



DAY ONE: ONE AND THE SAME

I wish I could see flowers the way Georgia O’Keeffe saw them—as a magnified version of themselves in acute, colorful detail. She said, “When you take a flower in your hand and really look at it, it’s your world for the moment. I want to give that world to someone else.”¹ During her lifetime, she made over 200 paintings. Just like an O’Keeffe original, Priscilla the hollyhock is magnificent to behold.

Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, are like the Siamese twins of the New Testament, since you never see one without the other. They walked together harmoniously as Christ made the two of them into one flesh. Side by side, they served the Lord to further the ministry of Paul the apostle. And as they traveled with Paul, their two hearts beat as one, remaining inseparable.

Hollyhocks grow in long spears with multiple blooms on each stalk, reaching heights of up to nine feet. You might say they grow better together, making an impressive show of their many flowers—just like Aquila and Priscilla did. These two also reached great heights as they joined Paul on his missionary journeys.

Of the seven times Scripture mentions them together, Priscilla receives top billing. Five times she is mentioned first, and the other two times, Aquila precedes his wife. Some commentators suggest that Priscilla “was the more energetic of the two, and perhaps had the stronger character.”² Others ponder whether Priscilla came to the faith prior to her husband and her virtuous conduct won him to the Lord. Still others attribute her with having a great intellectual acumen or a more noble bloodline. No matter why she was more frequently listed first, we can see that Aquila was a confident, well-adjusted man who loved to see his wife receive the accolades of others. He admired her just as much as their peers did.

¹Quoted by Carol Vogel, “Georgia O’Keeffe Museum to Auction 3 Paintings,” *New York Times*, September 11, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/12/arts/design/georgia-okeeffe-museum-to-auction-3-paintings.html>.

²Herbert Lockyer, “Priscilla,” *All the Women of the Bible*, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/all-women-bible/Priscilla>.

Read the verses below and answer the following questions:

“After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome)” (Acts 18:1-2).

Practical Observation:

1. Where had Paul been and where did he go?
2. Who was the first person Paul met? What was his background?
3. Who else did Paul meet? What was her relationship to Aquila?
4. In your own words, explain why this couple moved to Corinth.
5. Who was responsible for this mandate?

1. Corinth was established in 10,000 BC. The city was known for its great wealth, including bronze, pottery, and shipbuilding. Located on the Isthmus of Corinth between the Ionian Sea and the Aegean Sea, it served as the most important trade center between Rome and the east.³

4. Claudius was the Roman emperor from AD 41-54. His maternal grandfather was Mark Antony. He made a decree to deport all Jews from Rome, which explains why Aquila and Priscilla left Italy to live in Corinth in Greece. There were two expulsions of Jews from Rome before Claudius' reign.

Personal Application:

- a. Paul did a great deal of moving. Make a list of the places you have traveled. Place a cross beside the places you shared the gospel or enjoyed Christian fellowship. Place a 0 next to the places you did not. Explain why you did or did not share the good news.
- b. Priscilla and Aquila were victims of an unjust political decision. Describe a time when your life was affected by a bad political policy. How did it impact you?

³Adapted from *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986).

- c. Imagine meeting Aquila and Priscilla, a duo who strengthened the faith of others. Do you have someone like this in your life? Write about how they have strengthened your faith.

DAY TWO: ONE TOUGH GAL

Here's to the humble homemaker, the woman who doesn't need designer clothes, salon gel nails, or multiple styling tools to do her hair. She'd rather plant an organic garden than put in time at a fancy mall. You can find her wiping running noses instead of running up debt. She knows her way around a workshop full of power tools. And a set of blueprints don't intimidate her. Don't get me wrong—she's a beaut who can put a sunset to shame, but she's not frail or fragile.

Last week we met Lydia, who was a woman of wealth. Not so, our Priscilla. She labored hard beside her husband making tents, and it was arduous work. Hollyhocks, like Priscilla, are hardy, no-nonsense flowers. They grow in unexpected places, like between the cracks of a sidewalk or near the stucco wall of a house. They grow in full sun, require minimal care, and easily reseed themselves to rise again the coming year.

Tents in ancient times were made of goat skin, unlike the nylon pop-up tents of today. They were also huge. We're talking circus-tent size with multiple rooms separated by goat-hair curtains. This explains how Sarah overheard the angel in their tent telling Abraham that she would get pregnant well into her nineties. These tents were known as a "house of hair," as the fabric was very coarse and heavy. They protected a family from cold in the winter and could be raised from the ground in the summer to create shade and allow a breeze to blow through.

