

Series: Ministry in the Marketplace

Title: Priscilla and Aquila: Manufacturers with a Mission

Text: Acts 18:1-3, 24-28.

Intro: Let's play a word game – I will give you the first half of a famous two-person team, and you give me the second half. Starsky and *Hutch*, Frankie and *Johnny*, Abbott and *Costello*, Hatfield and *McCoy*, Burns and *Allen*, Bob and *Ray*, Bonnie and *Clyde*, Bert and *Ernie*, Sonny and *Cher*, Batman and *Robin*, Simon and *Garfunkel*, Laurel and *Hardy*, Amos and *Andy*.

Those were easy, now some Biblical duos: Paul and *Silas*, David and *Jonathan*, Ahab and *Jezebel*, Samson and *Delilah*, Ananias and *Saphira*, Priscilla and *Aquila*. We could continue with foods that seem to go together, like mashed potatoes and *gravy*, turkey and *dressing*, ham and *cheese*, coffee and *cream*, but it is likely I will lose most of you to thoughts of lunch, brunch, or donuts in the Courtyard.

Our duo for this morning, Priscilla and Aquila: Manufacturers with a Mission, would not be the most well-known Biblical duo, but they provide us with one of the most beautiful examples in history of the power for good that can be exerted by a husband and wife working in unison for the advancement of the gospel. We find their story in the book of Acts.

In Acts and the Pauline letters around 95 individuals are recorded to have been associated with Paul during his ministry.

The presence of these people in Paul's life shows the extent to which his ministry was one of teamwork and camaraderie, and was not a "one-man show". Of these 95 individuals, 36 were intimate coworkers of Paul. Among his coworkers were Priscilla and Aquila. Turn with me in your Bibles to Acts 18 for an introduction to them.

"After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

(Move ahead to verse 18)

Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus.

(Now down to verse 24)

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.”

Paul also referred to Aquila and Priscilla in the closing remarks of his letter to Christians in Rome, in Corinth, and his personal letter to Timothy.

Romans 16:3-5 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house.

I Corinthians 16:19 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.

2 Timothy 4:19 Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus.

When Paul left Athens and went to Corinth he met them, and because they shared the same trade, tent-making, he stayed and worked with them.

From the scriptures we can piece together a number of details about them. We know that Aquila was a Jew — his wife? Well perhaps she was a Jewish convert. Her name, Prisca, or Priscilla, is a name that may have come from a high-ranking Roman family. We know they were Christians, but it is not clear whether Paul led them to Christ shortly after meeting them or whether they were already believers.

Why should we spend time looking at their lives this morning? They have much to teach us about the advantages of working in a team, about holding loosely to what we have, and about being purposeful as followers of Jesus.

Aquila and Priscilla are a good example for us because they:

- ◆ **Exhibited a “Team” Lifestyle: In their relationship as a couple.**

We could not exist as a church without the benefit of “Teams” that serve together. Teams are responsible for all we do as a church. I would guess that many of you serve on a team at First Free. The more visible teams, such as Ministry Staff, Elders, Trustees, Deacons, Adult, Student, Children, Missions, Worship, etc. involve at least 150 people. Many of these teams have sub-groups that teach a class, work with students of a specific age group, lead small groups, etc. We can learn much from Aquila and Priscilla about life on a team. I hope you will think of your team as you look at their example.

They were married, but you know that being married does not automatically create a “team”, just as harnessing two or four horses together doesn’t create a “team” that will do productive work together.

They exhibited humility, and respect for each other. The New Testament references to Priscilla and Aquila make it clear that, despite the male-dominant culture, Aquila was not the leader and Priscilla his assistant. In fact, of the seven times the two names are mentioned together, Priscilla is listed first five of those times. Because it was the custom to list the husband’s name first, this reversal indicates Priscilla’s predominance in the minds of the New Testament writers Luke and Paul.

For those of you who are married, how would this impact your ability to be a “team” in ministry? We don’t get to peek inside their home to hear conversations at the dining table, or in the bedroom, but there is no indication either of them saw this as negative. There was mutual respect, humility, and a powerful witness for the sake of Christ and his church.

What is it like for you to serve on a team where one person is a very gifted leader? Do you find it easy to submit to them on the team? Do you respect them, even if you may see your gifts being in leadership as well? Men, if a woman on your team has unusual insight into Scripture along with godly wisdom, do you respect her role on the team? Humility and respect go a long way toward building effectiveness on any team.

