



Wisdom & Maturity – Part 1

Moving Fellow Christians Forward

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I know that sometimes you're listening experience in a sermon can be a lot like a roller coaster. Some of them start slowly like the Matterhorn or maybe at Knott's, the Silver Bullet. That visceral gut punch doesn't come until after some slow parts at the beginning. Others are like the aptly named Accelerator or the... What do they call it now, the old California Screaming ride? Incredicoaster? That's not a real word. But bam, right out of the gate. Right? Talk about a visceral gut punch. There you go. So I decided we might as well have an accelerator sermon this morning. So let's just start with a convictional gut punch right out of the gate.

And it's not coming for me, it's coming from God and it's recorded, you don't need to turn there, I'll quote it, it's brief. But in James Chapter 3 verse 13 when it says this to our congregation and to every congregation that's ever been since the name of Christ has been over the door of a church. Here is what he asks. He says, "Who among you is wise and understanding?" Who among you is wise and understanding? On the surface, you can read that and just get on to the rest of the sentence. But you've got to stop and think as God uses James to say, okay, in this congregation, who are the wise and understanding people here? And I think unless you are an egomaniac, you're kind of slow to say, "Well, that's me right here. Here I am, James." And I'm not sure that's our immediate response because we understand ourselves and yet we know we're probably not where we need to be. Which is what a lot of the Bible is doing to us, is saying, hey, you should probably be further along by now.

And there is something to that if you're a brand-new Christian you might say, "Well, I can't be. I'm a neophyte in this thing. I hardly know my way around the Bible yet." And I get that. Hebrews Chapter 5 says that there are people there who had been in the church long enough to be the wise and understanding ones among them. He says to them, "By this time you ought to be teachers," but instead you just want the milk of the word. That's what you want. You just keep going back to your 15 favorite Bible verses, and you're not someone who has, as it says, they're skilled in the word of righteousness. "You're unskilled in the word." You don't want meat to eat because your senses haven't been trained by this constant use of God's word and so you're not the wise and understanding among you. That's a conviction in particular if you've been a Christian for a while.

Paul says to the Corinthians. Hey, isn't there someone among you? Isn't there someone among you who can solve these disputes between Christians, dragging each other out there to court in front of the secular magistrate? Somebody should be able to pick anyone in the church who's been a Christian very long at all, put them up and be able to solve these problems. Those are convicting truths and I just think thinking about the question of maturity and wisdom, that makes us think, man, I wish I were more mature and wiser than I am. And that's a good place to start this eight-part series, as we look at the Apostle Paul's often-called Third Missionary Journey. We're going to look at Paul do some things on this trip that are



expressions of a kind of wise maturity that I hope you note throughout these next eight weeks and you say, well, I want to be more like that. And we need to.

As a matter of fact, God needs to look at our church and say, hey, Compass Bible Church, I see there, there, there, there, there, there, there. There's a bunch of people who are wise and understanding among the rest. And I'd hope that we are in this church increasing that tribe to where God looks down and says, this place is full of people who are wise. And then God will continue, I think, to bring people to this church where we can continue to strengthen them in the faith. And that's really the theme of our passage. At the beginning of this missionary journey it starts the way we saw the second missionary journey and even the first in the middle of the first missionary journey, that statement about strengthening disciples.

But before we get into the text, hold your applause, but we have another map in color on your worksheet there. And you need to look at it so we can kind of get oriented to the geography of this third trip, which looks a lot like the second trip. It would be hard to distinguish them and yet there is a distinguishing feature. At least get oriented here. And I'll try to do it backwards for you. But if you picture... let's start with the two Antiochs. You got to start with the first Antioch and it's in a place in a region called Syria, north of Israel, so that we often call Syrian Antioch. And then there's the Antioch that's in the center of Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, and we call that Pisidian Antioch because it's in the region of Pisidia, and that's an important city. And we saw Paul get there before and we thought, okay, you are going to take the Roman road from there to the city of Ephesus. That's what we thought. And there were a lot of reasons I tried to at least suggest that was his intention.

But God kept closing the doors and he kept driving them north until finally they got to the port city of Troas and there we had in the second missionary journey what is called the Macedonian Call, where Paul then goes across the Aegean Sea, up and around to a lot of places there in Greece, modern-day Greece, Achaia and Macedonia. Macedonia and Achaia. Okay. All the cities you see Paul is going to leave on this third missionary journey and we're going to cover a lot of ground today even though there's not much detail on it. He's going to stop in for some home cooking in Tarsus. Do you see that there? We assume. That's on the road there. And Derbe and Lystra and Iconium and then to Antioch. And then he's going to go this time on the Roman road from Antioch to Ephesus and beyond.

But that little chunk of this first section is important because what happens literally in this text is that Luke turns the attention to Ephesus where Paul is not even there yet. But he left someone there as you might remember at the end of the second missionary journey in Acts Chapter 18. It might be worth glancing at now. Verses 18 through 22, we have this paragraph that talks about the end of the second missionary journey, and he's left Priscilla and Aquila, remember those names, in the city of Ephesus. And so in this passage that we're about to read and study and try and untangle, we'll try to get these pieces teased out because we're going to see the interest of the text move us from Paul's leaving to do what he's always trying to do with people who are already converted and that is strengthen them. And then we're going to see how his disciples, who he had strengthened, end up strengthening somebody named Apollos.

But let's at least glance through verses 18 through 22 that give you the orientation to all that's going on here. Just glance above that even. We're glancing everywhere now, but look above there, that's all in Corinth. Corinth was this key city over there across the Aegean and it says in verse 18, "After this, Paul stayed many days longer," he did, about a year at least, maybe a year and a half, "and he took leave of the brothers and he set sail for Syria." Now, look at your map. Syria is where Antioch is, Syrian Antioch, and that's the home base. That's where he was sent out the first time. That's where he was sent out the second time. This is the home base of operations where the disciples were first called Christians. It's north of Israel because they had persecution down in Jerusalem and a lot of the Christians came up to Antioch. It became a source of where at least there was enough freedom to see the Church explode. And this was a very important city.

