

How Do I Serve Outside the Sanctuary?

Working in the Margins

Acts 18:1-17

This study explores Paul's ministry in Corinth, a city known for its wealth, corruption, and diverse population. Here, Paul serves not from a pulpit or temple but while working as a tentmaker alongside Aquila and Priscilla. This study challenges us to see how God calls us to serve not just in sacred spaces but in the everyday places of work, community, and the margins.

I. Why This Study?

A. Objective:

1. To explore how Acts 18:1-17 highlights ministry outside traditional religious spaces.
2. To examine how God uses work, relationships, and even hardship as spaces for service.
3. To gain wisdom for serving faithfully in secular spaces.

B. Relevance:

1. Many believers wrestle with feeling their jobs or daily lives are _____ from their faith.
2. This passage affirms that Christian service happens not just inside the sanctuary but in _____, _____, and difficult circumstances.
3. Paul's experience reminds us that God moves powerfully in the _____.

II. Context of Acts 18:1-17

A. The Background of Paul in Corinth:

1. Paul arrives in Corinth after facing opposition in Athens (v. 1).
2. He meets Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish _____ recently expelled from Rome, and works with them (vv. 2-3).
3. Paul teaches in the synagogue every _____, testifying that Jesus is the Messiah (v. 4).
4. Silas and Timothy arrive, allowing Paul to devote more time to _____ (v. 5).

5. After facing rejection, Paul turns to the _____, beginning ministry in the home of Titius Justus next to the synagogue (vv. 6-7).
6. Crispus, the synagogue leader, and many others believe and are _____ (v. 8).
7. God speaks to Paul in a vision, encouraging him to stay and continue (vv. 9-10).
8. Paul remains for _____, teaching the Word (v. 11).
9. Jewish leaders try to have Paul _____ before Gallio, the Roman proconsul, but Gallio refuses to get involved (vv. 12-16).
10. Paul continues his ministry, even as Sosthenes, the synagogue leader, is attacked (v. 17).

B. Historical Insight:

1. Corinth was a large, wealthy, multicultural city known for _____, _____, and _____ worship.
2. Tentmaking was common work, allowing Paul to integrate into everyday life and labor alongside others.
3. Gallio's legal dismissal protected _____ preaching in this region for a time.

C. Key Takeaway:

Ministry is not limited to sacred spaces. God uses everyday work, relationships, and even rejection to expand the gospel.

III. What Happens When I Serve in the Margins?

A. God Works Through Ordinary Labor (vv. 1-4)

1. Key Verses:

“Because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue.” (vv. 3-4)

2. Key Lessons:

a) *Ministry happens in the workplace, not just the synagogue or church.*

b) *Paul models _____ of faith and labor, breaking down the sacred/secular divide.*

c) *Rev. Dr. Teresa Fry Brown writes: “The gospel is portable—it is meant to move with us into every space we inhabit.” (Delivering the Sermon)*

B. Opposition is Inevitable but Not the End (vv. 5-8)

1. Key Verses:

“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!’” (v. 6)

2. Key Lessons:

d) _____ is part of serving in difficult spaces.

e) *Shifting focus to new people and places is sometimes _____ for the gospel to grow.*

f) *Dr. Emilie Townes notes: “The margins hold both pain and possibility. God is at work there, too.” (Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil)*

C. 3. God’s Presence Sustains Us in the Margins (vv. 9-11)

1. Key Verses:

“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you.” (vv. 9-10)

2. Key Lessons:

g) *God meets us in _____ and commands us to persevere.*

h) *Divine reassurance is often necessary when serving outside traditional _____.*

i) *Rev. Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas writes: “The God who calls us to the edges of society also strengthens us to stay there.” (Mining the Motherlode)*

D. 4. God Can Use Secular Systems for Protection (vv. 12-17)

1. Key Verses:

“Gallio showed no concern whatever.” (v. 17)

2. Key Lessons:

j) *God can work through unexpected means—even _____ indifference—to protect His mission.*

k) *Systems that often marginalize can, at times, be used for God's purposes.*

l) *Martin Luther once preached: "God writes the gospel not in the Bible alone, but on trees, and flowers, and clouds, and in the hearts of people—even among rulers."*

IV. Scholars' and Theological Insights on Serving in the Margins

A. **Martin Luther (Reformer):** "A Christian shoemaker does his duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship."

B. **John Calvin (Reformer):** "No task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God's sight." (Institutes of the Christian Religion)

C. **Rev. Dr. Teresa Fry Brown:** "Ministry in the marketplace is ministry in motion—where the Word becomes flesh among the people." (Delivering the Sermon)

D. **Dr. Emilie Townes:** "We are called to tend the places where evil is manufactured and humanity is discarded, because that is where God's Spirit moves." (Womanist Ethics)

E. **Rev. Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas:** "The work of liberation is not done in pulpits but in the spaces society overlooks." (Mining the Motherlode)

F. **Dr. Willie James Jennings:** "The church was born in public, in the streets and marketplaces, and that is still where it belongs." (The Christian Imagination)

V. Prayer Focus

1. Pray for courage to serve where God sends you—workplaces, schools, communities.
2. Ask God for wisdom to see your job and daily routines as ministry opportunities.
3. Pray for resilience when facing opposition or discouragement.

VI. Key Takeaway

The gospel is not confined to sanctuaries. God calls us to serve in the margins, in workplaces, and among those the world overlooks. There, in the midst of ordinary life, God's power and presence are most visible.

VII. Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. How does Paul's tentmaking shape your understanding of ministry?
2. Where are the "margins" in your own life or community where God might be calling you to serve?
3. How does God's encouragement to Paul resonate with moments you've felt discouraged or out of place?
4. What does it mean to serve God in secular systems or jobs?
5. How can our churches better equip believers to see their daily lives as spaces of ministry?