

“DEEPER”

Week 7 – “Focusing our Focus”

Week 7- Acts 18:1-18a

DIVE DEEPER – LIVE WELL POINT --- We are free to enjoy life in a deeper more abundant way when we discover the unique joy found in specific times of special spiritual focus.

This final teaching (notice, I have since extended the text through vs. 18a instead of ending at the end of v17) of Part 1 of Season 5 “Deeper” taps into another often overlooked spiritual discipline that has enabled many a follower to experience God’s presence on a deeper level...special vows (think LENT) and I’m going to include and focus this teaching on sabbaticals (they are in the same category...a specific time of special spiritual focus). Notice the commentary on the Nazarite Vow at the bottom. It is believed that John the Baptist and perhaps most famously Samson (his strength was in his vow to God...his uncut hair) along with Samuel & John the Baptist were also observing such a vow. Though it was not necessarily a Nazarite Vow...we see Jesus taking 40 days and nights in the wilderness to prepare His heart for the upcoming era of ministry through to His death, burial and resurrection. Part of the ceremonial conclusion of such a vow was, in fact, to be baptized...however, it doesn’t appear that Jesus’ hair had been cut at the conclusion of his 40 day fast? Though even less light is shared regarding Moses’ time on Mt. Sinai, we know he spent at least 40 days (twice) in some sort of specified time of seclusion/contemplation before receiving God’s law (twice).

Acts 18:1-18

¹ Then Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.² 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. ³ Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers^{3a} just as he was.

⁴ Each Sabbath found Paul at the synagogue, trying to convince the Jews and Greeks alike. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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.”

⁷ Then he left and went to the home of Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God and lived next door to the synagogue. ⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.” ¹¹ So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God.

¹² But when Gallio became governor of Achaia, some Jews rose up together against Paul and brought him before the governor for judgment. ¹³ They accused Paul of “persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to our law.”

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ And he threw them out of the courtroom.

¹⁷ The crowd^{17a} then grabbed Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him right there in the courtroom. But Gallio paid no attention. ¹⁸ Paul stayed in Corinth for some time after that, then said good-bye to the brothers and sisters^{18a} and went to nearby Cenchrea. **There he shaved his head according to Jewish custom, marking the end of a vow.** Then he set sail for Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him.

---Paul’s ability to sense God’s presence and hear God’s voice (vs.10) was no doubt because in addition to practicing the disciplines of the Sabbath...he undertook other methods of consecration/contemplation like the Nazarite Vow that was likely concluded before he, Priscilla and Aquila journeyed with him from Corinth to Syria (vs. 18).

---More now today than ever, we are inundated with the visual and audio static a modern society in the information age understandably provides to us in what seems to be an almost unending, frantic pace. Therefore, the practices of contemplation, solitude, silence that were essential in Paul’s day take on a far greater importance and yet, shockingly, they seem to have been relegated as practices of only the most pious. WE MUST RECLAIM THESE ANCIENT PRACTICES COMMANDED IN SCRIPTURE LEST WE SLOWLY LOOSE OUR CAPACITY TO EXPERIENCE THE FULLNESS OF HIS PRESENCE AND THE ABILITY TO LIVE LIFE TO THE FULLEST. There is nothing whatsoever in scripture to indicate that God was bringing the church into a new era in which these types of

spiritual disciplines would no longer be needed. So why do we, in the American Church, hear about them so infrequently and see them practiced even less???

-“Outdoor” magazine article titled “Get Your Mind Dirty”, June 2011---by the author of “Last Child in the Woods” 2005, Richard Louv (pg’s.66-71) offers us some insight as to why these practices of solitude are not merely arbitrary commands of God, but rather, once again, evidence that God’s commands are always in tune with INCREASING our capacity to enjoy life to fullest vs. the far too common perception that His ways somehow prevent or diminish one’s capacity to enjoy life.

-“nature deficit disorder” = an atrophied awareness, a diminished ability to find meaning in the life that surrounds us.

-even in small doses, exposure to nature can measurably improve our intellectual, psychological and physical health.

-natural environments seem to stimulate our senses and our ability to pay attention, think clearly and be more creative.

-in 2008, for the first time in human history, more than half the worlds’ population lived in towns and cities.