And so this is where he's going to head back. He's going to go home. He's going to go to the sending church. And with him Priscilla and Aquila, at least they leave there, Corinth, with him. Now he's got this weird thing we looked at last time, this haircut, which ends his vow, and they come to Ephesus. Now, you think he spent a lot of time trying to get to Ephesus, so it seemed. But he doesn't stay. He does leave them. Who's them? Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus. "And he himself went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews. And when they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. But taking his leave of them, he said, 'I will return to you if God wills.'"

And a little preview spoiler, he's going to get there and spend a lot of time in Ephesus. And that's where in Chapter 19 next week we're going to start to see the beginning of his ministry there in Ephesus. But he left Priscilla and Aquila there. And we're going to see Luke shift from the launch of the third missionary journey to what happens in Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila and this guy named Apollos. And we'll get back there.

"And when he landed in Caesarea," that's on the coast of Israel, Caesarea Maritime, the port city on the Mediterranean, "he went up and greeted the church." So he goes up. And that we're assuming that indication is one everyone would understand in the first century to go to the Church, the beginning of the Church in Jerusalem where we still had apostles there. And he goes there and we don't learn anything about it, what he does. But after that, "he went down," it says, "to Antioch," that's Antioch of Syria. That's the home base. And that's what he set out to do in verse 18, to go to Syria. Which, of course, why is that important? Because Antioch is there. So he can go back to the home church where he started.

Now, it's unceremonious here and there's no division. And maybe it would be great if I was on the translation committee, I'd say, "Well, let's put a space between these." I see how it runs altogether. I get that. But between verse 22 and verse 23 is the end of the second missionary journey. He's made it all the way back to Antioch and in verse 23, he's going to leave. "After spending some time there," in Antioch of Syria, "he departed and he went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples." So there's our theme in this particular section. And yet I'm going to now with Luke go to Ephesus. He's



not quite there yet, but it says in verse 24, "Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus."

Everyone is going to Ephesus. Why? It is estimated by historians, 250,000 people, a quarter of a million people lived in Ephesus at the time of the first century. It had the biggest Greco-Roman temple there, bigger than the Parthenon, the temple to Diana or Artemis, as they called it. This was a big place, an important place to be. We had learning going on there, we had Jewish synagogues there, a contingent of Jews. It was an important place. Paul wanted to get there. He didn't stay long on his way back on the second missionary journey. But here is Apollos. He's from Alexandria and I'm sorry I don't have endless space on your map. If I did, I would show more south of the Mediterranean. Because if you know your geography, south of the Mediterranean is the continent of Africa, north of Africa, there in Egypt, Delta Nile, there's a city, very important city, it becomes very important in church history. Alexandria and this from Alexandria is where this guy was from.

And now look at all the piled-on compliments about this guy. "He was an eloquent man, he was competent in the Scriptures." So he knows the Old Testament text of Scripture. "He had been instructed in the way of the Lord." Now, that phrase, way of the Lord, the way of Christ, the way of God, that's the way that the early Church was named by people saying this is a sect of Judaism because they believe they found the Messiah and that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah.

So this is a phrase here, which is definitely indicating that he was on the right path, Right? He was instructed in the way and not just instructed, he was all about it, "Being fervent in spirit," which is a phrase that Paul uses over in Romans 15 to describe how we all ought to be. And I think this is everything here is leading me to believe this guy's got it together. If he were to get hit by a big camel, you know, at this point, he would be forgiven and right with God and redeemed. "He spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus." Right? His resume is being built here in this long list.

Here, though, we have a comma and the word, though, "though he only knew of the baptism of John." John who? John the Baptist. That's what we call him. John was the forerunner of Christ. He was baptizing people and it was called the Baptism of Repentance you might remember. People were coming and repenting of their sins except for the peanut gallery that watched them and made fun of him. But he was up there saying to people, "You need to repent of your sins because I need to prepare your heart for the coming of the Messiah." He even sees the Messiah, "here's the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." Apollos knows about Christ, so he's been taught about Christ. He's repented and he knows about the baptism of John. We assume that when he was traveling from Alexandria to Jerusalem, to Israel, to Galilee, to Perea, that he submitted in the Jordan River to the baptism of John. That's what we're assuming. He's all about all of that. But he doesn't apparently here know the rest of the story.

Like if you have the "Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" and you've read Isaiah 53 and you know about the coming of the Messiah, and you say, yeah, I'm all about



that. I'm all about Jesus. He's even teaching about Jesus now, but he may not know about, I mean, I don't know when the recording stopped in his mind, but he perhaps didn't know about the crucifixion, about how God through a transaction on a Roman execution rack, took care of the problem of sin. Maybe he didn't know about the resurrection. If you are going to preach the gospel Paul says in First Corinthians 15, I mean, a cornerstone essential is the resurrection of Christ that vindicates the death of Christ. So the death, burial, resurrection, perhaps that was missing. The ascension, the fact that he ascended to the right hand of the Father and then promised that he'd come back exactly the way that we saw him leave.

I mean, there was a lot to the story and maybe some point in the way his knowledge ended, and yet he responded positively to everything up until that point. He only knew of the baptism of John, which means he had it right about Jesus. He knew who he was. He was repentant. He was all about it. He's teaching people to do the same. "He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him," those are disciples of Paul, tent makers, remember? They became close and became friends, ministerial partners. They had the same trade that Paul was by vocational doing this with them. "They took him," Priscilla and Aquila did, "aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." Is that a good thing or a bad thing? It's a great thing. That's what he needed.

