



# Central Peninsula Church

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Rob Hall  
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## The Kind of People God Uses

SERIES: *Acts: The Rest of the Story*

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For six years I was one of the founding pastors of a new and growing church in Las Vegas, Nevada. Now, as you can expect, starting a church in Las Vegas was extremely difficult and challenging. God brought all types of people to our church. Young families, elderly, businessmen, addicts, homemakers, casino workers, former strippers, construction workers, insurance brokers, and everyone in between. This morning I want to tell you the story of two people who left a dramatic impression on my life and my ministry in Las Vegas.

Janice and her husband Taun were one of the first couples to come to our church. They were engaged, Taun was a police officer and Janice served cocktails at Treasure Island. After getting married, they began to serve in our church. They both renewed their relationship with the Lord and soon Janice came on our staff in an administrative role. The funny thing is that she had no idea how to use a computer and never had worked for a church in her life. But she had a love for people that was contagious and we learned later that she was extremely gifted at putting together events. Well, it wasn't long before she was not only a pro at using the computer, but she organized most of our church events, and we did a lot of them. Then, after having kids, she helped pioneer a ministry at the church called MOPS, Mother of Preschoolers, which is still very successful at reaching moms for Christ. She currently oversees guest assimilation, events, and several other ministries at the church. She does this all part-time while raising two young children and supporting her husband in his high stress job as a police officer. From serving cocktails to directing a ministry, this is the kind of person God uses.

Pat and his wife moved to Las Vegas to retire. He was a very successful executive here in the Bay Area and in retirement just wanted to golf for the rest of his life. At a young age he walked away from the Lord and gave his life instead to the market place. For years he worked crazy long hours and placed his work before his family. In retirement, I remember him telling me that he and his wife had to learn to love each other all over again because for years they really lived two separate lives. Well, one day he drove by our church building and sensed that he just had to go to a service. (His elderly mother had been praying for her son for over 50 years!). Pat hadn't gone to church in years but he and his wife came to a service and the Lord grabbed a hold of their hearts once again. In tears, they committed their lives

once again to the Lord. He told me once, "Rob, here I am, a man in my fifties, but I am a baby in Christ". God gave him a hunger for His Word and he began reading everything he could get his hands on. It wasn't long before he wanted to serve the Lord. He shows up one day at our offices and says, "How can I help the church?" We had no idea what he was good at or how God had gifted him; we didn't even know he used to be a big wig executive. At first I think we let him fold bulletins and take out the trash or something like that, I can't remember! At the time, the church was in the middle of buying 10 acres of land and we were in desperate need of a project manager who could oversee the entire process so that the pastors could focus on our job and not real estate development. One day he asked if he could see our files and that he would jot down a few questions and ideas for us. Well, that began an incredible journey for Pat. He quickly became our project manager and paved the way for the church to move onto a new campus right off the freeway. I tell you what, there is nothing like watching a person do what they are good at. I would sit in meetings with Pat and he would just do his thing. Pat is a brilliant businessman who is extremely humble and wants to make the last part of his life count. This is the kind of person God uses.

Janice and Pat, two very different people—a former cocktail waitress and a retired business executive. God is using both for His purposes and for His church. Isn't it true that different kinds of people are needed for God's work? God loves to take a Janice and a Pat and transform them into people with a mission, with purpose, with a new outlook of life. What about you? How did God use you in 2007? How will God use you in 2008?

My guess is that many of you are thinking through a list of excuses about why God can't use you: "Rob, you don't understand my past and what I've gone through, God can't use me, I've really messed up." "I'm too busy. I'm a busy parent. I'm slammed at work. I'll wait until I retire like that Pat guy!" "I've only been a Christian for a few years, I don't know much about the Bible, how can God use me?"

What excuse have you been using? We all have them, right? I tell people all the time about how I went kicking and screaming into the ministry. I thought pastors had to come from good, well manicured families. I thought pastors were the guys who always had it together and were the really nice people who grew up in church. I

didn't think I was pastor material at all. But when God calls you to something or somewhere, you can try and run, but as the phrase goes, you can't hide.

This morning we will be looking at three very different types of people that God uses. The first, of course, is the Apostle Paul. The church planter, theologian, and hero of the book of Acts. The second is a husband and wife team, Priscilla and Aquila. These two were pretty normal, average people, who didn't have a Bible college degree or really much ministry experience, but God uses them tremendously. The other, Apollos, was a well-educated and gifted man who knew the Old Testament well, but didn't have a complete picture of God's work in Jesus Christ. He too, had his weaknesses. This much is true—different kinds of people are needed for Christ's work. All were used greatly by God and helped the church continue to grow and transform a pagan society.

