

IMPACT

Cultivate Series, May 21 & 22, 2022 | Acts 18:1-3
Senior Pastor Rob O'Neal

Let's start with the end in mind.

The First Great Awakening took root in New England.

Revival rumbled in New Jersey in the 1720s after faith had been fizzling out in the colonies for decades.

The flames of revival really lit in Northampton, Massachusetts, during the ministry of Jonathan Edwards. Those revival flames spread like wildfire down the Connecticut River Valley from Enfield to Old Saybrook in the 1730s.

From here, revival spread across New England and eventually throughout the colonies.

Chocolate-chip cookies remind us that what happens here in New England happens everywhere.

Chocolate-chip cookies were invented not too far from here in Whitman, Massachusetts, by Ruth Wakefield, who ran the Toll House Restaurant with her husband.

Ruth was making cookies to go along with their ice cream.

Since she was a perfectionist, she was looking for the ultimate cookie to go with ice cream.

Eventually, she printed her recipe in a cookbook in 1938. Then, Betty Crocker featured it on her radio program and Nestle acquired the right to use her recipe and the Toll House name.¹

The rest is history. What happens here spreads and happens everywhere!

God is up to something here and now!

Today, many people think of New England as spiritually dead. We have low percentages of people who participate in churches, and many people here claim no religious preference.

However, that perception is wrong. I travelled in and out of New England for seven years before moving here to Valley in 2020. Every time I came here, I was impressed by people's honesty and their desire to talk about matters of faith.

In the network I was part of, we were planting churches. The churches we planted here in New England tended to be stronger and better than the churches we had planted elsewhere.

God is up to something here and now. It may be under the surface, but revival is rumbling.

We want what God is doing next in New England to begin here at Valley.

We want God to work in our lives and to work through us here in the Farmington Valley.

We want to see God use us to reach everyone living in Hartford and Litchfield Counties with the Good News about Jesus.

We hope that what God does here will spread catalytically throughout New England.

¹ <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/sweet-morsels-a-history-of-the-chocolate-chip-cookie>

If God is doing something big in New England, we would love for it to begin right here.

How? I have been listening since I arrived two years ago.

As I've listened to God and to the people here at Valley, a picture emerges.

Our mission, vision, and values are like promises we have made to God and to each other.

We don't need to change those things.

Instead, the real question is, "How do we fulfill the promises we have made?"

I've pulled together those thoughts in a framework called "Cultivate."

I'm going to put up a big diagram for you to see briefly today.

I don't expect you to absorb it today. I want you to see the big headline that I believe summarizes our mission, vision, and values: Full Valley engagement cultivates disciples who IMPACT our world for Christ.

That's what I want to spend the next few weeks explaining because it's important to our future as a congregation. Just as significantly, it's important for each of us to understand as we try to figure out what it means to be disciples of Jesus.

It all begins with IMPACT.

We're going to study the lives of two people who are mere footnotes in the New Testament today because their lives show us something important about IMPACT.

What does IMPACT mean? You want to know because we are built to have IMPACT, and we will never be whole or fulfilled until we find how God wants us to IMPACT our world for Christ!

Any Christian can have IMPACT.

Our Scripture reading for today is Acts 18:1-4:

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

In Acts 18:1-3, we meet Priscilla and Aquila.

Priscilla and Aquila lived in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire.

Both Priscilla and Aquila were Jewish by descent, but someone introduced them to Christ.

Then there was a controversy in Rome between the Jews of the city over the Christian faith.

Consequently, the Roman emperor ultimately expelled all Jews from Rome.

Priscilla and Aquila relocated from the political capital in Rome to one of the commercial hubs of the Roman Empire, Corinth.

Priscilla and Aquila became ministry partners with Paul in Corinth.

Priscilla and Aquila were tentmakers in Rome, and they continued their work in Corinth.

Paul was also a tentmaker. When Paul reached Corinth, he made a quick, natural connection with Priscilla and Aquila. They shared Jewish heritage, faith in Jesus, and a trade.

Priscilla and Aquila gave Paul a place to stay and (likely) a place to work.

Priscilla and Aquila demonstrate that anyone can have IMPACT!