Verse 27, "And when he," Apollos, "wished to cross to Achaia," the key city was Corinth, "the brothers encouraged him and they wrote to the disciples," they gave him these letters here of recommendation, "to welcome him." So he gets these commendation letters, these resumé-building letters, these references from the Christians here in this city in Ephesus, and he's going across the Aegean Sea now to Corinth, and he's going to take up residence there and become a key preacher. So much so that Paul is going to write back and say, hey, you guys are all about your favorite preachers. Peter, Cephas, me and Apollos. You got to stop with wearing jerseys to church about who your favorite preacher is, he says. But the point is, he's a big-deal preacher among the Corinthians. Paul gives no correction to his preaching. He says it's good, he did well.

So the point is, this whole encounter with Priscilla and Aquila was well received by Apollos. The PH.D. preacher hears from the tent-making disciples of Paul and he responds positively and everyone gives him commendation to go across to Corinth. "And when he arrived," what happened in Corinth? "He greatly helped those who through grace had believed." So the Christians were encouraged, "for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus."

So great scene, two different images here, one of Paul leaving in one verse, verse 23, and then of all that took place with Apollos who becomes a key figure in Achaia in Greece. It's super important for us to see how good this passage is in terms of good things happening, of people intending to strengthen others, who are strong, looking back at people who Paul had strengthened, who end up strengthening others, and then he gets on a boat and goes across and strengthens even more. This is good. There is about a lot of strength. It's about a lot of maturity. It's about a lot of growing Christian sanctification and usefulness to God. It's a great



passage and we want to untangle it, to think through what's going on here, to see if we might do the same. Right?

Verse 23, here he's going to go out, third missionary journey, his intention is the same as he had in the middle of the first missionary journey. He doubles back from Antioch to go to Lystra and Derbe, and he goes to strengthen disciples in Iconium. And he says, that's what I'm going to do, strengthen you. And we want to learn how he did that so that we can do the same. Number one, let's just figure this out. "Know How to Strengthen Disciples." You need to learn how to do that. You can be a stronger disciple if you will learn how to strengthen other disciples because they go hand-in-hand. They really do. The more I'm strengthening others, the more myself I'm gravitated toward things that strengthen me.

But let's piece this together. How does Paul do this? I'm going to have to go out of this text to show you the pattern. So let's go to Chapter 14 of Acts as he doubles back to this key part of the middle of Asia Minor in and around Antioch as he goes to deal with Lystra and Iconium and Derbe. Acts Chapter 14. Let's go there to get our first sub-point. Have you noticed the sub-points there? How interesting this sermon is going to be with all these sub-points. I can't wait. Acts Chapter 14. Look at verse 21. "When he had preached the gospel to that city." There's a demonstrative pronoun pointing back to something. What's the last word of verse 20? Derbe. I know where that is on the map. He goes back to Derbe. "He's preached the gospel there," it says, "and he made many disciples, then they returned to Lystra and Iconium and to Antioch." Doing what? "Strengthening the souls of the disciples."

Now, here's this great word "encouraging." How many times have we talk about the word "Parakletos"? Parakletos translates into the word into English, "encouraging." Encouraging is not like a card you pick out at CVS and send to someone. I mean, it could be, I suppose. But encouraging is a much stronger, more masculine word in Scripture. "Para," it's a preposition and it means "next to" or "beside," and "Kletos" is "to call in." And I often illustrate it this way, so bear with me if you heard it 20 times, but it's like a knee that is injured, ligaments are stretched or torn or whatever. We need a knee brace. Those elements, those pieces of plastic and whatever it might be, it's all put next to your joint to just shore you up. Parakletos. So to use the word strengthen and encourage, it's almost synonymous. If I'm going to strengthen someone, I'm being used by God to come in and do something that shores them up, that bolsters them, that helps them to stand firm. That's the picture. Okay?

So it says he was "strengthening the souls of the disciples," that's the end result, "encouraging them," that's the process, "to continue in the faith." Keep at it. Keep going. Hostile Christian world. We need strong Christians. And saying, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Look at that phrase, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." So let's think this through. He's telling them between now and the kingdom, when Christ comes and establishes his kingdom and "the kingdoms of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." Between now and then, we're going to go through some tough times. Tribulation.



Question. Where'd Paul get that information? How did he know that? How did he figure that out? How does he know the forecast? Well, clearly, though, the book of John had not been written at this point, it's 40 years out. We know that the story of Christ and the teachings of Christ had been imparted to Paul. Some of it even in Galatians 1, himself Jesus showed up and taught the things that were taught to the apostles. And so he learns what Jesus has taught and here's what Jesus taught. You might want to jot it down, it's a parallel to this passage, and it comes from the lips of Christ. John Chapter 16 verse 33. John 16:33. Some of you know it from memory, and it simply says this: "In this world you will have," same word, "tribulation. But take heart." See Jesus intending..., take heart, be strengthened, "take heart; I have overcome the world." I am now going to be the King of kings and Lord of lords. So there is a kingdom coming and I am the king of that kingdom.

So Paul is saying, "You guys, you need to stand strong in the faith. Now, I'm going to leave you. I want to strengthen you. I'm going to leave this city and move on. But you guys need to stand firm and stand strong." Here's something that will help you: "Hey, through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." One day Christ is coming back, establishing his kingdom. He's overcome the world. But between now and then, tribulations. Where did he get that? That's God's word. That's the word of the incarnate God speaking to his people. And Paul is simply echoing that to the people here in this city, and he is strengthening them.

So if you want to know how to strengthen disciples, Letter "A," you need to "Echo God's Truthful Words." You want to strengthen someone then echo God's truthful words. Thankfully that's convenient for us. We have it now. It's all written and it's in print. It's electronically on your phone. The Bible. I know that this book is a strengthening device. It does something. It's an instrument that God uses to strengthen us, to discern the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. It is something that can help us put things in perspective. Give us the forecast as this happens here. And here's my point. You don't even have to be a very old Christian to be able to quote or echo the Scriptures.

