

# Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



## TENT-MAKERS

After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers.

*Acts 18:1-3*



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# Out of Place

*It had been a long, arduous journey.*

*The apostle Paul and his companion, Silas, had just completed a whirlwind tour of the Northern Mediterranean region.*

THEY HAD PASSED THROUGH Syria, Cilicia, Derbe and Lystra (where they picked up Timothy). In each of these places they had strengthened and encouraged the young churches. Then they continued on to Phrygia and Galatia and, after being turned away at Bithynia, to Troas, where Paul's vision beckoned them to Macedonia. Next was Samothrace, a day later, Neapolis, and on to Philippi, where he and Silas were arrested, stripped and beaten with rods, and thrown into prison. Upon their release, they found momentary solace at the house of Lydia in Thyatira, then proceeded to Amphipolis, Apollonia and Thessalonica, where they spent three weeks reasoning through the Scriptures in the local synagogue and were almost jailed again. By night they fled to Berea where, again, the Jews from Thessalonica stirred up local opinion against the missionaries. Traveling by sea, Paul left his companions and journeyed alone to Athens, where he spoke before a crowd of philosophers at the Areopagus.

It was an itinerary that would bring anyone to their knees. So it must have been a weary and perhaps low-spirited apostle who entered the cosmopolitan city of Corinth. Paul would not have been interested in the flashy distractions of this metropo-

lis, nor the companionship of one of its famous temple prostitutes. He would instead, after months of travel and fleeing for his life, be searching for a place of rest and restoration with people of like mind and Spirit.

People like Priscilla and Aquila.



Just imagine, if you will, being so terribly far from home, bereft even of your traveling companions, bone-weary from being constantly challenged, ridiculed, and pursued. You find yourself now in a strange and alien city, where licentiousness is not only permitted, but essentially the official religion. Imagine, evening is approaching and the dying sun is burnishing the streets of bustling Corinth a deep orange. Strangers jostle and bump against your shoulders, eager shopkeepers beckon you closer, hoping to separate you from the little currency you have. The evening air is filled with the disorienting stench of this foreign culture. Nothing is familiar, nothing comfortable.

Out of desperation, you ask a street vendor where you might find a prosperous tent-maker in the city; you tell him you are of that trade and seeking employment. With a dismissing



wave of his hand he tells you to go down this street, then that street, until you reach a house that looks sort of like this. With the mumbled directions repeating through your head, you wend your way through the darkening streets and alleyways, until at last you stand before the previously described address.

Timidly you rap against the heavy, wooden door; loud voices and angles of lamplight seep through the cracks that out-

line the door's timbers. Abruptly the gate swings open, and before you know it you are standing in the midst of friends—brothers and sisters to whom moments before you were unknown. For you have found not only tent-makers, but the open arms of fellow Christians.

## Ordinary

**L**IFE IN GOD'S FAMILY IS ORGANIC. It does indeed include scholarship, deep philosophy, good business practices, common sense, adherence to doctrine, and an historical foundation. But at its root, kingdom life is fundamentally about members of a family—a vast, diverse, sometimes incomprehensible family, to be sure, but still a family. Jesus told us that after our love for God, the most important part of our life with Him is to be our love for each other.

But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor

as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

*Matthew 22:34-40*

Man was created to first glorify his Creator. Second, however, he was created to be a friend to his neighbor. And as in all things, Jesus was our supreme example. His death on the cross was the once-for-all atonement for the sins of man. That was first. But His sacrificial death was also that of one friend voluntarily giving His life for another—another who would eventually become part of His family.

