One summer I went backpacking with my Boy Scout troop in the Smoky Mountains. We had planned our trip for months in advance, planning out our food, our stops at our campsites, and where we needed to stop to refill our water bottles.

Most of our days were pretty short, just 5 or 6 miles a day so we could spend time at our campsites enjoying our time there. But one of our days was an 11 mile hike to the next campsite. We had a bunch of rookie hikers and some junior high kids with us. That day we ended up all spread out through the trail, sometimes miles apart, and we didn’t hit camp until about 10pm that night.

I was one of the few guys in front that day, so when it got to be about 9 o’clock I decided to sit and wait for the others to catch up. I thought I would conserve my batteries in the meantime, so I shut off my headlamp, and was immediately surround by darkness. It was a cloudy night, no moon, no stars. I don’t know if I have ever felt as alone as I did at that moment, in the dark, in the middle of the forest, with no one around, no lights, no sounds. I was completely and utterly alone.

Last week we talked about sharing our faith with others, and that is often a scary and intimidating thing to do. Sometimes sharing your faith with others might make you feel like you’re completely alone. Like you have no one to support you, no one to stand with you. It can be a very lonely thing to do. That’s even true in a country where according to a Gallup Poll three years ago 75% of Americans claim to be Christians. It sure doesn’t seem like it when you walk out those doors.

Paul certainly felt that way. Imagine what it must have been like when 0% of the population believed in Jesus, and many had never even heard about him. Think about how he must have felt going to the different cities and towns where he was one of a handful of believers in Jesus trying to convince the Jews that their Messiah had come. Then he tried to convince the Gentiles that everything they had known before was wrong, and they needed to put their trust in a guy who had died a criminal’s death, and come back to life.

Paul was an outcast for much of his ministry, and he spent a considerable amount of time in prison. It’s not too much of a stretch to think that he felt pretty lonely.

In Acts 17, we looked at how Paul had spoken in the Areopagus and shared the Gospel with people who had influence and power, but had almost no foundation for believing in Jesus. Paul shared the Gospel with them, and had a mixed result. Some people mocked him, but there were a few who did believe the message of the Gospel.

Paul didn’t stay long in Athens after that. He left and went to the city of Corinth. Corinth was the capital of Achaia, the region that Paul was in, and it was the third largest city in the Roman Empire with a population of around 200,000 people. It was also a very prosperous city that had a reputation for immorality.

This was a very different place than Paul had been to before. It was a city with a lot of new challenges, but also new opportunities. Paul went there all alone. Timothy and Silas still hadn’t joined him from Berea, and he was about to enter a city that was full of paganism and people who had never heard the name of Jesus.

**Acts 18:1–4 ESV — 1** After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. **2** And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, **3** and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. **4** And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Once Paul got to Corinth, he met a Jewish couple who we see play a big role in the life of the church in Corinth. Luke tells us that Aquila and Priscilla had recently come from Italy because of a command the Emperor Claudius had made.

The Emperor Claudius issued a decree in 49 AD that all the Jews had to leave the city of Rome because they were continually making disturbances at the instigation of someone named Chrestus. It’s possible that there actually was someone named Chrestus, but it’s also entirely possible the name Chrestus is just a Latin spelling of the word Christos, which is the Greek word for Messiah, where we get our word for Christ. A Roman historian named Suetonius confirmed in his writings that the conflict between Christians and Jews was the reason the authorities got involved to begin with.

We don’t know how or when the Gospel first made it to Rome, but the Gospel made it to Rome long before Paul did, and the conflict that ensued is the reason the Jews were expelled from Rome. Paul wasn’t the only one who faced persecution for spreading the Gospel.

Aquila and Priscilla are an interesting couple. We find out here that they worked together as tentmakers. They ended up hosting a church in their home in Corinth, as well as in Rome when they returned there later on. They are mentioned six times in Scripture, and they are always mentioned together. These two worked side by side at their jobs, and in ministry. We see them join in ministry with Paul, teach and encourage future leaders, and even risk their lives to help Paul in his mission.

