

Strengthening the Disciples

Not only do we hold fast to the anchor, but we must also acknowledge that we are kept by God. We do our best to keep hold of Him. He always, always keeps hold of us. Brothers and sisters, our spiritual strength doesn't happen automatically. Coincidentally or accidentally. For us to grow and be strong in the Lord requires effort, intentionality, and some help along the way.

Father, as we consider your Word now, we pray for your spirit to lead us into its truth that we might always receive it implanted in our hearts for it to do the change that you intend for it. Then we might be blessed by your wisdom, which is far beyond ours, by your words, greater than ours, by your truths, which we so desperately need in a world that can be some times quite dark and deceitful.

So bless us. We pray with open eyes and open ears and open hearts to receive all that you have for us this morning through your word. We pray in Jesus name, Amen. For us to grow and be strong in the Lord requires effort, intentionality, and some help along the way. Effort. If anyone wishes to grow in faith, in any one wants to be strong in the Lord, and I'm just going to take it as a given that that's what we all want as Christians.

I lay that out there. If anybody wants to grow in faith and be strong in the Lord, that person is going to have to work for it. Spiritual might in maturity will not be handed to us. We don't inherit it. It can't be handed down to us and we should know that we have an enemy who is actively trying to keep us from attaining it.

Who wants us to remain baby Christians, to press on to maturity in the Christian faith and requires determination. You and I have to desire it. We have to pursue it. We have to want it. It's not just going to happen to us. So it requires effort and it requires intentionality. Not a word you hear a lot in church circles.

But let me ask you, friend, when it comes to following Jesus, what are your goals? Have you ever thought of it this way? Or let me ask you this Where is your growth edge? That is. What is it that you and the Lord are working on right now about who you are and how you are? Can you answer that question?

You've heard me say it probably many times now. If you aim at nothing, you hit it every time. So what are you aiming at when it comes to your walk with Jesus? What progress are you striving for in your faith life, and what steps are you taking to get there? One would not reasonably expect to become physically stronger simply by joining a gym.

A lot of us tried that rate around the first of the year every year. I think if I join a gym then I'm going to get in shape. But that doesn't work, does it? You have to actually go to the gym and beyond going to the gym, you actually have to participate in what the gym offers. You have to you have to receive instruction.

You have to use the machines. You have to lift the weights. That's why I don't lift weights. They're heavy.

Joining is the start. It gets you in, but it doesn't make you strong. It's interesting that in his letter to Timothy, Paul tells him Train yourself for godliness. Train yourself for godliness. And that word translated. Train is gymnast. So this is where we get our idea of the gym. And it means to exercise rigorously. Exercise rigorously if you want to be godly is what Paul saying.

So if we want to be godly, we got to train for it. Belonging does not automatically equate to change and doesn't automatically equate to progress. Just like the gym. You can join a church you should, but you have to go and and beyond going, you have to participate in what is happening there and what is being offered as believers who want to grow in Christ.

We have to avail ourselves of the resources around us in a thoughtful way and in a purposeful way. For instance, if you find yourself mired in grief, you should consider being part of the grief share group that we hope to start this fall. If your service to God is hampered by your anger problem, you should seek some biblical counseling that we can provide.

If you are less versed in the Bible than you want to be, then become part of a small group or attend a Sunday school class. Ladies again, sign up for the Small town Summit conference is happening this September. We as a church are going to continue to lay out these opportunities, but as we've noted with Paul in his preaching, you can lead a horse to water.

You can't make that horse drink. I'm encouraging you this morning. I hope to drink, eat and drink and make yourself strong, because my point is this if you want to be spiritually resilient, if you want to be able to stand firm, if you want to be strong in the faith, you've got to be intentional about it. It isn't just going to happen to you, but even then, with effort and with intentionality.

Even then, if we're to grow to be strong in the Lord, we're going to need some help along the way. We cannot do it on our own. And that help generally comes from two directions. Our first source of help on the journey to spiritual strength is God, God himself. And we absolutely can count on God to do His part in helping us to grow spiritually.