We begin our journey this morning in the book of Acts 18:18-23. Here we see Apostle Paul in Corinth but ready to get back on the road and on the move once again.

**“After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. But on taking leave of them he said, ‘I will return to you if God wills,’ and he set sail from Ephesus. When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.”**

In the passage we are looking at this morning, we have a very hurried account of the last part of Paul's second missionary journey and into the beginning of his third. Paul leaves Corinth with Priscilla and Aquila and travels to Ephesus, where he briefly teaches in the synagogue and moves onto Jerusalem and then to Antioch by himself. After some time in Antioch, he visits the churches he has formerly planted in the regions of Galatia and Phrygia. He'll then come back to Ephesus in Acts 19. In just a few verses, Paul covers roughly 1500 miles. That is a lot of travel for a man to do before the time of cars and Nike running shoes. Paul was very much a man with a mission from God.

As we read verses 18-23 though we are left wondering why Luke, the author of Acts, did not add any more detail to Paul's journey. We want to say, “Wait Luke, tell us more. Why did Paul cut his hair in Cenchrea? What type of vow was he under? Was it a Nazarite vow or a personal vow? When he cut his hair did he use a Flowbee or a Gillette razor?” We want to ask Luke, “Why did

Paul leave Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus? What did he tell the churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Galatia and Phrygia? Why was he in such a hurry anyway?” There must have been some interesting things Paul did and said, but Luke unfortunately does not give us much detail. And then in the midst of Paul's travels we get somewhat of a side note about this guy named Apollos. We are left wondering why Luke tells us about Apollos. Sure, he is an interesting guy, but we want to hear more about the star of Acts, Apostle Paul. We don't have many answers to these questions, but what we do know is that the church continued to press on amidst persecution and Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, gives us the account of four very significant people—Paul, Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos.

In verse 18, Paul leaves Corinth and takes with him Priscilla and Aquila. Remember this couple? Paul after leaving Athens, meets the couple in Corinth. In Acts 18:1-3 we are told that Priscilla and Aquila were Jews who had to leave Rome because the Emperor, Claudius, had commanded all Jews to leave Rome. Aquila and Priscilla were in a sense refugees, fleeing religious persecution. They were also tentmakers, who made leather tents to support themselves. In Corinth, they befriended Paul, probably became Christ followers during this time and began to serve alongside Paul and his ministry. In fact, this couple was extremely important to Paul's ministry and in Romans 16:3 he calls them, “co-laborers in Christ.” When Paul sets sail for Ephesus, here in verse 18, we are not too surprised that they too go with him. Priscilla and Aquila were committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and like Paul wanted to take the Good News into one of the most important Roman cities of their day, Ephesus. Ephesus was an international seaport on the west coast of Asia Minor. It was also famous for its temple to the Greek goddess Artemis, which ranked among the seven wonders of the ancient world. Ephesus also had a large population of Jews. For the missionary team of Paul, Priscilla and Aquila, Ephesus was ripe for the Gospel and strategic for its influence and prosperity.

Verse 19 tells us that while in Ephesus, Paul goes to the synagogue to reason with the Jews. As we have seen time and time again in Acts, Paul goes first to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and then afterwards he would go to the Gentiles. While in the synagogue no doubt Paul tells his beloved Jewish brothers and sisters about the coming of the Christ, the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Paul would explain from the Torah, the Old Testament, about how Christ through his death and resurrection paid the penalty for sin and sets people free from a life of sin and death. For some reason, Paul does not stay long in Ephesus; maybe his ministry was not very fruitful or maybe he just had his heart set on getting back to Jerusalem, Antioch, and to the churches he had been with before. And so, in verses 20-21 Paul declines an

invitation to stay longer and hits the road once again. Paul leaves Ephesus and promises to return only if it is God's will. We'll find out later in chapter 19 that is was God's will for Paul to return to Ephesus. Paul will have an exciting ministry there and will stay teaching and preaching for over two years.

Paul finally leaves Ephesus; Priscilla and Aquila stay there and begin a house church with the few disciples that are around. Upon landing in Caesarea in verses 22-23, Paul greets the church in Jerusalem and then heads down for Antioch. After his stay in Antioch, Paul went to two other regions to strengthen the disciples, Galatia and Phrygia. These verses mark the beginning of Paul's third and final missionary journey. You may be wondering how we know that Paul went to Jerusalem because Jerusalem is not mentioned by name. Geographically, Jerusalem sits on a hill and therefore when traveled to, the term "went up" is usually stated in the text in absence of the city's name. When Luke writes that Paul "went up" and greeted the church, he is referring to the church in Jerusalem. Again, we don't have any details as to what Paul said or did, but my guess is that he wanted to visit the mother church to give them another update of God's work among the Gentiles. He then does the same thing in Antioch. And after staying for "some time" in Antioch, we see Paul do something somewhat surprising in verse 23. Paul travels through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia not planting churches, not reasoning in synagogues, not debating Jews, but strengthening the disciples. The pastoral side of Paul emerges as he equips, teaches, and strengthens the disciples. Paul goes back to meet with these baby converts and to wean them off of milk and onto solid food.