"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay

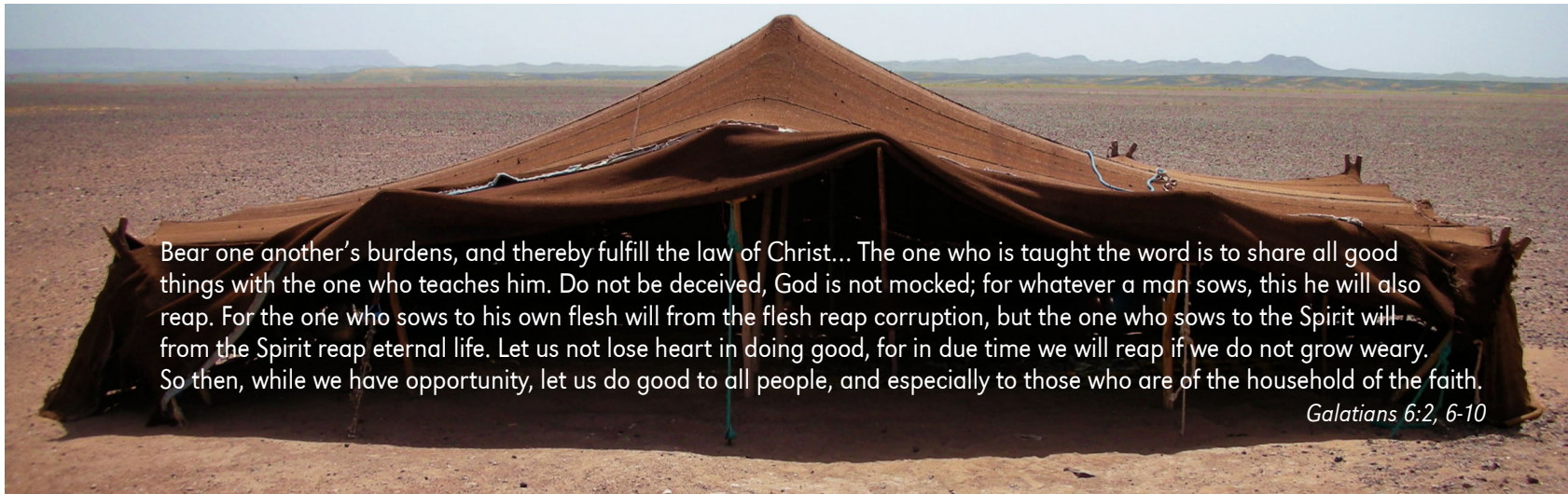
down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you.”

*John 15:12-14*

Priscilla and Aquila were not professionals. They never studied at a seminary, were not even apprentice clergy. They were tent-makers by trade—but Christians in heart. We know little of these two saints beyond the fact that they were zealous for the kingdom of Christ, and were eager to share His love with others.

They took in the bedraggled apostle Paul not because of his reputation, or because he was physically impressive, or because they hoped to show more profit in their tent-making business by having another employee in the shop. They took him in because they were friends to anyone who called Jesus Lord.

They opened the door not to a stranger, but to someone who was already a member of their family. They lovingly erected their tent of protection over their brother, Paul, and took him into their home.



# Travelers

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**W** E KNOW VERY LITTLE about Aquila and his wife, Priscilla. They were two rather ordinary followers of Christ who made themselves available to Paul and their fellow believers.

In our culture it is very often those who have attained a measure of stability in their lives—say, older retirees, who no longer need to labor every day to put food on the table, whose children have grown and moved away, and no longer require the regular support of their parents—these are often ones who make themselves available to serve Christ and His kingdom. But Priscilla and Aquila did this during a time of great upheaval in their lives. They still needed to earn a living; they still needed to make tents. Yet they welcomed Paul into their home, and later made their home available for the assembly of the local church.



Our common translations record that the apostle Paul and the couple were “tent-makers,” but that term (*skenopoios*) also applied to workers of leather in general. So along with the ubiquitous dark tents made from skins or cloth, they could also have made smaller furnishings for the home. Also like Paul, the couple was Jewish.

Priscilla and Aquila (their Roman names) were living in Rome when the emperor Claudius, around AD 49, declared that all Jews had to leave the city. By all reports this edict had more to do with keeping the peace between the early Christian sect and Jews, than any personal animus Claudius might have held against the Jews. He made other political moves that were more in support of Jews. In any case, the banishment was temporary, but sufficient for our couple to make the move to the city of Corinth, where they were discovered by the surely road-wearied apostle.