Romans 8:29 tells us that he is about the business of conforming us to the image of his son. You know that, right? God is interested in helping you become like Jesus. Is that that is beautiful truth. He is making us like his son. And that means that he is committed to us. It is God's will for us. According to Ephesians Chapter four, that we grow up into maturity in Christ and He helps us to do that.

Just what the Bible says grow up. It encourages us again in a couple of different spots in Corinthians, in Hebrews, not to remain as babes, not to remain as those who only can survive on the milk, but to strive after the meat. And God is committed to helping us get there. So that's one source of help that we need that we can count on.

The second source of help that we frequently need to become spiritually mature disciples comes from others that would be from other believers who are more mature than we are fellow saints who who will nurture us, who will lead us, who will feed us so that we can grow. The 17th century poet and clergyman, John Donne, was right when he chided no man is an island.

No man is an island. We're all connected. And when we open our Bibles, we see that in Christ. We are joined together as a body. First Corinthians, First Corinthians 12. And God has so designed it that we are a body and we we grow and become strong in the context of that body, in the context of relationships, in the context of community, you can grow and become a lot stronger, a lot faster participating in the body than you ever will on your own.

We need each other is what I'm getting at. We need each other in the church. We need the help that each other can bring to become what God wants us to be, to become who God wants us to become. And Paul, the Apostle Paul knew this very well. And so he devoted himself not only to evangelism. We're studying through the Book of Acts.

So we've seen time and time again how Peter and now Paul are preaching the word to people who have not heard it. They're talking about Jesus. Paul gave himself to evangelism, but he also gave himself to discipleship, to the strengthening of those who had received the word. A Southeastern Baptist Seminary states discipleship does not end with gospel preaching, but it must begin with it because the Great Commission calls for making disciples who obey all that Jesus commanded, not convert to merely pray a prayer.

Ongoing teaching is necessary. So Paul dearly desired for people to receive Jesus as Savior. They also wanted for them to remain in Jesus, to grow in the faith and to be strong in Christ. And in order to accomplish that, He knew that ongoing teaching would be necessary. So in our passage for today, we see Paul. He's wrapping up his second missionary journey, and he's rather unceremoniously really beginning the third between between.

Chapter 18 versus 22 and 23. Paul's wrapping up one and starting another. And the point of emphasis that I want to make this morning is found in this 23rd verse of Acts 18. After spending some time there, that would be Syria to Antioch, where it all began. He departed where Paul was commissioned. He departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygian, strengthening.

All the disciples again, one of these little phrases that if you just reading through or you're reading through to tick the box, you can just skip over that but an important one. And that's, that's what I want to land on today. This idea of strengthening all the disciples. See, Paul was concerned both with winning people to Christ as well as confirming and establishing their faith so they could grow and live as true disciples, true followers of the Lord.

He was absolutely committed to strengthening the disciples. Now the idea and the practice of strengthening the disciples might sound familiar to you. I've been reading through acts as we all have. It's not new to Chapter 18 X, Chapter 14 versus 21 or 22, when they had Preach the Gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium into Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

And then a little bit later in the story, Acts 15. This is following the Jerusalem Council. The letter to the church at Antioch was delivered that salvation was indeed by grace, alone, through faith

alone. You're not going to earn your way. You don't need to earn your way into God's good graces. He loves you and he'll save you by faith.

It says there in 1532, Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words, and also chapter 15, verse 41. Following the break up of Paul and Barnabas, we see that Paul chose Silas 1541 and he went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches. His point was out to you so that you see, this is Paul's pattern.

This is Paul's pattern. And it is a pattern of the early church. And verses like these help us to see the importance of the second part of Jesus Great Commission. We're all familiar with the first part, right? Go, therefore, and make disciples. We get that. But what are we supposed to do with these disciples? What? Jesus has more to say on the subject.