Tentmakers were part of a guild, similar to other craftsmen. It was common to teach a Hebrew boy a trade. Jesus was a carpenter, and Paul was a tentmaker. It's wonderful that Priscilla's parents made sure that she, too, excelled in a profession. Oftentimes tradespeople would set up shop around a synagogue, which explains why it was so easy for Paul to meet fellow tentmakers with whom he also found lodging.

Read the verses below and answer the following questions:

"He came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:2-4).

Practical Observation:

1. Who did Paul go to and why?
2. What two things did Paul do with them?

2. Stayed lets us know that the couple offered Paul hospitality. It is believed the apostle stayed with them for nearly one and a half years. A church met in their home in both Corinth and Ephesus. "The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house" (1 Corinthians 16:19).



3. Describe what Paul did every week and when.
4. What people groups did Paul hope to impact? How were they different?

3. Sabbath is the seventh day of the week and considered a holy day during which God's people should do no work but instead rest. God worked six days to create the universe and rested on the seventh day, leaving us an example that we might do the same. "Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD" (Exodus 31:15).

Personal Application:

- a. What vocational abilities do you possess, and how did you learn them? Do you use them to further the gospel? If so, how?
- b. Describe how you celebrate the Sabbath day. Do you find these habits restorative? If so, how?
- c. Paul's heart was open to all people groups from many countries and tribes. Describe a cross-cultural experience you've had. How were the people you encountered different from you? What did you learn?

a. Talents can become vocations. Today, selling your orchard-fresh jam at a farmers market is a vocation—a more organic one. Jobs in modern times need to be redefined as something that adds income to your household, whether you're an influencer on social media or you run a day care in your home.

b. Greek obviously describes someone from Greece or of Greek descent. But this term was often used to describe anyone who was not a Jew. A similar term in the New Testament is Gentile. Rome conquered the Greeks but did little to change the culture. As a result, Greek can also mean someone influenced by Greek culture.

DAY THREE: ONE GREAT OPPORTUNITY

The name *Priscilla* carries the idea of being venerable, ancient, or classic. Let's just say a Priscilla is full of old-fashioned beauty. Hollyhocks possess the same reputation, as some people plant them as a reminder of their youth.

My Grandma Davis sprinkled her garden with these nostalgic beauties. Sometimes she would pick two flowers, one a closed bud with just a bit of color showing through and the other fully opened. Poking a hole in the top of the open bloom, she would attach the little bud to it, creating a tiny dancer. The bud resembled a head crowned with a beautiful headdress while the bloom creating a swirling, twirling ballgown. As a girl, I threw elaborate balls with these ladies waltzing among the grass in their multicolored gowns. I like to do this with my granddaughter, Kaydence, to this day.

Priscilla lived in Corinth, a city from which the classic Corinthian column derives its name. The top part of a Corinthian column, known as the capital, possesses lavish carvings that resemble flowers, making these columns much more ornate than the Doric or Ionic columns that preceded them. One architect described the Corinthian column as “an imitation of the slenderness of a maiden.”⁴ Hollyhocks, too, are tall and slender columns of the garden that add a beautiful vertical impact. I can’t help but imagine Priscilla as tall and slender, too.

Not only did Priscilla enjoy living in classic Corinth, she was also privileged to sail to Ephesus, one of the premier cities of the ancient world. It had a vast port and was considered the most important Greek metropolis, a key trading center in the Mediterranean region. No wonder Paul wanted to visit this region. If Ephesus was impacted with the gospel, it would travel far and wide because of the variety of people who visited there. Any new believers would export the good news back home to their countries of origin. Apparently, Priscilla and Aquila were also drawn to the great opportunities that awaited them in Ephesus.

Read the verses below and answer the following questions:

“So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there” (Acts 18:18-19).

Practical Observation:

1. Describe how long Paul continued in Corinth. Why do you think this was so?
2. Where did Paul go next, and who did he leave behind?
3. Who joined Paul on his journey? How do you think this made them feel?
4. What did Paul do before they set sail?
5. Why do you think Paul made this decision?

2. Syria in this text corresponds to the southern tip of modern-day Turkey. It was a major nation to the northeast of Israel and served as a political threat to the Jews when they inhabited the Promised Land. During New Testament times, Syria was part of the Roman Empire.

