

# KINGDOMS COLLIDE TEACHING GUIDE

*A companion teaching guide to Episode 1: “The Stop That Began a Church”*

**Main Scripture:** Acts 18:18–28

**Companion Devotional:** *When God Interrupts the Itinerary*

**Where We Are:** Ephesus, approximately AD 52

**Teaching Length:** 35–55 minutes

## BIG IDEA

God often begins His greatest work through ordinary people who are simply willing to be faithful with what He has placed in front of them.

## TEACHING AIM

By the end of this lesson, participants should recognize that God’s work in Ephesus began before the dramatic events for which the city would later become known. Paul held his plans loosely. Priscilla and Aquila remained available where God had placed them. Apollos remained teachable despite his considerable gifts.

The goal is to help participants stop measuring spiritual significance primarily by visibility and instead ask:

**What does faithfulness require from me where God has placed me right now?**

## LEADER PREPARATION

Before teaching, read Acts 18:18–28 slowly at least twice.

If possible, also listen to Season 1 - Episode 1 of *Kingdoms Collide* “The Stop That Began a Church” and read the companion devotional, *When God Interrupts the Itinerary*. All of this is available for free at

[www.KingdomsCollide.com/ephesus/episode-1](http://www.KingdomsCollide.com/ephesus/episode-1)

As you prepare, notice what has not happened yet.

Paul has not spent years teaching in Ephesus.

The extraordinary miracles of Acts 19 have not happened.

The sons of Sceva have not encountered the power of Jesus' name.

The magic scrolls have not burned.

Demetrius has not gathered the craftsmen.

The theater has not erupted into chaos.

At this point, the beginnings are remarkably small.

Paul visits.

Priscilla and Aquila stay.

Apollos arrives.

A conversation happens.

Apollos leaves strengthened.

The temptation in teaching this will be to rush toward everything that Ephesus eventually becomes. Resist that temptation. Allow the class to feel how unimpressive the beginning actually appears. The ordinary days that they encounter here may look surprisingly similar to the ordinary days of their own lives.

That is part of the lesson.

## **OPENING QUESTION**

Begin by asking:

**Have you ever experienced something that seemed insignificant at the time but became much more important when you looked back on it later?**

Allow several people to answer.

Then transition:

We normally recognize significant moments after we know what happened because of them.

Acts 18 is going to allow us to see the opposite perspective.

Obviously if you read into Acts 19, you will see that God does some big things in Ephesus but the people that we are about to read about in chapter 18 don't know that.

They were simply living the next act of obedience.

## **READ THE TEXT**

Ask the group to open their Bibles and read Acts 18:18–28.

Then ask:

**What people, decisions, or movements stand out to you in this passage?**

Let the class observe the text before beginning the lesson.

## **SETTING THE SCENE — A KINGDOM ALREADY OCCUPIES EPHEBUS**

Ephesus was not an empty spiritual landscape waiting for Christianity to arrive.

It was a significant city connected to the wider Roman world through commerce and travel. The Temple of Artemis profoundly shaped the city's religious identity. The main deity of Ephesus was Artemis and this was the city's claim to fame. The Temple of Artemis drew pilgrims and visitors from across the ancient Mediterranean world. It was such a large institution that it operated as a bank that held the wealth of kings and commoners alike. Ephesus became famous in the ancient world for magical practices and formulas sometimes associated with the so-called Ephesia Grammata. Acts itself later describes costly magical texts being publicly burned in a mass act of repentance. These magical texts were likely available in the market alongside the metal idols of Artemis that brought wealth to the silversmiths.

Ephesus was also a part of the Roman Empire. Roman authority shaped its civic and political life. Imperial religion and political loyalty permeated normal life in the city. Imperial loyalty also carried religious expression. Honoring Rome and honoring the emperor were not neatly separated from civic life the way modern readers might expect. Public acts of sacrifice, incense, and acclamation could express loyalty to Caesar and the empire. People would make offerings of incense to Caesar and declare “Kaisar Kyrios” (Caesar is Lord) as a public display of their allegiance.

In a city where religion, commerce, and civic identity were deeply intertwined—and where loyalty to Rome shaped public life—God began planting another kingdom.

Not Caesar’s kingdom. Christ’s kingdom.

When looking at Ephesus and Rome, the beginning of Christianity in the city is striking.

God does not begin by constructing something that can compete visually with Ephesus.

There is no grand Christian temple that is built to compete with the Temple of Artemis, which was one of the wonders of the ancient world.

No political office.

No massive organization.

No visible Christian institution dominating the city.

Instead, Acts introduces us to people.

That matters because as we study *Kingdoms Collide*, that is exactly what we will see.

Human kingdoms frequently display their strength through structures, wealth, titles, institutions, and visibility.

God’s kingdom often begins where almost nobody is looking, with people whose names are often lost to history.

## **MOVEMENT ONE — PAUL: HOLD YOUR PLANS LOOSELY**

Read Acts 18:19–21 again.