We are to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. We are to teach them what to obey. All but Jesus said, I have commanded you. The second part is what I'm talking about strengthening people by teaching them to obey all that Christ has commanded, making disciples. That is more than garnering decisions. And we have sort of misled ourselves a little bit that if you just say a prayer or walk the aisle or raise your hand around a campfire and say that that you believe in Jesus, then then then you're saved and that's all there is to it.

And that may be what happens, but it may not be. There's more to it. Discipleship Jesus says, Go make disciples. He doesn't say Go out and grab decisions. That's not his. That's not what he's teaching the church to do. So if somebody makes that decision around that campfire Walk said it is the church's job to disciple that person to see that they grow in Christ, to see that that profession of faith is real, to to evaluate and affirm exactly what happened right there and to encourage the heck out of it.

That's what the church is supposed to be doing. That's what Paul lived for. God wants us to become strong followers of the Lord. He wants everyone to become a strong follower. And there's a good reason for that. As one person wisely points out, when you strengthen disciples, you strengthen churches. Think about that. When you strengthen disciples, you strengthen churches.

And what is Paul been doing? He's been traveling all over the place, all over hither and yon, planting churches. Now he's going back to establish them and to strengthen them. So as you pick up that passage for the day, Paul has spent considerable time. He's spent over a year and a half now in a city called Corinth, and his time ended there kind of uniquely with an uprising against him.

A bunch of people had had enough of Paul, and so they ginned up a crowd and they went to the governor and they were trying to bring charges against him. But do you remember we talked about it last week that God had given Paul a vision. And that vision, he said, don't be afraid. Don't be don't don't be silent.

Keep on speaking. No one will arise to harm you or attack you. That's what that's what God told Paul. And yet here he is coming to the end of his time in Corinth. And sure enough, a bunch of people rise up and they have bad intentions. And Paul is probably starting to feel that in the pit of his stomach.

Here we go again. And yet the governor, we read the governor there when he listened to their complaint, basically said, this isn't anything I'm going to deal with. You know. So Paul's time in Corinth actually ends with the promise kept. It's kind of important for us to remember when God makes a promise, he keeps it. They absolutely can be counted on it, even when it look like, Oh, no, this isn't what's going to happen.

It is what happened. Why? Because when God makes a promise, he keeps it. Paul's time in Corinth ends with a promise kept. Now, in Corinth, remember, he had connected with a couple of people, Priscilla and Aquila. They were tent makers, just like he was leather workers. Paul lived with them, and we can assume that he quite effectively disciple them because he takes them with him when he leaves and drops them off in Ephesus, presumably to begin a work that he hopes to rejoin.

He had said that I'll be back if the Lord wills. So I want you to see how this works. Paul invests in Priscilla and Aquila to the point that he's confident taking them with him and leaving them in Ephesus. And from Ephesus, Paul went up, the Scripture says, and greeted the church. Most believe that this is a reference to the Jerusalem Church.

And then he went down to Antioch, which is where he was first sent out. Antioch was a church that first commissioned him. So commentators interpret these verses to mean that Paul is not a loner. He's not founding a separate Pauline church, but he is just a major figure in the one mission which began in Jerusalem and was effective, effectively continued from Antioch.

And what is that one mission that is building the church? And who's building the church? Jesus Christ is building the church. And and as the title of our series Unstoppable, it's unstoppable. Jesus is building his church. The gates of Hades will not prevail against it. So brothers and sisters be concerned about the church. Pray for the church, love the church, but don't wring your hands over the church.

Jesus is building his church. He's still building his church while Paul is away Now strengthening the disciples in the regions of Galatia and Phrygian, Luke focuses our attention back to the happenings at Ephesus. If you have your Bible open, it'll be a Chapter 18, verse 24. Now, would you named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures.