These two were tentmakers by trade, and here in Acts 18 we find out that Paul was, too. We hear so much about the ministry work of the people that we read about in Scripture that sometimes we forget that they were normal people. We forget that Jesus grew up in the carpentry trade, the disciples were fishermen and tax collectors. They had families, they had jobs, they did everything normal people did. Paul was trained as a Pharisee, but that wasn’t his vocation. Paul was a tentmaker by trade.

We don’t know if Priscilla and Aquila were Christians before they met Paul, but they certainly got to know all about what Paul believed as they worked side by side with him at their job. They became some of Paul’s best students who then went on to teach others.

Paul didn’t give up his mission to reach people with the Gospel either. Luke tells us he reasoned with people in the synagogue every single week. That’s the same word we looked at back in Acts 17, διαλέγομαι (dialegomai). That word means to instruct and inform, but also means to have a conversation, to discuss, to dialogue with someone else. Paul spent his time talking with people and teaching people about the Gospel.

**Acts 18:5 ESV — 5** When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.

Silas and Timothy finally made their way to Corinth from Macedonia where they had stayed behind. Remember, Paul was sent ahead by himself to avoid the trouble that was brewing in Berea. Silas and Timothy stayed behind and rode out that storm. They probably also helped the church of Berea to get on its feet before they left.

When they got to Corinth, Paul was occupied. The word that Luke uses here to describe the state Paul is in is the word συνείχω (synecho) which means to seize or be seized by something. Luke probably meant that Silas and Timothy brought funds with them that allowed Paul to devote all his time to ministry instead of tentmaking. But there’s more to this word than that.

This is a word that brings with it the idea of being hard pressed, restrained, or continually giving yourself to something. Paul was feeling the pressures of his ministry. He was continually giving of himself to people who weren’t responding, people who were mocking him instead.

Paul’s friends and colleagues were finally with him again, but Paul had been on his own for a long time. He had been going into the synagogue week after week, trying to convince people of the Gospel all on his own.

Maybe you feel like that, too. You’re tired of being the only one at your work who tries to live a godly life. You’re tired of feeling like no one cares when you try to tell them about Jesus. People scoff at you when you try to invite them to church, and ask you why you even bother. You’re in good company, because Paul felt that way, too.

**Acts 18:6–7 ESV — 6** And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” **7** And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue.

Paul had seen plenty of opposition before, but this time these people were doing something different. The word Luke uses for reviled there is the Greek word βλασφημέω (blasphemeo) which means to blaspheme, slander, defame, or speak irreverently. Up to this point, there had been a dialogue going on. He was explaining the Gospel to them. Then things turned ugly and they began to revile him, slander him, and speak irrevently. That was Paul’s last straw with these people.

Paul shook out his clothing to signify that he was done with them. That was a gesture that the Jews would have known well from their own history. When the exile to Babylon was over and the Jews began to return to Jerusalem to rebuild some of the Jews returning were mistreating their fellow Jews, taking over their property, even enslaving them. When Nehemiah heard of it he called them out on their actions, and told them to make things right.

They promised that they would restore the property and the rights of their fellow Jews, and that they would stop treating each other that way. Then Nehemiah said this, **Nehemiah 5:13 ESV — 13** I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, “So may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise. So may he be shaken out and emptied.” The idea was that God would deal with Jews who mistreated their fellow countrymen.

Here was Paul, centuries later, a Jewish man being mistreated and reviled by his fellow Jews. He repeated the same gesture because the same thing was happening again. Paul had patiently explained the Gospel to his fellow Jews in synagogues all over. But the Jews in this particular synagogue rejected and mistreated him, so Paul would have no more to do with them. They rejected the Gospel, so he left them to face the consequences. God would deal with them.

As we’re reading through this Scripture, it’s easy to make too much of this. This was not a new direction for his entire ministry. Paul still went into synagogues, and he still went to the Jews. But he was not going to have any more to do with those particular Jews who had rejected his attempts to tell them the Gospel. Paul didn’t go far from the synagogue, he just went to the house next door. But his influence was not done yet.

**Acts 18:8 ESV — 8** Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

After everything that just happened in the synagogue, apparently the ruler of the synagogue still heard from Paul and came to believe in the Gospel. Imagine the conflict that would have caused with the other Jews in the synagogue.