Now, I know you need to get better at utilizing it, but you could utilize it right now, this afternoon. You can get your phone out. You've become a Christian. You know what the Bible says and maybe say my friend is going through this or my brother's going through that. I'm going to take part of the Bible here, a verse or two, and I'm going to send it to them. I'm going to speak on the phone to them about it. I'm going to write it in a letter. I'm going to put it in a card, I'm going to email it to them and I'm going to say, "Hey, I'm praying for you today. Here's a verse for you." You, by utilizing the sword of the Spirit, speaking of the armor of God, I'm going to use that sword, it's used in a positive way to get through all the muck of your thinking, to establish you and root you and help you to stand firm. You just need to echo God's word. To echo God's word is so important.

Now, the more you grow in Christ, the better you'll get at strengthening people. Because if I said think of three people who probably need to be strengthened in their Christian life, now go strengthen them with Scripture. So you go, "I don't know where to go." Well, that's the thing. The more you study, the more you know God's word, the more you're well versed in, the more it dwells richly in you, the better you're going to be at that. Here's what Paul said to Timothy,



study to show yourself approved to God, "a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." You're wielding the sword wisely.

If I said I've got a guy who just got news that his wife has cancer. Hey, encourage him. Send some Scripture verses to them. Tell them you're praying for them and give them some Scripture that will bolster their heart. I guarantee you ten years from now, as a Christian, you'll probably get better at knowing the kinds of words of Christ that are going to help. Paul knew in this particular passage, I know the words of Christ you're going to need. And so he takes the words of God's truth, and he enlisted them to strengthen them by the words themselves, becoming parakletos, called in alongside. Here's what you need to hear, the words of God.

Is that simple enough? I mean that I think all of us could leave the room going, that's what we do. As Romans 15:4 says. "Whatever was written in former days," speaking of Scripture, "was written for our instruction, that through endurance and the encouragement of Scripture," there's our word, parakletos, it comes alongside and it helps us, "we might have hope," we might have strength, we might have that ability to stand firm. The Scripture is the tool. You've got an arsenal. It's there on your phone, it's on your iPad, it's on your laptop. It's printed in a book covered with leather. It's sitting there. You can utilize it to strengthen other believers.

And just think about that. The more you need to strengthen other believers with it, the more you're going to want to make sure you're handling it rightly, that you know it, that you know the breadth of it, that you're learning new passages of Scripture all the time, you're going to be strengthened by just your ambition to be useful to God to strengthen other Christians. That's verse 23, just the entrance of this whole concept, Acts 18 verse 23. He's going to go again on another trip to strengthen the disciples. I know how he does it. He does it by echoing God's truthful words.

Verse 27. I know we're taking this all out of order, but follow me now. And even in this I'm starting in the middle of verse 27. I called it 27b. It says this, "When he," let's just get the context, Apollos, "wished to cross to Achaia," he's going to end up in Corinth, "the brothers encouraged him," there's our word, parakletos, "and wrote to the disciples," that means over there in Corinth, in Achaia, "to welcome him," Apollos. Question. What do you think? What do you think they wrote in that letter? What did the believers, the Christians in Ephesus, write to the Christians in Corinth about the guy who's carrying this letter of commendation and recommendation? They didn't just quote Jesus' words. Right? They did more than that, clearly, as it says earlier in Acts, with many other words they encouraged the saints. They strengthen the believers.

In other words, you are not only going to echo God's word, which I would say you should echo it precisely, just quote it. Write it. But beyond that, you need to do what they're doing here. They're writing a letter that I'm sure is very specific talking about the person. They're probably saying things that are said there in verses 24 and 25. Here's a guy. "He's eloquent. He's competent in the Scriptures. He's been instructed in the way of the Lord," and even Priscilla and Aquila, the disciples of Paul, they even took him into more information. Hey, this guy's



good. Trust this guy. Listen to this guy. Give him the pulpit in your church. Let him preach to you guys. They're saying a lot of things that go beyond the actual words of Scripture.

Number two or Letter "B" this same thing needs to happen in our life. We need to "Add Our Supportive Words" to the words of Scripture. Not as Scripture, because of course it's not. But I'm adding to the exhortation and the well-timed, well-placed, well-quoted words of Scripture to people who need support by adding my words around it. Do you want an example of that? "Yes, I do, Pastor Mike." Well, then go to Philippians. Go to Philippians and let's look at this great text in verse 1 of Chapter 4, Philippians 4:1. And I picked this passage because here again is the concern of the Apostle Paul to get the Philippians to stand firm. He wants them to be strengthened Christians. So I want you to look at the one verb in this sentence. Right? One verb in Greek, I should say. There's one imperative verb here. "Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved."

Now I whispered all the words around it. There's one main thing he's trying to say, stand firm. But look at what he says softly around it. Right? "Whom I love. Long for. My joy. You're my crown. STAND FIRM IN THE LORD. My beloved." I mean, dude, we got it already. You like us, right? It's like, what are you doing? Here's what he's doing. He's adding his supportive words to the exhortation of Christ which is to stand firm. Don't back down. Don't be timid. You stand up for Christ. You stand shoulder to shoulder with other Christians, and you fight the good fight of faith. I mean, this is the tenor of what he wants to communicate, but he surrounds it with personal words. Paul loves the Philippians. Paul longs for the Philippians. Paul considers the Philippians his joy and his crown, and he loves them. Right? That's some supportive words surrounding the words of Scripture, the words of truth, God's truth regarding what they needed. And all I'm telling is you need to get good at adding those words as well.

Matter of fact, in your small groups this week, one of the questions early on in the questions, I'm asking you to see what a powerful thing words do to bolster people's strength, to get them to stand firm. And by the way, in our passage, if you go back to Chapter 18, you look there in verse 27, it says, "They encouraged him and they wrote to the disciples and to welcome him." Now, I know they can't FaceTime them, I know they can't, you know, call them. So they need to write it. But today, I just need you to recognize writing some of these things and giving them, sending them to people is powerful because I know there are probably texts on your phone you've read more than once. I'll bet there are cards in your dresser that you keep because you want to read them again, because you've read them multiple times. Why? Because they encouraged you. They strengthened you in some way. They got you up and saying, I can do this.