-From the Jarawas tribe’s (India) ability to inherently sense the danger of the Tsunami of Dec. 2004 to the U.S. Military’s study that showed that over an 18-month period of following 800 personnel found that best bomb spotters were from rural areas

SOME ADDITIONAL TEXTS FOR SPIRITUAL FOCUS...

FOCUS ON HIS CONSTANT PRESENCE...

PSALM 139

¹ O LORD, you have examined my heart
and know everything about me.

² You know when I sit down or stand up.
You know my thoughts even when I’m far away.

³ You see me when I travel
and when I rest at home.
You know everything I do.

⁴ You know what I am going to say
even before I say it, LORD.

⁵ You go before me and follow me.
You place your hand of blessing on my head.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too great for me to understand!

⁷ I can never escape from your Spirit!
I can never get away from your presence!

⁸ If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I go down to the grave,^[a] you are there.

⁹ If I ride the wings of the morning,
if I dwell by the farthest oceans,

¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
and your strength will support me.

¹¹ I could ask the darkness to hide me
and the light around me to become night—

¹² but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.

To you the night shines as bright as day.
Darkness and light are the same to you.

- 13 You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.
- 14 Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.
- 15 You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
- 16 You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed.
- 17 How precious are your thoughts about me, ^{1b} O God.
They cannot be numbered!
- 18 I can't even count them;
they outnumber the grains of sand!
And when I wake up,
you are still with me!
- 19 O God, if only you would destroy the wicked!
Get out of my life, you murderers!
- 20 They blaspheme you;
your enemies misuse your name.
- 21 O LORD, shouldn't I hate those who hate you?
Shouldn't I despise those who oppose you?
- 22 Yes, I hate them with total hatred,
for your enemies are my enemies.
- 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- 24 Point out anything in me that offends you,
and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

FOCUS ON THE EXCELLENCY, SUFFICIENCY AND MAJESTY OF JESUS...

COLOSSIANS 1

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

HEBREWS 1

1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

EPHESIANS 1

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, ...

FOCUS ON OUR NEED FOR REPENTANCE/SURRENDER & HIS FORGIVENESS/GRACE...

PSALM 32

- ¹ Oh, what joy for those
whose disobedience is forgiven,
whose sin is put out of sight!
- ² Yes, what joy for those
whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt,^[b]
whose lives are lived in complete honesty!
- ³ When I refused to confess my sin,
my body wasted away,
and I groaned all day long.
- ⁴ Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me.
My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.

Interlude

- ⁵ Finally, I confessed all my sins to you
and stopped trying to hide my guilt.
I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the LORD."
And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

Interlude

- ⁶ Therefore, let all the godly pray to you while there is still time,
that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment.
- ⁷ For you are my hiding place;
you protect me from trouble.
You surround me with songs of victory.

Interlude

- ⁸ The LORD says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life.
I will advise you and watch over you.
- ⁹ Do not be like a senseless horse or mule
that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control."
- ¹⁰ Many sorrows come to the wicked,
but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the LORD.
- ¹¹ So rejoice in the LORD and be glad, all you who obey him!
Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!

HEBREWS 4:1-3a, 6-16

¹ God's promise of entering his rest still stands, so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to experience it. ² For this good news—that God has prepared this rest—has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn't share the faith of those who listened to God.^[a] ³ For only we who believe can enter his rest...
... ⁶ So God's rest is there for people to enter, but those who first heard this good news failed to enter because they disobeyed God. ⁷ So God set another time for entering his rest, and that time is today. God announced this through David much later in the words already quoted:

"Today when you hear his voice,
don't harden your hearts."^[e]

⁸ Now if Joshua had succeeded in giving them this rest, God would not have spoken about another day of rest still to come. ⁹ So there is a special rest^[f] still waiting for the people of God. ¹⁰ For all who have entered into God's rest have rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world. ¹¹ So let us do our best to enter that rest. But if we disobey God, as the people of Israel did, we will fall.

¹² For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and

desires. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.

¹⁴ So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. ¹⁵ This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

HEBREWS 13

20 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, **21** equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

DIVE DEEPER MATERIALS (as always, our thanks to David Guzik of enduringword.com)

Acts 18

A. Paul in the city of Corinth.

1. (1-3) Paul arrives in Corinth and meets Aquila and Priscilla.