Here at CPC, our mission is "To make and MATURE more followers of Christ." The two are not exclusive of one another. We as a church want to help bring people into a life giving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We want to see people set free from worship of self to the worship of the one true living God. But that is only the beginning of a life long journey of growing to be more like Christ. After a person places their life and hope in Jesus Christ, we also want them to grow in their relationship with Him. We want them to be strengthened. To be disciplined. To be equipped and trained for every good work. This doesn't happen though by accident. Disciples are made, not born. Strengthening takes time, effort, prayer, study, accountability, and the power of the Holy Spirit working in you.

Maybe for many of you, 2008 is the year to get strengthened. You've been coming to church, you've committed your life to Jesus Christ, but like my friend Pat, you feel that you are still a baby Christian. Let me encourage you to make 2008 a year of strengthening in the Lord. Practically, begin by committing to read and study the Bible this year. Growth does not happen without

the Word of God. To do this though, you'll need to have a plan, a place and the time. In your bulletin is a Bible reading plan—use it. Secondly, you'll need to find a place to read. I have a friend who studies God's word in his closet! It is the only peaceful place in his home of two little girls! After you've found a plan and secured a place you need to commit to making the time to do it. Someone once said, "We all make time for what is important." It is so true. Find a plan, find a place and make the time to read and study God's Word; it is essential for your growth as a Christian.

Let's look at verses 24-28. While Paul is off doing his thing, Luke gives us an account of an interesting man Apollos. Now, this is not Apollo Ono, the famous speed skater, nor is it the guy from Rocky who wears American flag shorts. Listen to Luke's description of this guy...

**"Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus."**

Luke brings the reader up to date about what has been happening in Ephesus while Paul was gone. A guy by the name of Apollos comes into the city and preaches up a storm. Luke tells us several things about him. First he was a Jew who is a native of Alexandria, the capital of Egypt. Alexandria had a large and influential Jewish community, which produced such works as the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). At the time Alexandria had the largest library in the world with 700,000 scrolls! This was a very influential place of Paul's day. The next thing Luke tells us in verse 24 is that Apollos was an "eloquent man competent in the Scriptures." In other words, Apollos was a smart dude. He had the equivalent of a university and a master's degree for his time. He was also competent in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. This guy was a sharp Jewish theologian. Verse 25 tells us that Apollos also knew the "way of the Lord." There are several ways to interpret this phrase. Some argue that Apollos was a Christian who knew the Gospel, the way of the Lord. Others argue that Apollos was not a Christian and only had a partial understanding about Jesus. Apollos apparently knew something about Jesus and whatever he knew wasn't the complete picture.

My take is that Apollos was not a Christian yet, but

he was really close. At the very least he knew the Old Testament and the prophecies of Christ. Apollos was also “fervent in Spirit.” I love that phrase—fervent. I dare you to call someone that this week. The word literally means boiling. In other words, Apollos was an extremely enthusiastic and charismatic kind of guy. I bet Apollos was fun to watch and be around. I remember when I first became a Christian, I was excited about the Lord and I wanted to tell everyone. Apollos was that kind of guy. He was excited about the things he did understand about Jesus, however, he only knew the baptism of John. What does that mean? Apollos knew the Old Testament well, he knew the baptism of repentance proclaimed by John, but he obviously didn’t know the ministry and teaching of Jesus Christ. He didn’t know baptism in the name of Jesus as proclaimed by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38). He was unaware about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and what God was doing through the Apostles in the early church. As Ray Stedman said, “Apollos was a halfway Christian. He knew nothing of the cross, the resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit. His message was basically incomplete. He announced the word about Jesus but said nothing about those three essentials which make it possible for the word of Jesus to be experienced in our own life: His death, his resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.” (Ray Stedman’s sermon on Acts). Apollos was a halfway Christian. He was incomplete. You may be wondering if a halfway Christian is saved. I don’t know. What I do know is that God does not want us to stay that way. He wants our complete surrender. The story of Apollos reminded me of another great man in church history.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, has a very interesting faith story. John was raised in the home of a minister, Samuel Wesley. He attended Charterhouse and Oxford and became a double professor of Greek and logic at Lincoln College of Oxford. He was subsequently ordained into the clergy of the Church of England. While he was at Oxford he helped to form what was called “the holy club,” a group so nicknamed by the other students because they seriously attempted to cultivate their spiritual lives. Finally he accepted an invitation from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to become a missionary to the American Indians in Georgia, where he failed miserably. Forced to return to England he wrote, “I went to America to convert the Indians; but, oh, who shall convert me?”