Paul was in a volatile environment in Corinth. Some things were going well, but remember all the opposition Paul has faced. He spent a large part of his life training to become a Pharisee, he had every intention to be one of the leading Jews of his day. Now the very people he spent his life learning to lead were mocking him, reviling him, and opposing him at every turn.

In nearly every case, the people who had persecuted and opposed Paul the most severely were the Jews. Can you imagine being in a foreign place and being rejected by the only people you felt any kind of a bond with? Not only that, many of them wanted him dead, and many tried to kill him.

Paul probably felt like a failure in many ways. He probably felt like what he was doing wasn’t making a difference. Like he was just spinning his wheels, not doing anything of consequence. He certainly felt alone.

Maybe you have felt like that before. Maybe you have felt like you were all alone in your workplace as you tried to live like Jesus and all you got was mocking in return. Maybe your family couldn’t understand why you would ever want to be a Christian and the people closest to you in all the world were against you. If you have ever felt useless, powerless, like you aren’t making a difference. If you have ever felt all alone, then you have felt the way countless Christians before you have felt.

**1 Peter 5:8 ESV — 8** Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Do you know how lions pick which animal of a herd they are going to go after to devour? They go after the weak ones, the sickly ones, the ones who are all alone, without the rest of the herd to protect them. This is why this body of Christ is so important. This is why community and unity and accountability with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ is so crucial to following faithfully after Jesus.

This is how Satan attacks Christians. He whispers lies to us that we eventually begin to believe if we don’t keep ourselves in check. He makes us feel like no matter what we do we aren’t making a difference. He makes us feel like we don’t have what it takes. We can’t possibly talk about Jesus, because we don’t know enough. He makes us feel like we are all alone, like we have no one to lean on, no one to help us, nowhere to go. Sometimes we need a reminder that those are lies, and we are not alone. So did Paul.

**Acts 18:9–11 ESV — 9** And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, **10** for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” **11** And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Of all the people you would think would need to be told not to be afraid, and not to be silent, the Apostle Paul is probably not on that list. But Paul needed that too. He had been through years of struggle and suffering for the sake of the Gospel, and you don’t have to have much of an imagination to see how that would wear a person down.

Paul needed a reminder that God still had this under control. Paul needed to know that he wasn’t alone. He needed to know that he had people watching his back, people who were on his side. He needed to know that even when he didn’t feel like what he was doing was enough, all he had to do was be faithful to God and continue doing what God had called him to.

Because he had this word of encouragement from God Paul ended up staying for a year and a half, teaching God’s word among the people he had almost given up on.

Then we read this story that perfectly illustrates the way that God was taking care of Paul throughout his ministry in Corinth:

**Acts 18:12–17 ESV — 12** But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, **13** saying, “This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.” **14** But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. **15** But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things.” **16** And he drove them from the tribunal. **17** And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

The proconsul Gallio is a man that we have quite a bit of historical and archaeological evidence about, and this is one of those places where the historical evidence backs up the history we see in Scripture. Gallio had complete authority to act on behalf of the Roman Empire in Achaia, so if the Jews wanted to get anything done, they had to go through him. The tribunal they took Paul to was a judgment seat that archaeologists have found at the center of the lower terrace of the Corinthian forum, where all the leaders would meet, make decisions, and pass judgments.

The Jews dragged Paul before the Roman authorities hoping they would punish him for spreading the Gospel message. What they didn’t count on is that Gallio was not a fan of the Jews. He immediately recognized that their complaint was not something he wanted to be involved with. He even drove the Jews from the tribunal. When the ruler of the synagogue was beaten, he didn’t do a thing to stop it. The Jews came there to get their vengeance on Paul, but they ended up being the ones who tasted defeat for once.

God promised Paul that he would not be harmed. When his enemies thought they had the upper hand, they ended up getting a taste of their own medicine. Gallio may not have been a believer in Jesus, but God certainly used him to fulfill his promise to Paul, and show him that he was not alone. God was still sovereign, and he was still watching out for Paul.