As was his custom, Paul began his speaking for Christ at the local synagogue, but after a dispute with the Jews, he was invited to move his ministry next door to the home of Titius Justus. Thus was formed the first church in Corinth. The evidence would seem to indicate that Paul kept his residence with Priscilla and Aquila, but moved his ministry from the synagogue to the home of Titius Justus.

Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

*Acts 18:18-19*

After eighteen months in Corinth, Paul crossed the Aegean Sea and stopped in Ephesus and parts south, before continuing on, across the Mediterranean, to Caesarea. Aquila and Priscilla, who had sailed with him from Corinth, remained in Ephesus, and while there they once again welcomed a traveling preacher for Christ into their home.

Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

*Acts 18:24-26*

The couple heard the eloquent and dynamic Apollos speak at the local synagogue, but noticed that he was missing some critical information about Christ Jesus; the gospel he was preaching was incomplete. For example, he was familiar only with the baptism of John the Baptist, and not of Jesus. John's baptism was one of repentance, while baptism in the name of Jesus was (and is) an act of obedience, faith, and identification with the Lord.



The evidence suggests that this Christian couple was prosperous, if not wealthy. They apparently had a thriving business that required travel, and it may be that they had branches of their manufacturing business in each of the cities they visited.

While in Ephesus Aquila and Priscilla made their home available as the local church. Paul, still there at the time, in his first (extant) letter back to the church in Corinth, shares the couple's greeting to their friends in that city, using the more formal version of Priscilla's name.

The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

*1 Corinthians 16:19*

When Paul is back in Corinth, around AD 58, and writing to the church in Rome, he sends greeting to Prisca and Aquila who are back in that city and, once again, offering their home to the church.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; also greet the church that is in their house.

*Romans 16:3-5a*

Finally, near the end of his life in AD 64, while Paul is in Rome awaiting his execution and writing a final letter to his "beloved son" Timothy in Ephesus, he again remembers his friends, who are now back in that city.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.

*2 Timothy 4:19*

What the circulation of the blood is to the human body, that the Holy Spirit is to the body of Christ which is the church. Now, by virtue of the one life-blood, every limb of the body holds fellowship with every other, and as long as life lasts that fellowship is inevitable. If the hand be unwashed the eye cannot refuse communion with it on that account. If the finger be diseased, the hand cannot, by binding a cord around it, prevent the life-current from flowing. Nothing but death can break up the fellowship. You must tear away the member, or it must of necessity commune with the rest of the body. It is even thus in the body of Christ. The pulse of living fellowship sends a wave through the whole mystical frame. Where there is but one life, fellowship is an inevitable consequence. Yet some talk of restricted communion and imagine that they can practice it. If they be alive unto God they may in mistaken conscientiousness deny their fellow Christians the outward sign of communion, but communion itself falls not under any rule or regulation of theirs. Tie a red tape round your thumb and let it decree that the whole body is out of fellowship with it. The thumb's decree is either ridiculously inoperative, or else it proves injurious to itself. God has made us one, one Spirit quickens us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus. To deny any believer in Jesus is to refuse what you must of necessity give, and to deny in symbol what you must inevitably render in reality.

*Charles Haddon Spurgeon*



# Extended Lives

“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’”

*Matthew 25:34-40*

**B**AKED CHICKEN. MASHED POTATOES. Roast beef with carrots, potatoes, and onions. Baked ham with raisin sauce. Every Sunday when I was growing up, around 12:15 in the afternoon, after a full morning at church, I would step through the front door of our house to be greeted by the rich aromas emanating from the kitchen. Every Sunday morning, as the family dressed for Sunday School and worship, Mom would put the finishing touches on that day’s dinner, placing it in the oven on a low heat so it would be ready after the final “Amen” of the eleven o’clock worship service. And every Sunday our growling stomachs would be met by a house exuding the savory aromas that would fill our nostrils. Made all the more hungry by the pervasive fragrance, we would have to suffer the wait while Mom fixed the accompanying vegetables and salad, and filled a towel-lined basket with her fresh, homemade crescent rolls.