Not all was lost, because in his earlier travels he had crossed paths with a group of Moravians whose living faith deeply impressed him. So upon his return to London he sought out one of the leaders and to use Wesley’s words was “clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved.” In other words, Wesley was a halfway Christian at this point in life.

On the evening of May 25, 1738, Wesley went to a meeting at which Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans was being read. Wesley said while it was being read, he felt his “heart strangely warmed.” He went on to say “I felt I did trust in Christ and Christ alone, for my salvation.” Prior to Wesley’s “Aldersgate experience” he knew more theology and was more dedicated than most believers, but he was lost, he was a halfway Christian.

Kent Hughes says that, “Hundreds of thousands of people profess some type of belief in Christ, display reverence for God, go to church on Sundays, contribute to the offering, sit at the Lord’s table and admire the ethical teaching of the Lord – but are as lost as John Wesley before Aldersgate. They have no fire, no passion, no life because they do not have Christ.” (R. Kent Hughes. Acts: The Church Afire. Wheaton Ill.: Crossway Books, 1996, pp. 245-246)

Maybe that is true of you this morning. You come to church, you give a little money, you try and read your Bible, but you feel incomplete, you feel lost. Maybe it is because you have not placed your faith in Jesus Christ. Maybe 2008 will be the year you take the next step with the Lord. Maybe this is the Sunday you say yes to Jesus. When anyone at CPC says yes to Jesus, we want to help. We’ve created a New Believers packet just for you. There is a New Believer New Testament, a book from John Piper and a letter we’ve written to help you get started in the journey of faith in Christ. If you’ve committed your life to Christ recently or here this morning, this is a gift to you. Just go and ask for one at our Information Center; they are free.

Let’s look at what happens next in verse 26. Apollos and his lack of knowledge of Jesus did not keep him from speaking boldly in the synagogues about Christ. Priscilla and Aquila hear him and instead of blasting him publicly and confronting him in front of other Jews, they take Apollos to their home and privately sat him down and explained the Gospel clearly. They didn’t embarrass Apollos, instead they opened up their home to him and lovingly explained Jesus more clearly. I honestly do not know who to admire more here, the graciousness and hospitality of Priscilla and Aquila or the teachability and humility of Apollos. Here is Apollos, a well-trained, educated, scholar, who is being taught by two ordinary folks. However, Apollos humbly submits to their teaching. I can just picture Apollos eating up every word that falls from the lips of Priscilla and Aquila. I can just see Apollos finally putting together the pieces of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. I can see Apollos growing more and more excited about his ministry and God’s calling on his life. Then in verses 27-28, Apollos goes to Corinth where he powerfully refutes the Jews, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. Apollos finally had the whole story and his ministry continued to flourish as he moves on to

Corinth greatly helping those who through grace had believed.

Who in your life gave you needed encouragement along the way? Who was it that took you under their wing and disciplined, equipped and loved you into the faith? Is there someone in your life in whom you have noticed a gift that needs acknowledging and encouraging?

Charles Swindoll asks the following; "Who taught Martin Luther his theology and inspired his translation of the New Testament? Who visited Dwight L. Moody at a shoe store and spoke to him about Christ? Who was the elderly woman who prayed faithfully for Billy Graham for over twenty years? Who financed William Carey's ministry to India? Who helped Charles Wesley get underway as a composer of hymns? Who personally taught G. Campbell Morgan, "the peerless expositor," his techniques in the pulpit? You probably don't know, do you?" Swindoll goes on to write, "Had it not been for these unknown people – those nobodies – a large chunk of church history would be missing. And a lot of lives would have been untouched. But they were people just like you and me and God used them to encourage and empower others and as a result church history was changed. God uses you to empower others." That is what Paul did for Aquila and Priscilla, what they did for Apollos, and what he did for the church in Corinth.

Who are the people that God uses? An out of control Jewish zealot who hated the spread of Christianity so much that he goes on a Christian killing spree. He later called himself "the chief of sinners."

Who are the people that God uses? Two ordinary tentmakers. They were not highly educated nor were they people of means. Later Paul will tell us that these two "risked their lives for him."

Who are the people that God uses? A brilliant scholar and speaker who debated publicly but didn't actually know the whole truth of the Gospel.

Who are the people that God uses? The Janice's and Pat's of the world.

Different kinds of people are needed for Christ's work. How will God use you this year?

Let's pray. "May the LORD bless you and keep you, may His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you His peace, now and forevermore. Amen."