4. Vow refers to the Old Testament Nazirite vow. A man or woman who made this covenant would, for a specified period of time, determine not to consume anything made from grapes, from a raisin to a glass of wine. They would also promise not to cut their hair. This separation served to consecrate the person to the Lord, signifying a sincere devotion.

⁴Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, 4.1.8, trans. Morris Hicky Morgan, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://lexundria.com/vitr/4.1.8/mg>

Personal Application:

- a. Has God ever asked you to stay in a relationship, location, or vocation when you really wanted to leave? Describe the situation and how God helped you to persevere.

- b. Have you ever made a vow to God, perhaps to fast or pray about a heavy burden? If you haven't, do you think He may be calling you to make one now? What might it look like?

- c. Read Exodus 25:1-9, then list the things the children of Israel offered to God. Has God ever asked you to make an offering to Him, whether it was abandoning a bad habit or giving away something precious?

b. Fasting is a season of abstaining from food and water for spiritual reasons. Both Moses and Jesus fasted for forty days. Moses did so while receiving the Law, while Jesus did so on the Mount of Temptation. Fasting is a way to deny the flesh to strengthen the spirit. In the Bible, fasting was sometimes a sign of grief, distress, or repentance.

c. Offerings in the New Testament were often animal sacrifices presented to God to atone for the giver's sin. Sometimes they included grain, flour, or oil. Other times these offerings were personal possessions given to honor God, like the precious perfume Mary Magdalene poured on the head of Jesus.

DAY FOUR: TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Walking the summer streets in New Mexico's capital city of Santa Fe, you'd be convinced that hollyhocks are our state flower. Artists paint them onto their canvases to add a splash of brilliant color alongside coyote fences and old adobe buildings. However, in 1927 our state legislature adopted the yucca as our state flower because of its sturdy nature. I enjoy a lovely yucca, but in my opinion, they can't compete with the brightly colored hollyhock. I'm convinced the hollyhock would win Miss Congeniality because it is adored by so many.

Hollyhocks likely came to New Mexico in the late 1500s with the conquistadores from Spain and adapted beautifully to our arid, sunny climate. The Spanish settlers called them *la vara de San Jose*, or St. Joseph's staff that offered grace to those who encountered them. A myth says that when the holy family fled to Egypt, an angel mistakenly made a stop in the Land of Enchantment. As a symbol of friendship, Joseph planted his staff into our dusty soil, and it was miraculously transformed into a hollyhock.

Although the stuff of legend is amusing, we do know that our hollyhock, Priscilla, adapted to a new environment and would bloom just as effectively in Ephesus as she did in Corinth. And now she would need to do so long after Paul left her and Aquila behind to continue the ministry he began in this world-class city. God's math often does not make sense. He will sometimes divide in order to multiply. Paul leaving this couple behind allowed the gospel to grow in two places at once.



Has God ever divided you from someone who was important to you? It really hurts, and you just don't understand why. *Why did my children move to another state? Why did my husband's job take us far away? Why did my dear friend grow away from me and find new friends?* Perhaps it's God's way of maturing you. Eventually, "the faith" must become your own faith. The faith of your father or friends will not do in the long haul. It is in these lonely, isolating times that Jesus draws closer than a brother and we begin to flourish right where He has planted us.

Read the verses below and answer the following questions:

"And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, saying, 'I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing'" (Acts 18:19-21).

Practical Observation:

1. Where did the trio arrive, and what happened next?
2. Where did Paul go? What did He do?
3. Describe how the Jews responded to Paul. Why do you think they made this request?
4. Explain how Paul responded to the Jews' request. Why do you think this was the case?
5. What did Paul promise, and what caveat did he add?

4. He did not consent means that Paul said no. *It's hard to imagine the great apostle turning down an opportunity to further explain the way of Christianity to the men of Ephesus. But surely he trusted that God had a plan. Part of that included Aquila and Priscilla advancing into a role of leadership. When we say no, it gives others an opportunity to serve the Lord.*

5. God's will must be served above our own. *Too often we continue in the flesh something that God began in the Spirit. Paul often paused to reassess God's will. For example, he told the Romans, "I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you" (Romans 1:10, NIV).*

Personal Application:

- a. Read Psalm 27:14 to learn the benefit of waiting. Turn this verse into a personal prayer for a situation in which you are waiting on God.
- b. Paul reasoned with the men of Ephesus; in other words, they had an intellectual debate. Take a moment to write down the reason for your faith.
- c. Paul surrendered his future to the will of God. What is something you are praying will be included in God's will for your future? What can you do while you wait?

a. Left Behind: After Priscilla and Aquila accompanied Paul on the journey to Ephesus, the first thing he did was leave them behind. Did they feel expendable, unappreciated, unimportant? God's kingdom is an upside-down kingdom where the first are last and the humble are exalted. God had plans for this couple right around the corner.

b. While You Wait: While Priscilla and Aquila waited, Paul was working. It's difficult to see someone flourish while you're floundering. But God is the perfect gardener. He knows when to prune our lives back and when to reap a bountiful harvest. While you wait, be sure to drench yourself in the "living water" (John 4:10).