Paul enters the synagogue and reasons with the Jews.

Remarkably, they ask him to stay.

For a missionary, that sounds like an open door.

Yet Paul leaves.

What is particularly important is the way Paul speaks about returning:

“I will return to you if God wills.”

Paul has plans, but his plans remain underneath God’s authority.

That is different from refusing to plan.

Christian faithfulness does not require irresponsibility, indecision, or passivity. We can plan carefully while recognizing that planning is not sovereignty.

Paul can prepare a route without pretending he controls the destination.

And consider everything Paul cannot see yet.

He cannot see the years of ministry ahead.

He cannot see the Word spreading throughout Asia.

He cannot see the elders who will eventually weep with him when he leaves.

He cannot see the future struggles of this church or the letters that he will send to this church.

He simply knows what faithfulness requires next.

## **ASK THE CLASS**

**What is the difference between making wise plans and trying to control outcomes?**

Follow with:

**Where are we most tempted to treat our plans as though God is obligated to follow them?**

Allow discussion.

## TEACHING TRUTH

Faithfulness plans responsibly while leaving God in control of the itinerary.

Sometimes obedience means going to the next scheduled place.

But the next people in the story teach us that obedience can also mean something very different.

## MOVEMENT TWO — PRISCILLA AND AQUILA: SOMETIMES FAITHFULNESS STAYS

Paul leaves Ephesus.

Priscilla and Aquila remain.

Their presence here is especially meaningful because stability has not characterized their recent history. Acts 18 tells us earlier that they had left Rome because Emperor Claudius ordered Jews to depart.

They knew what disrupted plans felt like.

Now they find themselves in a new city.

Strangers among different people, different places, and a different identity.

Acts gives us no grand commissioning ceremony for their Ephesian ministry. Paul simply leaves them there.

We do not know what their ordinary workdays in Ephesus looked like. Acts has already told us that Priscilla and Aquila shared Paul's trade as a tentmaker. It is reasonable to imagine that many of their days looked remarkably ordinary: work, customers, meals, conversations, and then another day much like the one before it.

Based on what we know historically about Ephesus:

Their ordinary lives unfolded in the shadow of Artemis, Roman authority, commerce, pilgrimage, idols, and the magical practices for which Ephesus became famous. Whether at work, in conversation, or simply moving through the city, they lived inside a

world saturated with rival claims of power and allegiance. Surrounded by the visible kingdoms and competing loyalties of their world, they may have felt remarkably insignificant as two people in a city of hundreds of thousands.

Against that enormous backdrop, Acts gives us two ordinary believers who simply remain faithful.

So when Apollos arrives, they are present.

Available.

Listening.

Prepared enough to recognize that something is missing from his understanding.

This gives us an important principle:

Sometimes staying is readiness.

We often imagine a meaningful calling somewhere else.

Another position.

Another church.

Another city.

Another opportunity.

Another season when we finally have enough time.

But God's present assignment may be hidden inside the ordinary responsibilities we keep treating as temporary.

## **ASK THE CLASS**

**Why do you think ordinary faithfulness can be harder to value than dramatic opportunities?**

Then ask:

**What are some places where Christians may overlook ministry because the setting feels too ordinary?**

Possible answers may include home, workplace, neighborhood, parenting, friendships, caregiving, or routine church service.

Remind the group that Acts does not tell us what happened during every ordinary day Priscilla and Aquila spent in Ephesus.

What Scripture does show is that when an important moment arrived, they were there.

## **TEACHING TRUTH**

You do not have to know what God is preparing in order to be faithful where He has placed you.

## **BEHIND THE BATTLE — GOD BUILDS PEOPLE**

Ephesus knew how to recognize power.

Rome had authority.

Artemis had a monumental temple.

Commerce moved enormous amounts of money.

The city had structures that communicated importance.

Yet the kingdom of Jesus is beginning through relationships.

Paul speaks.

Priscilla and Aquila stay.

Soon, Apollos listens.

Before there is anything impressive to point toward, God is already preparing people.

This does not mean buildings, institutions, education, or resources are bad. It means they are not the foundation of the Kingdom of God.

Christ builds His church through people who belong to Him.

## **MOVEMENT THREE — APOLLOS: GIFTED PEOPLE STILL NEED TO LEARN**

Read Acts 18:24–28 again.

Luke speaks highly of Apollos.

He is eloquent.

Competent in the Scriptures.

Fervent.

Bold.

He teaches accurately about Jesus.

And his understanding is still incomplete.

Those truths coexist.

That is important for all of us to hear.

Giftedness is not the same thing as maturity.

Knowledge is not the same thing as completeness.

Being useful to God does not mean we have nothing left to learn.

Priscilla and Aquila hear Apollos and recognize the gap in his understanding.

Notice their response.

They do not publicly humiliate him.

Acts says they take him aside and explain the way of God more accurately.

Correction happens through relationships.

But Apollos also deserves our attention.

Because he receives it.

The gifted teacher becomes the student.