To this day, the aroma of chicken fixed the same way, or of pot roast, carrots and potatoes ready for the dinner table, will immediately transport me back to those simpler days. In those

aromas I am reminded of our home on Church Street in Marshalltown. I can see the basic, unsophisticated furnishings of the living room where we would bide our time with the Sunday funnies while we waited to be called to the table. I can see the small dining room, and the table set with the best dishes we had. I can remember the taste of each dish, the scent of candles burning in the center of the table, the comfortable conversation of a family enjoying the homely custom of breaking bread together.

More than anything else, however, those smells remind me of the love Mom had for her family. Even though on Sunday morning she was already busier than the rest of us, it was important to her that she feed her family a hearty, wholesome meal—from her own kitchen. Every dish was prepared with care, with practiced skill, and with her devotion and love.

There was more to Mom’s love than just feeding her family. There was her love for, and hospitality expressed to, others.

It was a rare Sunday when there were not others beyond the immediate family in attendance around our table. Most Sundays would include “the two Normas”—my Aunt Norma, Mom’s sister, and her best friend, Norma Langland. They would join us at table, then stay at least long enough to help with the dishes. But if someone in the church found themselves temporarily adrift, they, too, were invited to our home for the meal.

Itinerant evangelists, touring youth choir members, visiting scholars there to borrow the pulpit for the day, missionaries who had brought their slides or 16mm films to the Sunday evening service—all were offered meals and a comfortable bed for the night at the Lampels. And all this in a small house run on a limited budget.



Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

*Hebrews 13:1-2*

Christian hospitality is more than just a display of kindness and generosity. Even this fallen world is capable of that. But one Christian enveloping another into his or her life is a distinctive, even mystical union sanctified by the common Spirit who has made them brothers and sisters, fellow heirs, servants of the same Lord. Christ and the Father are glorified when this takes place in the church.

Aquila and Priscilla took in the travel-weary apostle Paul, they gave him their home and table, they shared with him their

mutual occupation. They offered him not just room and board, but sanctuary in a strange city. They gave to him their time, even traveling with him, and became more than just companions, but Paul’s fellow evangelists.

Then this remarkable couple, so strong in faith and knowledge of the gospel, was so bold as to school in the details of that gospel Apollos, the rising star of the faith. It is indicative of their faith and the binding Spirit that Aquila and Priscilla both-ered to counsel the man; it is indicative of his faith and that same binding Spirit that Apollos listened. And throughout this period they repeatedly, no matter the city they were in at the time, opened their home to the people who were the church.

It is clear from even the sketchy information we have of them from God’s word that Priscilla and Aquila lived for the Lord. They recognized their gifts as well as their obligation to employ them in His service. To that end they supported and nurtured those who were on the front lines of the faith that named Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and Savior of mankind.



We draw both good news and bad news from the example of this godly couple. On the positive side even the most cynical among us has to admit that the church today is filled with people who are made from the same mold as Priscilla and Aquila. The church, the body of Christ, in a human sense could not sustain itself without them: people who live graciously, generously; people who do not even have to think about it before opening

their gifts, their homes, their lives to those in need; people who live for Christ, because He truly is their Lord.

On the negative side we must admit to there being so many—perhaps even a majority—in the church who do not live this way. Their faith, and the living out of their faith, is kept close to the chest, private. They are not unloving, but love only from afar. They are stubbornly reluctant to extend themselves into the lives of others.

Though they are an eloquent example of how to live out the bond within the body of Christ, we need not depend on Aquila and Priscilla as our template. Christ Jesus Himself is our ultimate example for such a life. As is His way, God once again demonstrates faith-life through His own nature and ways.

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

*Philippians 2:1-8*