Exhibited a “Team” Lifestyle: In their relationship with Paul

As a team, Priscilla and Aquila modeled inclusiveness toward the apostles, especially to Paul. They provided a home for him in Corinth, and all that went with that; meals, a place to sleep, and a place to call his own.

As fellow tentmakers they included him in their business in the leather-working area of the city’s commercial district. Together they haggled over prices with customers, shared tools, and purchased raw materials and supplies for their business.

They shared their Christian faith in that setting, expressing Christ’s love to the others in the business section of the city and supporting one another at work. I would imagine Paul felt like a member of the family with them, not like a third wheel.

As proof of this, at the close of his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul greeted 26 people by name. At the top of this list was the ministry team of Priscilla and Aquila. He referred to the couple as “my helpers in Christ Jesus.” The word “helper” can be translated “companion in labor” or “fellow-worker.”

When Paul left Corinth for Ephesus, this godly couple packed up their belongings and their tent-making business and moved with him. They helped him to establish a new church, and eventually stayed behind to care for the young church when Paul returned to Antioch.

In Paul's last letter to Timothy before his death, he writes, "Salute Priscilla and Aquila" (2 Timothy 4:19). Timothy was the leader at the church in Ephesus, and Aquila and Priscilla had stayed on to help him. Timothy benefited from their friendship just as Paul did. As a team they were able to include others, join them in ministry, be whatever they needed to be for the good of the common goal of knowing Christ and making Him known.

Application point: Think with me about the value of friends. Perhaps you can remember going to a new city or a new school, or into a new ministry environment, and meeting someone who included you. Even better if it turned out that they were Christians, and you formed a strong bond with them. The same is true when you are invited to join an existing team and feel included.

Christian friends, like Aquila and Priscilla, are vitally important to all of us. We all need friends like them, and we all need to be friends like them. God's church is not made up of bricks and mortar; it is made of people who are inter-dependent on one another and Christ. How does your team do at including new people, adopting folks in need, encouraging those who are lonely?

Exhibited a "Team" Lifestyle: In their relationship to the broader Christian community.

That fact that their reputation had spread far and wide is evident from what Paul said in Romans 16:3-5, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house."

Evidently their reputation as a ministry team had spread among the Gentile Christians as well as the Jewish believers. Does your team benefit the larger community of believers at First Free?

◆ **Exemplified an "Open-handed" Perspective: In the use of their home.**

What is an "open-handed" perspective? It is a concept that comes from the recruiting speech that Jesus gave just after he predicted his death. I want us to read it as recorded by Mark in chapter 8, beginning with verse 31.

"He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

"Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what

can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.”

I believe Jesus was saying that we have two choices related to our possessions, holding them tightly, or loosely. Savers (those who hold them tightly) don't trust anyone else to hold what is precious to them, not even God. Jesus says the savers end up losing everything. Losers (those who are open-handed) are content to hold everything loosely, knowing it doesn't belong to them anyway. The losers are winners in the end, being the ones who end up with everything in Christ. As Paul said, “My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19)

Even though we have only scratched the surface in getting to know Aquila and Priscilla, it is clear that they had an open-handed attitude. When they met the Apostle Paul they shared their home with him. Later, they left their home in Corinth and traveled with him across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus. He left them there and when he came back he was able to stay in their home in Ephesus. When Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, they were there in Rome, and Paul said some very commendable things about them and mentioned the church that was in their house. They held all things loosely. Whatever they had belonged to God, especially their home, but also their business, and their finances.

Application: I wonder if you have thought of what an important place your home could be, as far as the gospel is concerned. Being open-handed is not just a N.T. concept. The O.T. tells about a Shunammite woman who invited the prophet Elisha to her home for a meal. This became his custom whenever he was in town. One day, she said to her husband, “I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us.” (2 Kings 4:9,10) And so they did. Maybe they were ancestors of Aquila.

Or consider the Lord Jesus. Whenever he went up to Jerusalem, it seems that he used to stay at that little village just outside Jerusalem, Bethany, in the home of Lazarus and Mary and Martha. What a blessing it must have been for the Lord Jesus to know that when he went to Jerusalem he would not have to scrape round for somewhere to get a bed and breakfast, but he knew he could go to their home and be welcome.

Illus: Back when I was in college, just after the earth's crust cooled, my uncle and aunt in Northern California remodeled their farm home, adding a large guest room and private bath where visiting missionaries or preachers could stay. They called it the “Prophet's Chamber” after the story of Elisha and the Shunammite woman.

