

May 31 [Priscilla] “Being Joined in Ministry”



**Romans 16:3-4**

**3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus.**

**4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.**

**Special Music:**

Wedding Song - Paul Stookey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lXrMXbAz1c>

Better Together - Luke Combs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpTk5C2G078>

**Jerry:** Hello? Hello.

I'm lookin' for my wife.

Wait. Okay...okay...okay.

If this is where it has to happen, then this is where it has to happen.

I'm not letting you get rid of me. How about that?

This used to be my specialty. You know, I was good in a living room. They'd send me in there, and I'd do it alone. And now I just...

But tonight, our little project, our company had a very big night -- a very, very big night.

But it wasn't complete, wasn't nearly close to being in the same vicinity as complete, because I couldn't share it with you. I couldn't hear your voice or laugh about it with you. I miss my -- I miss my wife.

We live in a cynical world, a cynical world, and we work in a business of tough competitors.

I love you. You -- complete me.

And I just had --

**Dorothy:** Shut up. Just shut up.

You had me at hello.

You had me at hello.

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I'm sure that you recognize that dialogue. It's from Jerry McQuire. Written, directed and produced in 1996 by Cameron Crowe. It has two of the most recognized and quoted lines in movie history.

**"You... complete me."**

and

**"You had me at Hello."**

I am probably the last preacher on the face of this planet that should give a sermon on marriage, but I also believe that no subject should be taboo for us to talk about. I admit, that as a man, I struggle with the fact that I have a terrible track record when it comes to choosing life partners. But that doesn't stop me from believing in love or believing in marriage. I am inspired to have so many friends that are so bonded to their mates that they have found that place of unity with a life partner that cannot be unraveled or broken. Their unions are forged in the fires of both hardship and joy; endurance, passion and grace celebrated in union. I also believe that we are all better when we have someone to share and celebrate our lives with, our accomplishments with, our hard times with, our good times with, our all the times with, together, in person and in spirit. In the words of Jerry McQuire, "You... complete me." It is difficult to serve in ministry, almost to distraction, when you are incomplete. And you certainly don't have to be a minister to understand that life is hard enough. And it can be even harder when you try to do it alone.

Please don't misunderstand me, because I am not talking about diminishing the presence of God in our lives. But from the very beginning, the Lord God said **“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Genesis 2:18.** The truth is, we are better together. God wants us to feel that connection of completeness, that joy of being joined with another human being, of being in a give-and-take relationship where that union makes each person a greater purveyor of the grace of God than we could ever be by ourselves. A unity where we can worship and praise the Lord our God, creator of the universe, together and in tandem, supporting and caring for each other, even when the world does its very best to drag us down. We feel complete when we know that whatever happens, whatever trials we face, whatever temptations lie in our paths, that person will be at our side, sharing both our burdens and our achievements.

We read in the intentions that God has for our unions in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12:

**9 Two are better than one,**

**because they have a good return for their labor:**

**10 If either of them falls down,**

**one can help the other up.**

**But pity anyone who falls**

**and has no one to help them up.**

**11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.**

**But how can one keep warm alone?**

**12 Though one may be overpowered,**

**two can defend themselves.**

**A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.**

**That cord of three strands is addressed in the Paul Stookey song that we heard earlier. That concept of three strands that becomes one cord involves two people and the God that is their creator and master. If you remove any one of the strands, the cord is no longer strong.**

**I chose “The Wedding Song” by Paul Stookey this morning because it has special meaning for me. Noel Paul Stookey wrote the song for his friend Peter Yarrow for the occasion of Peter’s wedding. It was his wedding gift to the couple. He went into the studio with Peter to write**

the song with absolutely no idea of how the song should go, music or lyrics. But he sat down. and the song came to him and flowed through him. He credited God with the marvelous gift of this song because he felt it could not have come from his own design. He was so utterly convinced that the song came from God, that, at first, he refused to have it copyrighted. Only when he was pushed into recording it did he obtain the copyright, simply because it could not be recorded without one. But he did something unheard of. He published it under the name of a foundation so that any monies made from the song went to charity. And today, it is available in the public domain.

If you ask what my personal connection with the song is, I have to admit that it is rather tenuous. I never had the pleasure of working with Paul Stookey but I did have the wonderful opportunity to work with Peter Yarrow on a concert in the mid 70's and could feel that bond that still existed between Paul Stookey, Peter Yarrow and Mary Travers. It was so very evident when he talked about his music and his relationship with his friends that their union transcended any coerced collaboration.

I get that same sense of unity when I read about Paul, Priscilla and Aquila. While Peter, Paul and Mary had a common interest through music, Paul, Priscilla and Aquila were all tentmakers. Aquila was married to Priscilla. They had come to Corinth when Claudius forced all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul meets them in Corinth and stayed with them, probably because they were all tentmakers. This is made clear to us in Act 18:1-3

**1 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.**

**2 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 Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them,**

**3 and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.**

Nothing is said at that time about Aquilla and Priscila being Christians. It is commonly believed that the connection that Paul had with them was through their tentmaking skills. It is probably during this time in Corinth that Aquila and Priscilla are first introduced to the story of Jesus Christ. That is how important relationships can be in our personal evangelistic ministries. We can use those commonalities between us and others to allow us the opportunity to speak into

**their lives and share the joy that is Jesus Christ our Lord. We know that Aquila and Priscilla become so strong in their understanding of scripture and in their belief as Christians through their friendship and relationship with Paul. They became a voice to be heard in unity in the early church.**

**The church in Corinth became strong, but there were ongoing disputes and persecutions committed by the local Jews against the Christian community. Times were turbulent. Paul's life was threatened on many occasions.**

**Today's passage from Romans may be a reference to the troubled times that Paul experienced in Corinth:**

**Romans 16:3-4**

**3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus.**

**4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.**

**We do not know why Paul left Corinth that first time, but it may have been with the encouragement of Aquila and Priscilla since they accompanied him as he continued his first missionary journey. When they reach Ephesus, Paul left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus and went on to Jerusalem without them. There**



appears to be no animosity, but instead, purpose on Paul's part with regards to the separation. There had to have been a great deal of trust that had been developed between these three friends for Paul to entrust them with opportunity to help the church in Ephesus grow through its infancy. The couple spoke with a unified and passionate voice that was so necessary for the continuity of the message of Christ in those early years.