This story hits home for anyone who have ever felt defeated. For anyone who has ever felt like nothing you did made a difference for the Kingdom of God. For anyone who has ever felt like you weren’t good enough. For anyone who has ever tasted discouragement. For anyone who has ever felt alone. Those of you who have never felt like that before, you can stop listening now, this is not for you.

I want to leave you with four pieces of this story that are crucial to picking ourselves up again and continuing on when those feelings of discouragement and doubt creep into our hearts. When Satan begins to whisper that lie to us that we aren’t good enough and we’re all alone.

1. Even the Apostle Paul felt alone, dejected, like he had failed

Paul goes down in history as one of the most prolific and successful missionaries of all time. The man overcame incredible hardships to continue taking the Gospel to the Gentiles no matter what. He was even stoned and left for dead, and yet still he continued on.

Paul is like the superstar Christian of all time, right? He’s the guy you look at and think, “I’ll never be able to be like that, how does he do it?” He’s the guy that everyone thinks of as the ideal missionary, the ideal evangelist, the ideal Christian. I mean, the guy wrote half of our New Testament. But Paul was only human. Paul was just like any man who commits to following after Christ and doing ministry for the Lord. There are highs, and there are lows. Sometimes the highs are really high, and sometimes the lows are really, really low. That’s true whether you’re in vocational ministry, volunteer ministry, or whether you’re just trying to live your life for Jesus every day.

Paul went through it too. In fact, Paul went through more of it than any of us probably will in our lifetimes. Winston Churchill said that Success is moving from failure to failure without a loss of enthusiasm. That’s what Paul did. He failed a lot, and we will too. God doesn’t call us to be perfect successes. He calls us to be unwaveringly faithful.

1. Even the Apostle Paul needed encouragement to continue on.

I am convinced that the reason Paul even had the courage to begin his ministry, and the reason why he took Barnabas with him at first, is because Barnabas was known as an encourager. In fact, the name Barnabas means son of encouragement. His real name was Joseph. Can you imagine someone who was so encouraging all the time that they earned that as their nickname? Isn’t that the person you want by your side all the time? If you had a choice between a son of encouragement, or a Debbie Downer, which one would you choose?

Even Paul needed encouragement to keep going. He got that from his traveling companions at times. Here in Acts 18, he got that directly from God himself. Encouragement is something we all need, especially those who are involved in ministry, volunteer or otherwise. Surround yourself with people who are an encouragement to you, not a hindrance. And be an encouragement to others whenever you can.

1. Even the Apostle Paul couldn’t do it alone

One of the phrases you get used to as your kids move from babies, to toddlers, to adolescents is “I will do it by myself.” I’m getting myself ready for Gabe to start that about as soon as he can talk. We don’t grow out of that. As adults we often want to do things ourselves. We have a hard time asking for help, a hard time admitting that we can’t do it on our own. Especially us men.

The truth of it is that the Christian walk is not meant to be done alone. Ministry is not meant to be done alone. Life is not meant to be done alone. When we feel alone and we feel like there is no one we can lean on, no one we can talk to, we’re in real danger. We need our brothers and sisters in Christ. We need this body for support, and to complement our gifts. Where one of us is lacking, another is strong. That’s how God designed the church to work. When we try to go it alone, we are setting ourselves up for failure.

1. God’s people are everywhere

Corinth is not the only place that God has his people. When we look at society and we read the news, it seems like God’s people must be almost non-existent, but that’s not true. God’s people just don’t make it onto the news.

When Elijah felt that he was the only one left in Israel who had not bowed down to idols, God told him that he had a remnant of 7000 men who had not bowed their knees or worshiped the false gods. He was not alone.

When the Assyrians destroyed the northern nation of Israel and scattered the remaining Israelites all over the world, Isaiah said this, **Isaiah 10:20–21 ESV — 20** “In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. **21** A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.” Even when it seemed like the world was falling apart, God’s people remained.

God’s people are everywhere. They may not be the majority, they may not be the ones who get the attention from the media, but God’s people are out there. You are not alone in your struggle to live for Jesus, you are not alone in your struggles, and you are not alone in trying to take the Gospel of Jesus to the world around you