Priscilla and Aquila gave Christ full access to their home. It really comes as a challenge to us, does it not? Our homes — what are they like? Are they centers of Christian influence? Are they places of hospitality? Are they classrooms where we are able to help other Christians to grow more in knowledge and understanding of the truth? Are they

arenas where unbelievers can hear, yes, and see the difference that Christ makes? Do you have an open-handed attitude toward the use your home or apartment?

Exemplified a “Open-handed” Perspective: In the use of their time, gifts, and talents.

I want to approach this point from a negative angle, looking at what Aquila and Priscilla did not have, rather than what they had. First, and this is only conjecture on my part, but I don't think they had any children. Going with that assumption, their childlessness, rather than being a point of bitterness toward God, was seen as providing them with more time to invest in ministry. It also allowed them to be very flexible, moving from place to place (from Rome, to Corinth, to Ephesus, and back to Rome) without the concern of uprooting children from friends, education, etc. It also permitted easier use of their home for business and for church, not having to worry about sleeping times, meal times, and such. They held time loosely.

Another thing Aquila and Priscilla never had was a primary ministry position, such as was held by Timothy, Titus, Apollos, or Paul. As far as we know, they never wrote a book of scripture, never preached a sermon, didn't hold an official leadership position in the synagogue, or even in the churches that met in their houses. In many situations they are seen filling a secondary role, a supportive position. They were content to play second fiddle, to work behind the scenes.

They did not think of themselves as indispensable, but were willing to die for the sake of Christ and his Church. Paul said “Greet Priscilla and Aquila my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. [Romans 16:3-5].

What they did and when they did it, we do not know. But obviously there had been one occasion when they had intervened at risk of their own lives in order to deliver the Apostle Paul.

Maybe it was the incident that he referred to at the beginning of 2 Corinthians: We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. [2 Corinthians 1:8-10].

Permit me to speculate one last time? They probably did not have a life plan that included financial goals, educational goals, home ownership, a pension plan, a down payment on a beach house on the Black Sea. Why do I believe this? Because people who have all these things are usually not as apt to consider moving at the whim of an itinerant evangelist. They probably don't see their family business as that which provides the basic income for food and lodging, and that lodging in turn becomes the guest house of traveling preachers, and the place where the local believers hangout on Sunday. Nor do people who

have these things feel okay about not knowing where they will be five or ten years from now.

I must confess that I do not find the lifestyle of Aquila and Priscilla appealing. I like having plans in place for the future, for retirement. I like thinking I will remain in Wichita for as many years as God gives me, watching my grandsons grow up, seeing them get married and have children. I just heard last week that great-grandchildren are even more fun than grandchildren. I can't tell you that I hold the present and the future as loosely as they seemed to hold it.

Lastly, Aquila and Priscilla are a model because they

◆ **Engaged in Purposeful Ministry: A Ministry of Evangelism**

Aquila and Priscilla shared Paul's love for fellow Jews who had not yet accepted Jesus as the Messiah. The best place to connect with them was the local synagogue. Like Paul, they went there on the assumption that if anybody is likely to believe the promises of God concerning the Messiah, surely it would be God's historic people, the Jews. Every Sabbath found Aquila and Priscilla reasoning in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. Since they had a Christian church meeting in their home, it seems clear their only reason for continuing to attend the local synagogue was for evangelistic reasons.

Did you know that the longer you are a Christian, the fewer opportunities you will have to be involved with unbelievers in a non-business setting? It takes intentional effort to remain connected socially with those who are not Christians. If you were to name your five closest friends, is at least one of them a non-Christian? Is there a non-Christian among your ten closest acquaintances?

Application: It is with regret I confess that I dropped my membership at a local health club, since that was my best place to rub shoulders with unbelievers. Thankfully though, I still have natural opportunities in my neighborhood, but I need to be more purposeful about making time for this.

When we think intentionally about evangelism we begin to see everyone we meet as ministry (someone who needs Christ), instead of seeing them as scenery (part of the landscape), or as machinery (serving us, the clerk in the store, the delivery person). If you are hesitant about sharing the gospel, I encourage you to consider enrolling in our Evangelism Training Program which meets on Tuesday nights here at the church. A new class will begin in February. Class members learn to share the gospel in a supportive, non-threatening environment.

➤ **Engaged in Purposeful Ministry: A Ministry of Edification (building up)**

We pick up the story in Ephesus. We know it is their habit to attend the local synagogue in whatever city they find themselves, and on a particular Sabbath a very gifted man is speaking. To refresh your memory, here is the account from Acts 18:24-28.

