

# **Your Community**

## ***Understanding Your Impact:***

**Acts 18:4-18**  
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The greatest tragedy we witness today is not the horrible wars that ravage this planet, or nature's fury of fires, floods, tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes and tsunamis. It isn't the diseases that place both old and young on a bed of pain. By far, the worst tragedy is both what could be and what could be prevented if we'd believe.

I know that we believe many things, intellectually at least. However, the faith that changes things is a faith that acts. It is the faith of a child who may scream sliding down the hill with his mother, but his act of getting into her lap, against his better judgment and because of her word, opens a new world to him. That is the faith of a mustard seed that moves mountains and uproots mulberry trees. It is just enough faith for God to reward you whether you doubt or not. It is the faith that opens up a new world and new life to us and those around us.

The problem is that we don't act in that kind of faith. God powerfully works through ordinary people who have all kinds of weaknesses. We think God uses only distant heroes. Why do you think Moses suffered opposition to his leadership from his first cousin, his sister and brother? He wasn't a distant hero; he was an all too human brother. Their lack of faith brought them shame and great pain. Why do you think Jesus' brothers taunted him in John 7 just like Joseph's and David's brothers taunted them? Jesus, Joseph and David all were ridiculed by brothers who thought they suffered delusions of grandeur. Those brothers saw the men's humanity rather than their standing with God. Indeed, all Nazareth took offense at Jesus because they knew him. They knew his family. They remembered him as a little child. They couldn't

imagine that God would do such amazing things through an ordinary individual. Hundreds of years earlier, speaking of God's suffering servant, the prophet Isaiah said:

***Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed... He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*** (Isaiah 53:1-2, NIV)

I have had the privilege of meeting some heroes that God used to launch movements of faith that have been shaping our world. Some of these individuals have their names plastered on magazines and are written about in books, yet what impressed me was how extraordinarily ordinary they are. They make mistakes. They have problems. The only thing out of the ordinary is their faith to act and keep on acting.

I picked up a magazine this past week and read how ordinary people from Midwestern churches responded to the desperate call of a woman named Esther from La Oroya, Peru. The community and Peruvian government had long ignored her complaints about the health effects of a smelting plant that operated in that community since 1929. God used her single voice to bring international attention to her community where it was discovered that 97 percent of the children suffered from lead poisoning. The faith of this Esther reminded me of the faith of a different one, a Hebrew girl who was elevated to Queen and would have to violate a law with a death sentence to save her people (video clip).

The words we listened to are almost a direct quote from the Bible. Queen Esther acted at great personal risk. She saved a nation by violating a law and depending on a man's favor, who had not wished to see her for a month. That single act of faith still affects our world 2,500 years later. Although you may not be elevated to a palace, your acts of faith affect a community.

You affect what your community hears and welcomes. Your acts of faith affect the climate of the community. When the Apostle Paul visited communities, riots broke out. In Acts

16, he visits Philippi and is imprisoned. When city officials release him, they request him to leave. In Acts 17, he visits Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. From Thessalonica he escapes by night after a riot. In Berea he faces agitated crowds and abruptly leaves. In his brief stay at Athens, he faces ridicule and sneering. When in Acts 18 he comes to Corinth, he follows his pattern of first preaching to Jewish people in the local synagogue. In short time, some Jewish leaders reject his message and become abusive. Would he soon be expelled? One night Jesus spoke to Paul in a vision:

***Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.***  
(Acts 18:9-10, NIV)

It is clear that Paul has protection from attacks and bodily harm, and furthermore, that he is free to speak truth because of other believers in the city. Understand that these believers are not physical body guards who personally shield him from rotten tomatoes or more likely, stones. Instead, the believers affect the spirit of the city. Their prayers, their fasting, their words and acts of faith, their witness and relationships impact the mood of that city. Every word we utter and every deed we do sows something good or evil into our community. Our volume, our silence, our action, and our paralysis all influence the community.

One of the most short-sighted thoughts and damning lies ever verbalized is that what you say doesn't matter. None of us are called to exercise control over the other, so we shouldn't think that others will blindly obey or even agree with what we say. However, our words and actions always encourage, caution, or discourage others. Even if they don't affect the immediate decision, they often affect the mood and faith of those who hear or observe us. Our words and actions sow thoughts and feelings into the minds and hearts of others. That is why God sends us as his witnesses, and Jesus teaches about sowing God's word in the soil of people's hearts.

Sometimes, as iron sharpens iron, we sharpen one another (Proverbs 27:17), and sometimes we dull one another, reinforcing falsehood. What we say or do may not affect the immediate decision, but it often will affect subsequent decisions. Frequently, it is not what we say once or do once that prevails, but what we continue to say and do. The walk of faith has an amazing impact. That is the lesson of the Peruvian Esther and Queen Ether.

To some degree that walk of faith was exemplified by Chris Gardner's struggle with poverty. His story is captured in the recent movie, *The Pursuit of Happyness*, and especially in an unexpected conversation over basketball. Listen (video clip).

At times, I have wanted to spare someone from the disappointment and heartache I've experienced. All I did, however, was discourage them from embarking on a journey of faith. Our rabbit trails are God's school of faith and life development. As we've said earlier in this sermon series, it is not important what you've been or what you are. What truly is important is what God wants you to be and what you can be in faith.

Brothers and sisters, you were made in the image of God, who is the epitome of all heroes. God didn't even spare his one and only Son on behalf of us and our community. Through faith in Jesus the Spirit of a hero lives and works in us. Jesus laid down his life in love and faith for us and our community. Victory belongs not to those who are gifted. Victory belongs not to those who are lucky. Victory belongs only to those who believe and won't give up. Does victory belong to you?