And all I'm telling you is it's not a bad thing for us to follow the example, though it's necessary here, that you don't just say supportive things that surround and echo and continue your personalization of God's truth. But that you write some of them, that you text them, that you email them, that you send, that you write them down. Echo God's truthful words. That's the core. That's how God really works within the hearts of people who are weak and need to be strengthened. Your supportive words around that. And I could go on and on with examples of



this from Scripture, but we need to give our supported words that continue to add that kind of encouragement to the truths of God's word as they did here.

Now, I have, can you see what Letter "C" is supposed to point to? Verse 27a. Now I'm going to shift the focus and the subject here, and that's Apollos. "When he," Apollos, "wished to cross to Achaia." Now, Paul had done many times, he had sat in a place and wrote a letter and sent it with a messenger to some other place. That's not what Apollos does here. Apollos says I'm going to get on a ship and I'm going to go to Achaia, I'm going to go to Corinth and I'm going to be there face-to-face. Why? Perhaps Priscilla and Aquila said, "Yeah. Paul spent a year, over a year in Corinth. He had taught them, but he had to leave. And you're masterful in the Old Testament Scriptures. You know the truth. You're eloquent. You're a great teacher. They could use you over there." Apollos says, "Yeah, I'll write him a letter. I'll send him a text." No, he gets on a ship and he goes.

Do you ever see that pattern with Paul? He can't be everywhere at once. But he wants to be. Sometimes he's writing like the Thessalonians and he says, "I've got to get there. I want to be there. I want to be face-to-face with you." Sometimes he tries and Satan hindered us. We're going to get there, man. He is committed to being face-to-face with these people. Even the Apostle John, in writing his short little letters at the end of the New Testament before the book of Revelation, he says things like, "I got more to write to you, but I want to talk to you face-to-face." The value of presence, of you being present. If you want to strengthen other Christians you can't do it just through email. Will it do something? Of course, if you're echoing God's truth and if you're adding your supportive words. But you know what you need to do sometimes? Get in your car and go face-to-face with these people.

Letter "C." You need to "Provide Your Helpful Presence," your helpful presence. And I add the word helpful because if you want to encourage me at two in the morning, don't come to my house. That wouldn't be a helpful time, right? There are things... You want... I want a cookie. This big casserole. I don't want your casserole. But you can bring me a pizza. I've told you my palate is stunted. I didn't like it when I was nine. I don't like it now. So people say, "I've got this great new dish." I don't want a new dish. Bring me a hamburger. I just want something simple. So you got to know who you're trying to help. And I'm not talking about your food, although I'm thinking about food now that it's 12:04. I'm trying to say this: make your presence helpful by knowing that it's a helpful time.

In other words, there are some people that you can provide a helpful presence, but if you were to do it every day this week, it may stop being helpful. As it says in the Proverbs, "Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor's house lest he grows weary of you and hates you." In other words, there's a point at which you've got to say, just because you want to visit that particular person, you ought to know what's the right time. But here is what I am saying. I don't have many people in the church who do need to visit, reaching out to me and saying, "Pastor Mike, you know, I was in the hospital. I went on the prayer line. But can you just have people stop visiting me? I've been visited way too many times this week." I don't have that very often. Does it happen occasionally? I suppose with some popular people that happens occasionally.



But usually what I get is, I can think of two calls this last week or so, when they call me and say, "You know what? It would be great if someone in the church would come visit me." Most of the time they want someone's helpful presence. Have they had texts? Sure, they've had texts. Have people reached out? Yeah, they've reached out. They've even called on the phone. "It'd be great if someone could sit here at my bedside at this hospital for a couple of hours." We need more of that. I should never have to get that phone call. If someone is willing to say I have a need, I have a problem, I'm going through a crisis, if someone shares that in your small group, I don't care what it is, they should get more than a text from you. At some point you say, when would my presence be most helpful? How can I get there face-to-face?

So many examples of this in Scripture providing a face-to-face presence with people. And I just think a functioning church where God looks at us and says, "Oh, there are a lot of wise and understanding people." Well, wise and understanding people will know we can't do all of this encouragement and strengthening long distance. You need to shut off whatever you got to shut off to get face-to-face. As I often say, your chairs need to go face-to-face a lot more often with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Okay. Bottom of verse 27. Did I put it this way? Verse 27c and 28. Did I say that in the notes? I did. So A and B, you understand that. We used that to talk about the first part of the verse, the second half of the verse, A and B, but sometimes you got to add C because we're looking at the first part, the middle part and the end part. So the end part a verse 27, what does it say? Here's the last sentence of verse 27. "When he arrived," that's Apollos in Corinth, "he greatly help those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus." The key word is the first word of verse 28. What's the first word of verse 28 interactive 11:00 crowd? "For." That's not "and" it's "for." it's not the word "Kai" in the Greek New Testament, it's the word "Gar." Gar is giving me some explanation for what's just come before it.

And that, I think, is important because I've even read this passage aloud in church wrong before by saying, here's how I've read it. "When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace believed," comma, "and he powerfully..." No, those aren't two different things to be just conjoined by a conjunction, but they're two separate ideas. The reason, at least one of the reasons that they were helped through grace by being these new nascent new believers in Christ is because he powerfully refuted the Jews in public showing by the Scriptures, he's masterful in the Scripture, we just learned that, "that the Christ was Jesus."

In other words, his strength in being bold and strong, taking on the critics who were saying, "Jesus from Nazareth, he's not the Christ. You're crazy." Bam, bam, bam, bam, bam! Scriptures. And he's out there publicly. You're sitting back there going, "Oh, man, I'm just afraid to tell my relatives I'm a Christian." That's a strengthening thing that happens when what? Letter "D," when you are a strong example, whenever you can "Be a Strong Example" of living out your faith, just know this. When you do that, I know you're thinking about you and your relationship with God, but you need to think this: there are going to be people who see this. There are going to be people that hear about this.