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

In his sermon, “Halfway Christians”, the late Ray Stedman said, “Here in the synagogue in Ephesus began a most excellent Christian practice -- inviting the preacher home to dinner.”

Illus: I can testify that as a preacher’s son, it was a rare occasion when someone invited our family home to dinner after church. I should tell you however, that I am the eldest of seven, and that may have caused folks to think twice about having the preacher over for dinner.

Priscilla and Aquila did a beautiful thing -- they invited Apollos home to dinner and helped him with his theology. How long it took them we do not know, but you can imagine the scene. Perhaps they would begin by discussing the sermon that he preached that Sabbath day in the Synagogue. They would commend the parts of the sermon that were correct, and then delicately, and tactfully suggest that here and there he should have put it like this. Or, did he realize this truth about the gospel? And, did he not see how all that fitted together? Then they probably went back into the Old Testament Scriptures to show him how they predicted the death and resurrection of Christ, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

I do not know whom to admire more in this situation, Aquila and Priscilla, or Apollos. These two dear Christians, not too old in the Lord themselves, did not scorn this young man for his incomplete preaching. They did not write letters to the synagogue president about him.

Neither did they reject him, or criticize him, but instead they invited him home, and lovingly, wisely, explained to him the more accurate understanding of Christ.

Apollos, must have been a very humble man because there is no doubt he was miles above this couple as far as his intellectual ability was concerned. Yet he was willing to sit in this way under the teaching of members of his congregation and humbly listen to them.

Because of their help, when Apollos went across the Aegean Sea to Corinth, he continued to preach in this dynamic, amazing way — but all the deficiencies were removed. He was able to explain the word of God, without the inconsistencies and the inadequacies that he had manifested when Priscilla and Aquila heard him.

There are several practical lessons here:

1. We should do our best to build up those whom the Lord entrusts to us in ministry. You never know if a disciple the Lord has entrusted to you might become an Apollos. If we have the chance of raising up one Apollos in our lifetime, it would be a life well spent.
2. Such instruction must be accompanied by humility. I suspect that the church in Corinth never knew the part that Aquila and Priscilla had played in helping, instructing, and spiritually educating Apollos. They were not concerned about that. They did not give instructions to Apollos saying, “You be careful whenever you preach a good sermon to give us the credit for having put you straight on those doctrinal points where you were not all that clear.”
3. We all need spiritual “mentors” who can help us expound the Scriptures in a more accurate way. Aquila and Priscilla approached Apollos and became his mentor in the things of the Spirit. We should not be afraid to ask others who may be more spiritually mature to help us get a better understanding of the Scriptures. Every sincere Christian should have a more mature believer under whose tutelage they are growing. Who is your mentor? Don’t neglect sitting under the instruction of people like Dallas Willard, John Stott, and Eugene Peterson, through their books.

Engaged in Purposeful Ministry: A Ministry of Church Planting

Keep in mind there were no church buildings such as we are used to so a Christian who had a large house would make it available so the local believers could gather there. In Corinth and again in Ephesus, and maybe in Rome the church gathered in their home. This was their significant contribution to church planting, in addition to sharing their faith in Christ with Jews and Gentiles alike. It is no small matter to house a church in your home, or a weekly Bible Study for that matter. If you do it, you understand the commitment it represents.

Do you want to get involved in church planting? Currently the Free Church is engaged in planting over twenty new churches in Kansas and Nebraska. A portion of your financial gift goes to help with four area church plants, Udall, Salina, Derby, and Halstead. Several people from our church serve on local advisory committees in each of these church plants. Speak to Pastors Mike or Dick if you have an interest in getting involved.

Suggestions for Application:

- Thank God for current examples of “team” ministry. If you currently serve on a team, be it an elected place, or as a volunteer with adults, students, children, missions, worship, building maintenance, please stand.
- Be willing to join an existing ministry team or form a new one. It matters not if you are young or old, female or male, single, married, or widowed, we have a place for you. Any member of our ministry staff would be thrilled to help you find a place on a team, or help you create a new team.

- Consider ways to minister with your home or apartment. Many of you already do this. Some of you are the first to volunteer your home for visiting missionaries or speakers. Others host a weekly small group or Bible Study. Thank you! May your numbers increase!
- What would it look like for you to adopt an “open-handed” perspective? It doesn’t mean you can’t plan ahead, it doesn’t mean you don’t have goals. It does mean your look at them differently. Trust God with your plans, your goals, your pension, your future.