DAY FIVE: REACHING EACH AND EVERY ONE

Hollyhocks attract hummingbirds. The brighter the color, the better, since hummingbirds don't have the greatest sense of smell. Flowers with a tubular shape like columbines, lupines, foxgloves, and hollyhocks also hold more nectar, making the birds' visits more fruitful. Their thin, long beaks fit perfectly into the deep pockets of the bloom.

Gardeners often grow hollyhocks in order to enjoy the graceful aerobatics of the hummingbird. Hummingbirds are capable of beating their wings up to 80 miles per second, which produces an audible humming noise to the human ear. I have often been startled by the whirling trill as they pass by.

Did you know that some hollyhocks come in double form, making their petals particularly frilly and producing twice the nectar? Perhaps that's what attracted Apollos to the dynamic duo of Priscilla and Aquila when he visited Ephesus. I like to picture him like a hummingbird flitting his way from Alexandria to this port city, going from boat to merchant shops to synagogues. This colorful couple seemed to attract this active man who was hungering for a deeper relationship with Christ. Priscilla and Aquila were there to nourish him with greater knowledge of the Way.

How do you attract others to the Lord? One way is with colorful speech. Paul encouraged us, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6). It's good to engage others in dynamic conversations about Jesus, giving them answers to their questions about the faith. Another way to entice others to Christianity is with a positive attitude, living hopefully in a world of negativity. Peter wrote, "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). Let the world around you see your colors.



Read the verses below and answer the following questions:

“Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:24-26).

Practical Observation:

1. Who came to Ephesus, and what was his background?

2. List the five things that describe this man.

3. Where did he go? Why?

4. Who heard about him? What invitation did they make?

5. Describe the conversation these people had.

2. Apollos was an impressive young man with incredible advantages. He was well-educated and well-spoken. Add to that, he possessed great passion. What a vibrant combination. After his time with this couple in Ephesus, he would return to Corinth to contend earnestly for the faith.

5. More accurately implies that Apollos had a great start on the path to Christianity but may not have had all the information yet. He was a disciple of John the Baptist and knew some details of Jesus' teaching, but not all. Aquila and Priscilla instructed him on what he lacked, a prime example of discipleship. We all need someone to enhance our walk with Jesus.

Personal Application:

a. Apollos knew a lot about Christianity, but only up to the baptism of John. Likely his encounter with Aquila and Priscilla brought him knowledge unto salvation. Describe the day Jesus became your Lord and Savior.



- b. Our couple invited Apollos into their home to share deeper knowledge of the Lord. Using the word HOUSE as an acrostic, describe some ways your home can be a place to encourage others:

House a Bible study for neighbors (example)

O

U

S

E

b. Home really is where the heart is. A Christian home reflects Christ to those who reside there and to those who enter in. Make sure that your house is a house of God. One way to do that is to pray with or for every person who visits. Another way is to play worship music throughout the day. "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

*When mother dear wore gingham frocks,
Her dollies grew in hollyhocks.
Here was a lady clad in silk,
There was another white as milk.
Dainty dolls in silken frocks,
Blooming on the hollyhocks!
Bowing low at every breeze;
Nodding to the bumble bees.
Darling dolls in dainty frocks
Blooming on the hollyhocks.*

—Anonymous

HOW TO GROW A HOLLYHOCK

Hollyhocks are a classic cottage garden staple. Many of the most common varieties are biennials, meaning they complete their life cycle over two years. However, they are easy to propagate again by planting seeds from the dried buds in your garden.

- Light: Most hollyhocks love full sun, but some prefer part shade.
- Soil: Provide rich, moist, well-draining soil.
- Spacing: Sow at one-fourth inch deep and about two feet apart.
- Planting: Hollyhocks are easily started from seed indoors or out. Seeds can be sown directly outdoors about a week before the last frost.

