Paul arrives in Corinth he is pretty beat up.

In his first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas fled Iconium under the threat of death (Acts 14:5). In Lystra, Paul is stoned, dragged out of the city and left for dead (Acts 14:19). He stumbles into Galatia suffering from a severe illness (Gal. 4:14). He and Barnabas return to Antioch where they have a bitter dispute and part ways. Paul takes on a new ministry partner, but his fortunes remain the same. In Philippi, Paul and Silas are swept before the magistrates by an angry mob, severely beaten and illegally imprisoned (Acts 16:22-23). Paul is forced out of the city by mob riots in Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:5,13). In spite of an impassioned challenge to the intellectually elite in Athens, Paul's appeal seems to fall on deaf ears (Acts 17:32).

By his own admission, Paul walks into the city of Corinth, "In weakness, with great fear and trembling... (1 Co. 2:3).

And why not? Corinth presented challenges of its own. As the provincial capital of Achaia, Corinth was comfortably positioned between two major sea Ports. While the city hosted a number of pagan temples, there were two that would have been of particular interest to Paul. Towering 2,000 feet above the city on a majestic mountain peak was the temple of Aphrodite. The temple was home to well over a thousand prostitutes that would ply their wares in the city in order to seduce their patrons into the lurid worship of the goddess of love. There was a temple in the heart of the city devoted to Milcertes, the patron god of all who go to sea. Many a seafarer would stop over in Corinth for a wild night on the town. Corinth was infamous for sexual immorality and licentiousness in a world that normally overlooked sexual immorality and licentiousness.

Corinth was also a pseudo intellectual center, where "would be" philosophers and orators charged exorbitant fees to entertain the crowds. As far as the Corinthians were concerned, Paul was not nearly as entertaining as other speakers on the circuit. The fact that Paul worked with his own

hands, was all the proof they needed that neither he or his message were ready for prime time.

Did any of this take a toll on Paul, or did he have such a deep relationship with the Lord that he was unaffected by the wear and tear of following Christ. We are not left guessing. We can read his mail. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Co. 4:8-9)”

Hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted and struck down are the phrases Paul chooses to describe his experience. But he is quick to add that he was never crushed, in despair, abandoned or destroyed. Often on edge, but never over the edge.

We can learn a lot from Paul’s time in Corinth about where we find encouragement in the face of difficulty. Paul found encouragement in the gospel, close friends and the Lord.

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE GOSPEL (1 Co. 2:2-5; Acts 18:5)

Paul primarily drew encouragement from the heart of the message he preached. Even though he was overwhelmed by the challenges he faced in Corinth, he resolved to know nothing but “Jesus Christ and him crucified.” The greater the difficulty the more intensely Paul focussed on Christ. Luke reminds us that Paul’s message was steadfastly centered in Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:2-5: For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. ⁴My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.

VERSE 5: Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah...

1. What do you think it means to “resolve to know nothing... except Jesus Christ and him crucified?”
2. How is the thought of “Jesus Christ and him crucified...” an encouragement in the face of weakness and difficulty?
3. What is the significance of proclaiming “Jesus [is] the Messiah?”
4. How is the fact that “Jesus is Messiah” an encouragement to us?
5. What are some ways we can encourage ourselves and those around us with the message of Christ?

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM FRIENDS (vv. 1-8)

Luke goes out of his way, to highlight Paul’s relationships in Corinth. Paul mentions three sets of friends—some old and some new—Aquila and Priscilla, Paul and Silas, and Titius Justus and Crispus. Each of these were a source of encouragement for Paul, and he would fondly recall all of them in his letters.

VERSES 1-8: After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²There 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, ³and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

⁵When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

⁷Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. ⁸Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

1. How did each set of friends encourage Paul?
2. What role do close friends play in our walk with Christ?
3. What are some of the most important things you can hear from friends in the face of weakness and difficulty?
4. Why is it important to expand our circle of influence beyond a few close friends?
5. How can we be more encouraging to those around us?