So this guy Apollos has a lot going for him. He comes from Alexandria. That's in Egypt, a massive cultural center, a place of great learning. So he is well taught and obviously he is well-spoken. And this is an eloquent man. And the ESV says that he was competent in the scriptures, so he knew his Old Testament. That's all the scripture that that that was available at the time.

He he was competent in the scriptures. But I like the King James version a little bit more here. Anybody have a King James version? This is this is what it says, mighty in the scriptures. They're not just competent like, Oh yeah, I can do chapter verse. This gives us a little bit more of the sense. I think that word do not was powerful powerful in the scriptures.

Isn't that a great testimony? Wouldn't you want to be known as someone who was mighty in the scriptures, not just able to come to a verse or hero? They're not living off of a devotional calendar, but mighty able to take out this word, open it up, explain it to somebody, show somebody Jesus, show somebody the help they need, the promises that are there.

This this is who this guy is. This is what he can do. He's good at this. He is mighty in the scriptures. What he knew about the Old Testament, he knew well, and he could communicate it convincingly. Luke tells us that the policies fervent in spirit and that word fervent means to be hot, like to be boiling over.

He's he's a kind of he's a kind of fellow who's preaching was what Lord Jones says preaching should be logic on fire. That's what my Lord Jones says. Preaching should be logic on fire.

Eloquent, passionate, reasonable. This is Apollos. This is what Apollos brings to the table. The problem, though, was that when it came to Jesus, Apollos didn't have the whole story.

He had been instructed in the things concerning Jesus. He was able to speak about and speak to and convey what he knew about the things concerning Jesus accurately. But as Kent Hughes writes, he had been a disciple of John the Baptist. John the Baptist, you remember, is the one who came to prepare the way for Jesus. John the Baptist was the one basically going all across the countryside, shouting across people's mouths, saying, get ready, get ready, the Messiah is coming.

And Apollos was a disciple of John the Baptist. He had obediently been baptized into repentance and he was looking for the coming Messiah, but he didn't know the meaning of the cross. He was not familiar with the fact of the resurrection or the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Ephesus, Apollos began to speak boldly in the synagogue, verse 26.

But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God. More accurately, I want you to notice, if you will, the right way to correct someone who needs correcting. There's a right way and there's a there's a wrong way to do this. Most of us have probably experienced both, and we know the wrong way by doing it the wrong way.

This is the right way. This godly couple took him aside. The goal was to instruct Apollos. Their goal was to help him, not to harm him, not to humiliate him. So they privately speak with the man, they take him aside. They probably invited him over for a spot of tea and a piece of apple pie or whatever The official version of those things would have been.

Right. But you get the sense that this is just a gentle, loving correction. This is the way to correct somebody who needs correcting. I want you also to notice both. Priscilla Inequality took Apollos aside and explained the truth to them. Both of them did this in the gospel that bears his name and in the Book of Acts that he wrote.

Luke consistently holds a high view of women their giftedness, their contributions to the development of the early church and the Christian church. And so the note in the ESV study Bible on this verse is helpful here. I think it says it as an example of the Holy Spirit's work in bringing about the growth of the Church in Acts.

This verse provides positive support for the idea that both men and women can explain God's word to each other in private or informal settings without violating the prohibition. In first Timothy 2:12 against women teaching an assembled group of men, I want you to notice also the commitment of Aquila and Priscilla to the Gospel. Apollos is no doubt teaching an incomplete message.

He was not inaccurate. He just could have been more accurate. And they took the initiative to correct him because they care about the integrity of the gospel. They know how important it is to hold fast to the trustworthy message that we have been given. You cannot compromise on the gospel. You can't let that pass. And so they took him aside and they corrected him.

And you might be thinking, well, I could never do anything like that. I just wouldn't do that. We kind of live in that, live and let live society don't weigh in in a lot of ways, it is probably good to let a lot of things go. Love covers a multitude of sins. If it isn't worth it, you know, that's fine, but not when it comes to the truth of God that we can't allow to to be mishandled.