Paul is the star of the mission to Corinth, the one whose work gets most of the attention.

It's easy to turn Priscilla and Aquila into nothing more than a bed and breakfast for Paul.

However, that would be a mistake! Paul didn't build the church in Corinth by himself.

Funding came from somewhere. Logistical support happened somehow. People who met Christ came to learn deeply how to follow Christ and how to help others follow Christ.

Much of that work in Corinth was done by Priscilla and Aquila!

They are as responsible for the start of the church in Corinth as Paul.

That's the case in every day and era. The work of spreading the Gospel, building the Church, and IMPACTING our world for Christ belongs to us all!

In many ways, the people of the Farmington Valley are very much like Priscilla and Aquila.

Though they were born elsewhere, Priscilla and Aquila made Rome their home.

The people of Rome were people of extraordinary capacity. They built and administered a vast empire for centuries.

Like them, the people of the Farmington Valley are people of extraordinary capacity.

Here at Valley, we have always known that if we could help the people of the Farmington Valley come to know Christ and serve him, we could truly change the world.

So far, we have seen that Priscilla and Aquila were key assets in starting the church in Corinth. We will eventually see that they were key assets for advancing the Gospel in the first century.

Like Priscilla and Aquila, you are key assets for the Kingdom of God today. The people of the Farmington Valley could be used by God to advance the Gospel in the twenty-first century.

Opportunities abound to make an IMPACT.

Priscilla and Aquila pivoted locations repeatedly.

After eighteen months, Paul continued on his second missionary journey. Priscilla and Aquila followed him. Their journey took them to Ephesus, the commercial hub of Asia Minor.

Acts 18:18-19 tells us:

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.

After starting a church in Ephesus, Paul continued homeward.

Priscilla and Aquila remained behind to grow the new church in Ephesus by hosting a house church.

Their work in Ephesus was critically important, and we'll come back to that in a minute.

First, just know that Ephesus wasn't the last stop for Priscilla and Aquila.

By the time Paul wrote to the church in Rome, Priscilla and Aquila had moved back to the imperial capital. In **Romans 16:3-5**, Paul wrote:

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

Once again back in Rome, Priscilla and Aquila had a church meeting in their home.

Priscilla and Aquila weren't done yet!

Late in his own life, Paul wrote to his protégé, Timothy. Paul commissioned Timothy to lead the thriving church in Ephesus. He wrote the letter we call "2 Timothy" to guide him. In **2 Timothy 4:19**, Paul greeted Timothy's co-laborers in Ephesus by name:

Greet Prisca and Aquila ...

Paul's greeting places Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus one more time. They were starting and strengthening churches in yet another chapter of their lives.

How? Priscilla and Aquila's missional enterprise facilitated their work.

Priscilla and Aquila were tentmakers.

The tentmaking trade was lucrative, and Priscilla and Aquila were successful businesspeople.

It is possible that they already had business units in Corinth and Ephesus. These were major cultural and commercial centers, ideal spots for tentmakers.

If they did not have business units in these places before their travels, they quickly leveraged capital to create new business units in these vital markets.

Priscilla and Aquila ran a multi-national business and certainly employed a number of people.

They used the proceeds from their business to fund the expansion of the Church.

Their business provided them with the means to travel and support their own missionary work.

Along the way, they certainly used their business as well to make and multiply disciples.

If you understand their model, opportunities abound for us to make an IMPACT.

We can IMPACT the world directly through volunteer positions here at Valley.

We can also IMPACT networks we build in our neighborhoods.

We can IMPACT our homes and our friends.

We can IMPACT the world through the businesses we serve and lead.

Fields abound for us to make an IMPACT.

We can IMPACT the least reached people groups in the world. We need to do more of that.

We can IMPACT New England by strengthening and encouraging the church here.

We can IMPACT the 900,000 lost people right here in Hartford and Litchfield counties.

There are many fields we can IMPACT for Christ.

Our future should include coaching to help you discover your opportunities to make an IMPACT.

As we think about the future of Valley, if we understand that our people are critical assets for the advancement of the Church in our day, then we must invest in one another.

We need to help each other identify our gifts for ministry.