You've asked for prayer I hope for some things in your life that have been a challenge in your small group. You go back to your small group and they say, "Hey, how did that go?" And you explain it. And if you explain it, not with pride, not "look at me, I'm so great," but just the kind of, hey, here's how it worked out. I did. I walked in and said, "I won't do that at work. And you know what? God supported me and God work this out. It's just amazing how God's favor came through." I'm just saying that strong example of you doing the right thing, you're obedience in that situation, your boldness, your courage, that strengthens other people. Maybe you think you're a new believer in Corinth and Apollos shows up and he just destroys the critics. Is that going to strengthen you? Absolutely. Right? He is refuting them, that's a strong word, in public, man. I mean, I don't think any Christian can be more emboldened than sometimes just watching someone stand up and refute the critics of Christianity.

These people are saying Jesus is not the Christ and Apollos is just destroying, weapons, as Paul says, in the right hand and the left, as he says elsewhere, destroying arguments, anything raised up against the knowledge of God, and in this case, his Christ. And all I'm telling you is that's a good thing. Now, you may not be out there doing something spectacular, but just remember this: every time you choose to be courageous in the Christian life, Paul has said this in Scripture, people should be looking at you, in one way or another, I mean, some people are going to know about it. You don't have to put it on YouTube. But I'm just saying, at some point they're going to see, hey, that person did the right thing. They did the courageous thing. Other people are going to be strengthened.

Just one passage on this real quick. Hebrews Chapter 6, just as good paradigm here in this passage. It says in Hebrew 6 verses 11 and 12. Here's the writer of Hebrews saying to the people he's writing to, these Hebrews. He says, "We desire that each one of you," every individual, "show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end." Does that sound like stand firm? Yeah, that's what we want you to do. "So that you may not be sluggish." We don't want you to be timid. We don't you being lazy, we don't want you backing down, but instead contrastive conjunction here, "but instead be imitators of those who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises."

Which, by the way, that's a line drop for what's coming in Chapter 11. People who have God's favor the promises of God coming to fruition in like a simple statement, "those who honor me, I will honor." And he's saying you need to imitate the people you've seen that happen to. Why? Because you need strength, you need earnestness, full assurance, hope all the way to the end. Don't be sluggish, don't be timid, don't back down. Look at people who are doing the right thing. Who, through faith and patient endurance, are seeing these things come to fruition. Chapter 11 is all about it. All this long list the people from the Old Testament and they keep being held up, not as perfect people, but as examples of people who have done courageous things by faith. And it's supposed to do what I hope it's done to you as you read through Hebrews 11, it heartens you, it bolsters you, it strengthens you.

And what if they're people you know, and it's Brenda and it's Sam and it's Tina? You start going, "I've watched people in the 21st-century deal with hard situations, and man, they've



honored God and God honored them." You be that person. You be the person who said, "I'm going to make a decision to do something right and courageous and bold and risky. And those things I'm going to do not just for me in my relationship with God, but that act of strength becomes a strengthening act as other people see it." A good thing. I guess you could even tie this to the end of the book in Chapter 13 verse 6. Talking about our trust in God, he says, "We can confidently say," and he quotes this psalm, Psalm 118, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what man can do to me."

Now, I don't want to make too much of the context here, but we should make more of the context than we generally do. He immediately goes, hey, and think of your leaders. "Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." There's the command again. "Mimeonai." Imitate what they do. And after that, he's trying to get them to think, God is your helper, be strong, don't be afraid, you need to be bold. Look at people who've done it and have been bold. Your leaders.

Guess what? We could say that to the Corinthians. "Hey, Corinthians. I know you're scared at work to say you're a follower of Christ. Look at Apollos out there just destroying them in the streets." That was something that was to bolster their strength. You get the point. Be a strong example. How do you strengthen Christians? There are just four things in our passage. Echo God's truth. Add your supportive words. Provide your presence when you can. And then when you're living, live for Christ courageously and that's going to make a difference. People are going to see that. It's going to strengthen them.

All right. Back to this little middle part verses 24 through 26. Apollos, all these wonderful things about him: eloquent, competent, instructed, fervent, spoke and taught accurately. But he only knew about the baptism of John. So as "he began to speak boldly in the synagogue, Priscilla and Aquila" goes we got to talk to him. "They pulled him aside." This is not debating in public. This is not shaming him in the middle of his speech. "They explained to him the way of God more accurately." He had an accurate view of God, but it wasn't the whole story. They filled in the gaps.

There's another form of strengthening besides just being a cheerleader for people, and you should be. They're standing up for Christ, cheering him on. Sometimes there's doing the wrong thing. Sometimes they're doing partly the right thing but there's more that they should do and they don't understand there's more to it than that. It's like someone telling me, "Hey, I went to work this week and I told my coworkers, Jesus loves you." Good. That's a good start, right? But let me explain the way of God more accurately to you. There's the love of God and there's the concern for the gospel. And the reason the gospel is the ultimate act of God's love is because you have a sin problem that needs to be solved. So you need to do more than just tell your friends "Jesus loves you." You didn't do evangelism because you said Jesus loves you. Let me explain to you the word more accurately. Okay.

How do I do that? Number two, let's give us a heading here. We need to "Carefully Realign Erring Disciples." And erring is a strong word, especially if I'm thinking about Apollos, because I'm not sure he was erring. He was ignorant. That Ph.D. in the Old Testament Scriptures, he



just didn't know the full story historically of Christ. He needed to be informed. But let's think about the kinds of things. It was an error to stand up in the synagogue and in Ephesus to preach the message of the gospel but you only got part of it. He only knew the message of John's repentance and the fact that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. We didn't have the message of the cross. I'm assuming we didn't have the message of the resurrection. I'm assuming we didn't have the message of the ascension. I'm assuming. So it would be better for you to preach the gospel and to use those elements because you just need to preach that.