After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.

a. **Corinth** was a major city of the Roman Empire, at an important crossroads of trade and travel; it was also a city notorious for its hedonism and immorality.

i. Even in Paul's day, **Corinth** was an ancient city. It was a commercial center with two harbors and a long rival to its northern neighbor, Athens. Corinth was a city with a remarkable reputation for loose living and especially sexual immorality. In classical Greek, to *act like a Corinthian* was to practice fornication, and a *Corinthian companion* was a prostitute. This sexual immorality was permitted under the extremely prevalent worship of Aphrodite (also known as Venus, the goddess of fertility and sexuality). In 146 BC, Corinth rebelled against Rome and was brutally destroyed by Roman armies. It lay in ruins for a century, until Julius Caesar rebuilt the city, and it quickly re-established its former position as a center for both trade and immorality of every sort.

ii. "It is significant that it was from this city that Paul wrote his Roman letter; and when one reads his description of Gentile corruption in that

Roman letter, one has almost certainly a mirror of what he found in Corinth. (Romans 1:22-32)” (Morgan)

iii. One ancient writer described Corinth as a town where “none but the tough could survive.”

iv. Paul knew that because people from all over the Empire passed through Corinth, a strong church there could touch lives all over the Empire. He knew Corinth was a tough city, but he wasn’t only interested in planting churches where he thought it would be *easy*!

b. **And he found a certain Jew named Aquila . . . with his wife Priscilla . . . and he came to them:** It is implied, though not clearly stated, that Aquila and Priscilla were at this time Christians. But it is possible that Paul led them both to Jesus as they worked together as **tentmakers** (those who worked with leather).

i. **For by occupation they were tentmakers:** Paul’s tentmaking was an important part of his ministry. Though he recognized his right to be supported by those he ministered to (1 Corinthians 9:7-14), he voluntarily supported himself on the mission field so that no one could accuse him of seeking converts for the sake of enriching himself (1 Corinthians 9:15-18).

ii. In the modern missions movement, people call any work that a missionary does to support himself on the mission field *tentmaking*.

iii. “In Judaism it was not considered proper for a scribe or a rabbi to receive payment for his teaching, so many of them practised a trade in addition to their study and teaching of the law.” (Bruce)

c. **Because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome:** The Roman historian Suetonius writes that Claudius banished Jews from Rome because they were “indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus.” There have been many attempts to explain who *Chrestus* was, but a likely solution is that Suetonius referred to Christ, but writing some seventy years after the events, had the name somewhat mixed up. It seems that the expulsion had to do with “dissension and disorder within the Jewish community of Rome resulting from the introduction of Christianity into one or more of the synagogues of the city.” (Bruce)

i. Chronology is often a tricky issue, but it seems that this expulsion of Jews from Rome occurred at about 49 AD.

2. (4-8) Paul’s ministry among the Jews and Gentiles of Corinth.

And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled

by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus is the Christ*. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and said to them, “Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain *man* named Justus, *one* who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

a. **And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath:** Paul was effective as he **reasoned** among the Jews and Greeks. The **Greeks** present in the synagogue were Gentiles interested in and sympathetic with Judaism.

b. **When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia:** When Timothy came, he brought news about how the Christians in Thessalonica were remaining steadfast in the faith (1 Thessalonians 3:6-10). This brought Paul great joy, spurring him on in ministry (**Paul was compelled by the Spirit**). He answered back by writing 1 Thessalonians from Corinth.

i. Paul describes the character of his bold preaching in Corinth preaching in 1 Corinthians 2:1-16, where he declared, *For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*

c. According to 2 Corinthians 11:8-9, while Paul was in Corinth, financial support arrived from the Christians in Philippi, and he was able to put aside tentmaking for a while and concentrate more fully on the task of building the church in Corinth.

d. **But when they opposed him and blasphemed:** The blasphemy must have been directed against Jesus, because Paul was preaching Jesus as the Messiah (**testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ**). This is an indirect declaration of the deity of Jesus, because someone can only really blaspheme God.