The people who work with their hands teach the eloquent man from Alexandria.

And Apollos apparently does not consider himself too important to listen.

## **ASK THE CLASS**

**Why can correction become harder to receive as a person becomes more experienced, knowledgeable, or respected?**

Then:

**What does the way Priscilla and Aquila approach Apollos teach us about how Christians should correct one another?**

Allow the class to discuss both sides:

Humility in giving correction.

Humility in receiving correction.

## **TEACHING TRUTH**

Spiritual maturity is not demonstrated by never needing correction. It is demonstrated partly by remaining teachable when correction comes.

## **MOVEMENT FOUR — FAITHFULNESS TRAVELS FARTHER THAN WE CAN SEE**

When Apollos decides to cross into Achaia, the brothers encourage him and write to the disciples there to welcome him. A community of believers is already taking shape in Ephesus, however small it may have been.

Acts then says that Apollos greatly helps those who had believed through grace and powerfully demonstrates from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

What happened in Ephesus did not remain in Ephesus.

Priscilla and Aquila could not travel everywhere Apollos would travel.

They did not need to.

They invested faithfully in the person God placed in front of them, and that investment traveled with him.

We tend to ask:

How many people saw it?

How significant was the opportunity?

How impressive was the result?

God may ask:

**Were you faithful with the person in front of you?**

A conversation can travel.

A lesson can travel.

Encouragement can travel.

Discipleship can travel.

Truth placed carefully into one life can reach people the original teacher will never meet.

The servant does not have to control that multiplication.

God does.

What may have seemed like a small opportunity to invest in one person eventually shaped a teacher who became so influential in Corinth that Paul would later write of believers identifying themselves with either Paul or Apollos. (1 Corinthians 3:4-9)

**Read** 1 Corinthians 3:6.

Years later Paul would summarize their different roles this way: Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. Even Apollos's later influence ultimately belongs inside the same truth we have seen throughout this lesson: faithful people do their part, but God produces the result.

## **BRINGING IT TOGETHER**

Look again at the three primary examples.

Paul held his plans loosely enough to submit them to God's will.

Priscilla and Aquila remained available where God had placed them.

Apollos remained humble enough to receive what he still needed to learn.

None of them could see the entire story.

They only knew what faithfulness required next.

And before Paul's great Ephesian ministry begins, God is already arranging people who will become part of what happens next.

The first lesson of Ephesus is therefore not spectacle.

It is faithfulness before anyone knows what God is building.

## **GROUP APPLICATION — MAKE ROOM**

Ask everyone to consider one place already present in their life:

A home.

A workplace.

A neighborhood.

A church.

A family responsibility.

A friendship.

A person.

A routine.

Then ask:

**“What would it look like for me to make room for God to use what is already here?”**

Give the class a quiet minute to think.

Their response does not need to be dramatic.

Maybe they need to schedule a conversation.

Stay and serve faithfully.

Invite someone to coffee.

Listen instead of immediately speaking.

Encourage someone they routinely overlook.

Receive correction without becoming defensive.

Open their home.

Return to a responsibility they have been treating as temporary.

The goal is not to manufacture a spiritual moment.

The goal is to become available.

## **CLOSING DISCUSSION**

Finish with these three questions:

1. Which person in today's passage do you identify with most right now: Paul, Priscilla and Aquila, or Apollos? Why?
2. What ordinary responsibility or relationship might you be underestimating because it does not seem spiritually significant?
3. What is one faithful action already within your reach this week?

Encourage participants to make the third answer specific.

## **CLOSING PRAYER DIRECTION**

Invite the class to pray around four simple ideas:

Lord, give us courage to go when You send us.

Give us patience to stay when You plant us.

Give us humility to learn when You correct us.

Give us faith to release the results we cannot control.

Close by thanking Jesus that His kingdom does not depend upon our ability to understand His whole plan.

Ask Him to make the group faithful with whatever He places in front of them next.

## **LOOKING AHEAD — EPISODE 2: A WAR OF ENDURANCE**

Paul will return to Ephesus.

This time, he will not make a brief stop; he will stay.

What began quietly will enter a long season of teaching, opposition, endurance, and eventually extraordinary influence.

Episode 1 asks whether we can recognize God's work when the beginning looks small.

Episode 2 will ask another question:

**Will we remain faithful long enough to see what God builds through endurance?**

All material for this is free at [www.KingdomsCollide.com/ephesus/episode-2](http://www.KingdomsCollide.com/ephesus/episode-2)

## **A Note from the Author:**

I sincerely hope that you have found something of value in this teaching guide. Kingdoms Collide is a ministry passion project from a guy that loves Jesus. If you need prayer or if you want to share a kind word with me, I would love to hear from you.

Everyone needs prayer and encouragement. I would love to be that for you and for you to be that for me. Feel free to email me at [KingdomsCollidePodcast@gmail.com](mailto:KingdomsCollidePodcast@gmail.com)

Every prayer request is confidential and will not be used in any media or promotional material.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyler H.", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.