So notice their commitment to the gospel. You might be thinking you cannot do that. I want to share a couple of scriptures with you to encourage you to think differently. Colossians 3:16 Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly teaching and admonishing one another and all wisdom or Ephesians 4:25 that tells us every believer is called to speak the truth in love to one another or Romans 15:14 Again words of the Apostle Paul.

I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, listen and able to instruct one another, but is saying, Well, no, I'm not a teacher, I'm not a preacher, I'm not an elder, I'm not qualified. Listen, if somebody's speaking falsehood about the gospel, you're qualified to correct them. Do it gently.

Do it kindly do it lovingly, but don't let it sit out there. We are commanded. We can feel uncomfortable about that. I know, I know. We feel uncomfortable about instructing others, but we are commanded to do it. You have to like Valley three. I just shared three. You have to violate three Bible verses, not to do it. Hope that compels you to think a little bit differently about it.

I've got to stand up for the Word of God. We owe it to each other to bring the Word of God to accurately bear on each other's lives. So good on Priscilla and Aquila for doing this. And especially when we consider the dynamics, we kind of zoom out a little bit and consider the dynamics here. Apollos, who is this Apollos guy?

Well, he comes from Alexandria Alexandria. He is a learned man. He is a cultured man. He is a good speaking man. We will we might, in a modern vernacular, say something like, well, he's kind of like a Harvard man, you know. I mean, he's he's he's large and he's in charge and he oozes pedigree and he drips with confidence.

That's who he is. Now, Who's Brazil in Aquila? Did they make tents, instruments? They're laborers. They're leather workers. Who are they? Who were they to take this guy who comes from Alexandria? You know how big a library is an Alexandria? Yeah, I mean, this is who are they to do that? The tent makers. Except they've been taught by Paul, who was himself taught by the Holy Spirit, the deserts of Arabia.

And God is no respecter of persons. We get caught up in that all the time. But God is no respecter of persons. And I love that Priscilla and Aquila take a chance here and Paul Apollos aside, and they take that chance for the sake of the gospel. It's too important to leave the inaccurate stuff out there or let him persist in teaching an incomplete message.

But I think it actually gets better. You know why? Because Apollos listens. It took courage for Priscilla and Aquila to speak up, but it sure did take humility for Apollos to listen. But because he did, because he was willing to listen to these sweet tent makers who pulled him aside as a brother. There's more to this story that we need to share with you, because he did.

He now had the full story about Jesus. He now knew that the Messiah, John the Baptist had said would come, had in fact come, and that that Messiah was God in human form, that he lives seamlessly and perfectly as no man ever had, that he was rejected and killed by crucifixion on a cross that he hung on that cross as the substitute, as a substitute for every guilty sinner to sacrifice for the sins of all.

Who would believe that he died, that he was buried? And as the Scriptures predicted, he was raised from the dead. Three days later, having satisfied that penalty of sin, Apollos knew that Christ is now alive and will be forever more, that he appeared over a period of some 40 days to his disciples and to hundreds of others that he ascended into heaven, where he reigns with his father, that he promises to return and gather his own, who will live with him for eternity.

That after his ascension he sent the helper, the Holy Spirit, who comes to live in and who empowers those who receive Christ by faith. That baptism is now given not a baptism of repentance in the name of John the Baptist, but in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the very act signifying one's union with Christ, with the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

When we are baptized, we go down into the water, buried in the likeness of His death, and we are raised to newness of life. Apollos now knows the full story, and he received this good news learned as he was, he was willing to learn. And I think there's another application there for us, at least. I would hope that we also are willing to learn, willing to be taught that we have not been misled of the time that we received Christ and that well, there, that's over now I'm done. Instead of saying, no, that's the beginning. Now I'm on the journey to learning. We don't want to get to the place where we think we know it all, do we? And hopefully we'll never get to the place where we feel like we know enough. We don't even want to settle for that, right? We don't want to settle for that.