Paul shows how very much he believes that Priscilla and Aquila had grown in their relationship with Christ by calling them co-workers in Christ Jesus. The common bond that was originally tentmaking had become a bond now centered in their relationship with God and Jesus Christ.

When we read about Priscilla and Aquila, it is always just on the periphery of our vision, that ever so slight movement that occurs bringing focus to the message of Christ. They work in tandem and seldom is one mentioned without the other. But it is always to advance the kingdom of God in a way that keeps the spotlight on the message, instead of the messengers.

I would be remiss in talking about this couple without mentioning their encounter with Apollos. Still in Act 18, we read the following with regards to the church in Ephesus:

## **Acts 18:24-28**

**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.

**25** 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.

**26** 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.

**27** When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.

**28** For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

We learn from this passage that a new Christian by the name of Apollos was on fire for the Lord, preaching the story of Jesus everywhere he went. But he didn't know the whole story. Although he was a believer and thoroughly versed in the scriptures, he was working off of third hand knowledge. Remember, the gospels didn't actually get written down until much later and Paul's letters were only starting to be circulated. Copying was all done by hand and the Jewish leaders were doing everything in their power to make sure that the message was not being delivered. Its kind of like that old "Telephone Game" that we all used to play where we would sit in a circle and someone would whisper a word or phrase to the next person. That person would in turn whisper it to their neighbor

and so on and so on. Until the last person said whatever they heard out loud, and everyone would laugh at how the word or phrase had changed. Apollos was just later in the telephone circle and his knowledge was incomplete and somewhat jumbled.

Priscilla and Aquila only wanted to help him. They saw that he spoke with conviction but needed a little guidance and clarification. So, they invited him home. Verse 26 says, **“they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.”** Notice that they didn’t argue with him in public or try to discredit him. They saw an opportunity where they, as a couple, could show grace. They invited him into a safe environment where they could have a conversation, teach and speak into him. Bring him “up to speed” so to speak. And, of course, he is going to listen because his heart is in the right place and the people who were gracious enough to invite him into their home, were a couple of Paul’s best friends. The information that he was receiving from Aquila and Priscilla was from a much more substantial source than the rumors that he had been privy to. Just like my appreciation of “The Wedding Song” was enhanced by my encounter with Peter Yarrow who was best friends with Paul Stookey.

All this brings us to an important point. Priscilla’s contributions to the early church are not in dispute. When we study the story of Priscilla and Aquila and the dynamic of the couple, we see a gradual rise in the authority and respect of Priscilla and Aquila slowly backs into her shadow. This is truly due to the way that the couple interacts with each other, lifting each other. There is no jealousy here, only purpose. Aquila treats Priscilla as an equal. Paul treats Priscilla as an

equal. No one brings up her gender other than acknowledging that she is the wife of Aquila. Her voice is held at the same level as the other teachers in the early church and she is recognized for her knowledge of scripture and its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ.

Paul's letters were being copied so that they could be shared with many of the early churches, and for three centuries, it was believed that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written by Paul. After all, Paul was famous for his letters to the early churches. But scholars began to realize that the Epistle to the Hebrews just doesn't sound like it was written by Paul, but by someone who was intimately connected to both Paul and Timothy. So, the debate has gone on through time with regards to who actually was the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Today, there is a strong case being made that that person was Priscilla, and that only Priscilla meets all the qualifications of being the author of this letter. And while it cannot be definitely proven that Priscilla wrote this letter, it is a little strange that the earliest editions of the letter blotted out the author, perhaps because Priscilla was a woman, it is almost universally agreed that Paul did not write the letter and many scholars are in agreement that Priscilla is the most logical alternative.

It is way too easy for us to sit in judgment on those who chose to not disclose the author of Hebrews, but from a historical perspective, we have all too often allowed the achievements of the disenfranchised to go unnoticed while applauding their work. We sometimes get comfortable with our prejudices to the point that we look the other way when this happens, instead of speaking up. We have

trouble, at times, admitting that a woman, a poor person, an oversized person, a person of ethnic minority, a person of color, a disabled person or someone speaking from the shadows could ever have anything of importance to say. How much wisdom and insight have lost over the centuries to our own misguided prejudices?

But Aquilla knew the value of Priscilla. Priscilla knew the value of Aquila. They continuously lifted each other. They were joined in ministry. They had common values and a common mission. They worked together as one to deliver the story and message of Jesus Christ to the world. Together, they listened as Paul spoke into them and together, they carried that message to those around them.

Together, they risked their lives for Paul. Together they made a difference. And it did not go unnoticed.

**3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus.**

**4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.**

Paul lifted them up as a couple to celebrate what they had accomplished. May we all find completeness in the helpers that God blesses us with. May we truly understand what God means when He says that is not good for a person to be

**alone. Because together, we can accomplish so much more than what we can accomplish by ourselves.**

**AMEN**

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