So Priscilla and Aquila are going to correct Apollos, but the first thing I want you to note is what Luke did, and Luke may have been with them. I know Luke traveled with them earlier. Luke hears their view of Apollos, and certainly everyone's view, I suppose who knows him and they pile up all of these compliments, "eloquent" verse 24, "competent" verse 24, "instructed in the way of Lord" verse 25, "fervent" verse 25, "spoke accurately the things about Jesus" verse 25. That is a good resume. And all I'm saying is, why didn't you say there was this guy, he thought he knew a lot about the Bible, but he did not know the whole gospel. Loser. Why doesn't it read that way, right? That would be like accurate for a lot of us because that's what we'd say, "Ah, they're doing wrong. If only they were smart and as fully mature as I am."

All I'm telling you is that this is filled with compliments because one thing that we all need to recognize whenever we're going to think, "Oh, I want to help someone think more accurately about God, to be stronger in their Christian life because they're missing an aspect of it, or they're doing the wrong thing here. I want to correct them." We better, Letter "A," we better highly respect the person we're correcting because we're talking here about Christ's disciples. "Highly Respect Christ's Disciples," Because I'm talking here about our church. I'm talking about you hopefully being a man or a woman of wisdom and understanding.

And I would like you to not only cheer on the right behavior if there's something wrong, I want you to start with, "Oh, I'm about to correct someone here. I'm about to fill in the gaps for someone here. But I got to start with the fact, who am I talking to?" I'm talking to Christ's disciple. And that is, as we say in grammar, that is a genitive of possession. That we're saying Christ's (apostrophe "s") a possessive. These are Christ's disciples. They're not your disciples. These are God's people, they're not your people.

You're correcting, to put it in terms of Romans Chapter 14 verse 4, here's what you need to remember. The Bible says that you are if you're engaging with somebody who is a Christian, you're engaging with someone who is another man's servant. And in that passage, "Who are you to judge another man's servant?" And I'm saying, "Hey, Priscilla and Aquila, you guys are. You are, you're judging his message." But I'm saying it starts with this: it is another man's servant. You'd better respect whenever you're going to start correcting that you're dealing with God's people. They're not your people. And you better be able to write out a six-point positive resume about that person before you go dealing with the problem.



We're great at finding the dent on the bumper and the rest of the car is looking really good and we didn't even acknowledge that everything else is looking good. A lot of good things in Apollos' life. Priscilla and Aquila are going to humbly step up and they're going to deal with something, but they understand this person is a follower of Christ. This person is a teacher of Christ. This person is preaching for Christ. This guy is not an enemy. This isn't confrontational like refuting the Jews in public who are trashing Christ. We're all pulling for the same thing here. I want to make sure that you respect whoever it is you need to correct this week in your Partners meeting, your discipleship meeting, or your small group, your home fellowship group. Make sure you have a heightened focus. This is a child of God, this is a disciple of Christ, this is a servant of the Lord. And I need to make sure I deal with them with respect, highly respect. Because they're God's kids.

Bottom of verse 25, "though he only knew of the baptism of John." And if that were it I might go, I don't know, I mean, sure you should talk to him. But here's where this becomes urgent. Verse 26. "And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue." And that combination of gaps in your knowledge, ignorance about the full message of Christ and you're publicly standing up or sitting in the seat of Moses in the synagogue, proclaiming to everyone the story of Christ, but you don't have the whole story of Christ. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. We need a meeting this week. I'm not going to stand up and object, but I would like to come and have you meet with me, pull you aside, and I'd like to privately discuss the fact that you got a deal with this. We got to fix this.

Letter "B." We always, when we're going to think about correction, we always need to "Evaluate the Urgency." How urgent is this? Here's what I want to warn you of. I think it's Proverbs 29:20. "The fool is hasty in his words." You don't want to be hasty in your words. You don't want to be reactive about correction, ever. Why? Because these are the disciples of Christ. This is the child of God. This is another man's servant. I want to be very careful before I go and try and correct you. I want to first think now is this something that needs to be corrected this week, today in this conversation on the way to the car? Right? Do I need to say something? Is this needed? How many of us have stuck our foot in our mouths, probably several, trying to correct someone because we have a visceral reaction to something? And we go, man, had I waited a day or two to think about it.

And some things, they're in a different category given the fact that we don't have someone stepping up to preach on these things. Go, for instance, to one example in Philippians Chapter 3. We've been in Philippians a couple of times today, Philippians Chapter 3, look at verses 14 and 15. Verse 14, Paul is talking about, it's a long discussion, autobiographical, and he says, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." He's basically giving us a sense of his motive in all of this, straining toward the goal, as it says there in the heading of this English translation. He's talking about what's going on in his heart here as he does the things that he's supposed to do.

Verse 15 says, "Let those of us who are mature think this way," this is a mature way to think, "and if in anything you think otherwise," I'm going to make an appointment with you tonight so that I can correct your thinking on this. No, "God will reveal that also to you." I know in time



you're going to get there. I know in time you're going to get this. There are several situations, I've been in group settings, and you can imagine someone says something and that ain't the whole story. That's not right, that's not quite right. I mean, depending on who it is and where it is, someone said, "Yeah, he's told my coworkers Jesus loves them." "Wait! there may be a more to the story, to the pastor's office. Let's talk." I mean, some situations like... God's going to get this straightened out. It's not the place, it's not the time.

All I'm telling you is that some things, and I see that pattern even in Paul's discussion with Pastor Timothy in Second Timothy 2, it's like he knows God's going to work with the person. You're going to meditate on it and you're going to think about this. You're going to grow. God's at work. I don't need to confront this right now. And some things fall into that category. All I'm saying is here the tent makers could sit down the Ph.D. and fill in the gaps because this was urgent. He was up boldly preaching every day. That needed to be dealt with. So evaluate the urgency and that, depending on the situation, may go one way or the other.