Well, I know enough now this morning, though, and God wants you to know and he wants you to keep pursuing it. He wants you to keep after it. He wants you to keep growing so that you can be strong and resilient and you can do his work. That's exactly what the Apostle Paul did when we watched the trajectory of his life.

He's just growing and becoming stronger and stronger so that he can withstand everything he's going to need to withstand all the way to his eventual martyrdom, his eventual death. He couldn't do that if he wasn't a strong disciple. He didn't get to be a strong disciple just as a matter of course, he pursued God in the Holy Spirit in him, helped him to be strong, and then he helped other people and they helped him.

That's how it works, my friends. So let's not get to a place where we can't be taken a side like Apollo was. We want to be able to be taken aside, and if we are wrong, we want to be able to be corrected and to be taught more accurately what it is that we need to know. That's Apollo's and he's willingly corrected and he's schooled in the Gospel.

And to his credit, and with the result that he wanted to move on from Ephesus and go to the region of okay. And when he wanted to do that, he was encouraged by the church. He was endorsed by the church. He made such strides that they were willing to get give their amen behind him, send a letter with him so that the saints in that region would welcome him.

And if you've read First Corinthians, I know some of you have, because that's that's one of our discipleship groups studying that right now. You know, Apollo's became a central figure in the strengthening of the church in Corinth, having been strengthened himself by Priscilla in Equilar, verse 27. He greatly helped those who, through grace had believed, very powerfully refuted the Jews in public showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

So this is how it works. I know you know this, but I just want to emphasize it Today. Disciples make disciples, and this is disciples. Making disciples, Christians helping each other to become strong, stronger and mature. Everyone doing his part, everyone doing her part, nobody just sitting down, laying back saying, I'm just going to consume and consume and consume.

But no, we give and we give and we give. Evangelism isn't only for preachers. Friends.

Encouraging and correcting isn't only for teachers. Strengthening isn't only for missionaries. This is how it works. People who know Jesus and love him, pouring into people who know Jesus and love him and helping us all to become more like the Jesus we know and love.

That's not news. That's hardly new. You know sin. You'd be disappointed if you came here today to hear something new that's not new. We know this. We know this is how it works. And how do we know that this is how it works? Because we believers are here because of someone investing in us. You're here because someone took the time to tell you about Christ.

You're a believer and a strong believer because someone has poured their life into yours at some point or another. Might have been might have been a grandmother, might have been a parent, might have been a faithful Sunday school teacher or coworker or a friend. The

possibilities are many, but someone somewhere pointed each one of us to the scriptures and to the hope that is in Jesus Christ.

Amen. So we know that this is how it works. And prayerfully, since that time, when we have been pointed to Jesus, we have grown because you and I are the willing beneficiaries of someone or someone's choosing to instruct and strengthen us in the faith. The question I want to leave with is this Are we carrying on the tradition or are we imitating the practice in our lives? Are we encouraging and affirming the practice in others? Do we want to become stronger Christians and do we want the same for the brothers and the sisters who surround us? Our father, We thank you for all. When we just reflect on how he even got here. The the paths that have crossed ours, the saints that have instructed us in your love and your grace and your mercy, the dear ones who taught us how to open a Bible and read it.

How to how to sing a Christian hymn, why it even mattered. God, we are so grateful. You have blessed us in many ways, and we would ask today, Lord, that you would help us to be mindful of not just being a reservoir for all those blessings, but much more being a conduit, a river, a stream. However we want to put it, let them flow through us.

Let the investments made in times past in US bear fruit, in others today and in the Times to come. Give us a burden for strengthening, not just leading people to you, but helping them to become established and confirmed in you. And they might go and do the same. We ask this in Christ name, Amen. Let's conclude with our benediction this morning.

It's taken from Romans 16, 25 to 27. Now, to him, who was able to strengthen you, according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings, has been made known to all nations, according the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith to the only wise God to be glory forever and through Jesus Christ.

Amen. Have a blessed week.