e. **From now on I will go to the Gentiles:** Paul strongly sensed his responsibility to preach to the Jews first (Romans 1:16), but when his message was rejected, he did not waste time in going to the Gentiles.

i. Paul fulfilled the spirit of what Jesus said in Matthew 7:6: *Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.* When people are determined to reject the gospel, we shouldn't keep trying with them until the door is open again.

f. Paul **shook his garments** so that not a speck of dust from the synagogue would remain on his clothes, much less his sandals. This was a dramatic way

of expressing his rejection of their rejection! Paul was certainly capable of dramatic and vivid demonstrations of his message.

g. However, Paul did not then *forbid* Jews to come to Jesus, because **Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household**. Paul merely switched the focus of his evangelism from the Jews to the Gentiles.

i. **Crispus** was one of the few in Corinth whom Paul personally baptized (1 Corinthians 1:14).

h. What kind of people were the **many of the Corinthians** who **believed and were baptized**? Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:26: *For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.*

3. (9-11) God's special encouragement to Paul in Corinth.

Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

a. **Do not be afraid**: The implication behind this message was that Paul *was* afraid, fearing that here in Corinth his work would be cut short by either opposing Jews (as in Thessalonica and Berea) or by the incredible worldliness around him.

i. Jesus didn't tell Paul that his opponents wouldn't *try* to stop him, only that they would not be successful.

b. The solution to Paul's fear is for him to *obey* Jesus' command to not be afraid; and to **speak and not keep silent**, that is, to keep getting the Word of God out.

c. The *basis* for God's command to not be afraid and to keep preaching is the promise **I am with you**. When we understand what this means, and Who is saying it, this is enough.

d. The additional promise **I have many people in this city** was a constant assurance to Paul, who must have often had doubts about the survival and health of the Corinthian church.

e. **And he continued there a year and six months**: Paul was in Corinth a year and a half, which seems to be longer than in any other city where he founded a church. His ministry at Corinth is described simply: **teaching the word of God among them**.

- i. The duration of Paul's stay in Corinth shows where his heart was in ministry. He was no "in and out" evangelist, but a man committed to making disciples.

4. (12-17) The Jews of Corinth attempt (unsuccessfully) to convict Paul before the civil authorities.

When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, "This *fellow* persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." And when Paul was about to open *his* mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look *to it* yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such *matters*." And he drove them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.

a. In approaching the **proconsul of Achaia**, the Jews of Corinth are trying to stop Paul not only in Corinth, but also in the entire province.

- i. "If Gallio had accepted the Jewish charge and found Paul guilty of the alleged offense, provincial governors everywhere would have had a precedent, and Paul's ministry would have been severely restricted. As it was, Gallio's refusal to act in the matter was tantamount to the recognition of Christianity as *areligio licita*" (Longenecker)

b. **Gallio** was correct in seeing that the government has no legitimate role in attempting to decide religious matters, though government does have a legitimate role in matters of **wrongdoing or wicked crimes**.

c. Gallio looked the other way when angry Gentiles (probably more anti-Jewish than truly sympathetic to Paul) beat **Sosthenes**, the leader of the synagogue.

- i. Apparently, when *Crispus* trusted in Jesus, he was replaced as *ruler of the synagogue* (verse 8) by Sosthenes - who later himself seems to have become a Christian (1 Corinthians 1:1).

B. The end of Paul's second missionary journey.

1. (18) Paul leaves the city of Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla.

So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila *were* with him. He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow.

a. **He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow:**

The **vow** was undoubtedly the vow of a Nazirite (Numbers 6). Usually, the vow of a Nazirite was taken for a certain period of time, and when completed, the

hair (which had been allowed to freely grow) was cut off and offered to the Lord at a special ceremony at the temple in Jerusalem.

i. The purpose of the vow of a Nazirite was to express a unique consecration to God, promising to abstain from all products from the grapevine, to not cut one's hair, and to never come near a dead body.

ii. Why did Paul do this at this time? William Barclay suggests, "No doubt Paul was thinking of all God's goodness to him in Corinth and took this vow to show his gratitude." But the purpose of a Nazirite vow seems to be more of *consecration* than *thanksgiving*. Perhaps the intense worldliness of Corinth made Paul want to express his dedication and separation unto the Lord more than ever.