But what we want to do and this is the punch line and you knew we were going here, but go back to this passage. Chapter 18, Acts 18. Look what happens. Bottom of verse 26. Right? "They take him aside and explain to him the way of God more accurately." I'm going to fix this. I'm going to tell you what needs to be said. I'm going to accurately straighten your thinking and align your thinking with the truth of God's word. At least I'm going to try to. And thankfully in history we know successfully it worked. I put it this way, Letter "C." "Give Accurate Biblical Correction." Accurate, biblical. Accurate, biblical. Those two adjectives are very important. It needs to be accurate. It needs to be biblical. Then you can correct.

I say biblical because let's start with people wanting to correct other people for things that are not biblical. Does that ever happen? No... It happens. How about this? I just quoted for you a minute ago, Romans 14:4. "Who are you to judge another man's servant?" Well one of the reasons God's so hacked off through the pen of Paul to the Romans is because it's starting in verse 1 with you're disputing over opinions. Don't dispute, "don't quarrel over opinions." And they were opinions that you and I can have. You can see someone in your small group treat their kid in a particular way and you think, "that's not the way I would parent. That's not the way I should parent. I've read Christian books. You're not supposed to parent that way. If it's not a biblical issue you got to think, okay, wait a minute, is this really something I need to confront?"

And if so, it's something that's so differently approached than it is here. We're not talking about the crucifixion, the burial and resurrection and ascension of Christ when we need to deal with that. I mean, that's a must-do kind of thing. Apollos needed that correction. Maybe your friend's got a different way to deal with bedtimes. I don't know. You don't need to say, well, this is how we do it. Just be careful how you correct. It's got to be a biblical issue. And it's always got to be rooted. If it's going to be accurate, make sure it's rooted in Scripture.

Here's a passage I'll quote for you or you might want to turn there if you're deft to get around quickly. Colossians 3:16. Maybe you heard this verse, it's very familiar. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," that's where it starts, it's got to be biblical, I know it's the right thing,



"teaching and admonishing one another." There's an old-style word. You probably didn't use it this week. I admonished a coworker, admonished. What does it mean? I'm correcting your thinking. I'm correcting the way that you're doing this. Admonish.

Who's doing that? The people who have the word of Christ dwelling in them richly. Here's another way to put it. Those among you have wisdom and understanding. "Who is wise and understanding among you?" Those are the people who have the word of God dwelling in them richly and they are able and I hope the whole church becomes this way to admonish and teach each other. And you should, but it's not in a hostile context. The rest of the verse that a lot of us rush to is this: "singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thanksgiving in your hearts to God."

In other words, we're not here, this is not a college debate class. This is not, you know, a public speaking square in the quad of the university. This isn't an angry, red-faced correction. This is my arm is around you and we're singing songs with thanksgiving in our hearts to God. But let me admonish your thinking on this. And I got to think that's the feel of how Priscilla and Aquila were dealing with Apollos. And it's a great story because it works out. He becomes a key preacher as they take those letters of affirmation across to Achaia, the key city of Corinth and he becomes a popular preacher there.

I don't know how this sermon hits you, but I wanted it to be convicting enough to say, "Yeah, I want to be wise and mature. I want to be a man of understanding, a woman who has insight, who has the ability to strengthen other people. That's what I want." That's what I think you should want. If God's Spirit lives in you, I hope you desire to do that. But many of us are going to go, "Nah, that's not for me." Because you feel weak, maybe because you had a terrible Saturday. You stumbled in your Christian life recently.

Let me encourage you with these final words. Luke 22, when he's dealing with a pretty weak guy compared to Apollos and Paul, I think you'd say the fisherman from Galilee named Peter wasn't a paragon of like internal character strength. He doesn't appear that way in the gospels. But that guy becomes the pastor of the church of Jerusalem, in part because of the words that Jesus said to him in Luke 22. Jesus knows where that whole scene is going. Peter's about to go to Caiaphas' courtyard and he's about to deny Christ not once, not twice, but three times. And Jesus says, "Hey, Satan wants to sift you like wheat." And I love the pronoun here coming up. "But I prayed for you all that your faith may not fail."

In other words, here is Jesus saying you're going to get tested. Not only that, he knows Peter is going to fail. He's going to deny him three times. But I'm praying for you so that "when you turn back," you stumble, you get up, "you may strengthen your brothers." I want you to be a source of strength, even though you fall flat on your face. Get up, get strengthened. I'm praying for your strength. I'm praying that you'll be the guy who cannot go out fishing on the Sea of Galilee when you're done with this whole thing. But you go and preach and be a shepherd of the sheep. I want you to do this. And I think that's a great word for all of us, hearing a message about let's be strong strengtheners of others.



Don't say, "that's not for me. If you knew what my week was like, Pastor Mike, you wouldn't be saying that to me." I'm saying it to you because Jesus said it to Peter. "Strengthen the brothers." And I think you don't have to be a preacher to take that under your belt and say, "That's for me." Even in the passage I just quoted from Colossians 3, all of us are to be teaching and admonishing one another with joyful hearts. We're on the same team, but we need people who are wise and understanding among us. And I pray that you'll join the ranks or move in the direction of that or go into a, you know, varsity level of that as God can look at this church and see you as a place, a heart, a mouth, a set of hands, people who can get in their car and go and strengthen other people in this spot.

Let's pray. God, we need this perhaps more than ever as you said we would because the days are evil. Because as your coming approaches we need to stir one another on more to love and good deeds. We need people who are going to strengthen each other. So I pray for Compass Bible Church that you would fill this church with more and more people who are growing in strength and knowledge and wisdom and understanding. Their maturity is just steeling and fortifying them to be able to be an avenue and a conduit of strength for others, whether it's someone in a hospital who is struggling, whether it's someone who is lonely and just needs a reminder about the big picture of biblical truth. Whether it's someone going through a lawsuit or struggling, whatever it might be, or just maybe needs to be pushed to the next level of their spiritual growth. Let this church be filled with strong, wise, mature Christians. Let us step up to that task, knowing you're praying for us in that regard.

In Jesus name. Amen.