We need to help each other identify opportunities and strategies for ministry.

What we need here at Valley is coaching to help each other discover the spot to which God has called each one of us to because that's where we will IMPACT the world for Christ.

God will use you to make the real IMPACT.

From Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila shaped the ministry of an apostle named Apollos.

After Paul left for Antioch in Syria to touch base with his home church, an exciting young preacher arrived from Alexandria in Egypt.

Apollos had learned about Jesus from Christian missionaries to Alexandria. He started sharing the Good News immediately, but his picture of the Gospel was incomplete.

Priscilla and Aquila took him under their wings and nurtured him to maturity.

Plus, Priscilla and Aquila opened doors for Apollos to go to Corinth where he helped the church there to expand and thrive.

What a testimony to their leadership and the depth of their theological understanding!

Remember that Priscilla and Aquila were not apostles!

They weren't the stars. You might call them footnotes in the New Testament.

However, footnotes like Priscilla and Aquila remind us that there were lots of people making and multiplying disciples, building the Church, and spreading the Good News about Jesus.

Priscilla and Aquila were just ordinary extraordinary Christians!

As followers of Jesus, we are all sent.

Every follower of Jesus is meant to be like salt—adding the flavor of God to the world—and light—bringing Good News about the Kingdom of God and hope in Jesus to dark places.

Everyone who is a Christian is a disciple. Jesus tells us that his disciples make more disciples.

We are ambassadors for the Kingdom of God. We demonstrate the values of the Kingdom, we advocate for the interests of the King, and we call people to join us. That's who we are.

In **Acts 1:8** Jesus tells us with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are to be his witnesses:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

To be his witnesses means that we devote our lives to sharing and showing the Gospel. We do so in all the many places we go.

The First Great Awakening spread because the people spread the Gospel.

The First Great Awakening is typically remembered through the lens of great preachers like Jonathan Edwards and intense, emotional worship services. That's just the headline.

The important work of spreading the revival and of expanding the Church in the 18th century happened because of the work of people under the influence of God's Holy Spirit.

The revival really spread when the people of New England took responsibility for spreading the Gospel and calling people to vibrant faith in God.²

Valley is built by its members.

Valley's first pastor, John Peterson, was in town not too long ago. I met him.

He told me that Valley was built by our founders and by families who dedicated themselves to making and multiplying disciples in the Farmington Valley.

Valley will always be built by its members. When we catch the vision of what God could do through us, then God will do amazing things through us to build his Kingdom in our day.

Our dream should be to provide everyone with the training we need to IMPACT the world for Christ.

God will use the people of Valley to IMPACT our world for Christ.

Our dream should be to provide the tools, the training, and the theological education required to raise up and release generations of multiplying disciples.

There are three words to remember about IMPACT.

You: We have to take the initiative with someone.

We don't IMPACT the world until we IMPACT people, individuals.

If we are going to IMPACT the world, we have to invest in them. We lead people, motivate them, and call them alongside of us.

At some point we call people individually by name and say to them, "You!" I want you to join me, serve with me, and share the Gospel with me. I want to invest in you.

My own call to ministry involved someone saying "you" to me.

I was sixteen years old and had a plan for my life.

I was going to college; then I planned to go to law school. I hoped to practice law for a few years, get involved in politics, and run for Congress. I had my life mapped out.

That year my grandparents asked me to come to their church and preach on Youth Sunday.

It was interesting to me because I had had thoughts about being a pastor someday when I was younger, but I had put those thoughts out of my head to focus on politics instead.

I preached that Youth Sunday, and multiple people in their church confronted me with that word, "You!" They said, "You should be a pastor." Of course, I thought they were crazy.

But their words of encouragement led to me to a season of praying. I heard God saying the same thing to me, "You!"

Word number one for IMPACT is "You!" We have to invest in other people by name.

Word number two is Me (Who me? Yes, you.): We are all included.

As you hear me talk about IMPACT, you may think that I am talking to someone else.

² Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 286.

You may think that you could never (fill in the blank). You could never share your faith. You could never invest in another person. You could never make a difference in the world.

The call to IMPACT our world for Christ applies to each and every one of us.

No matter what your gifts, God can use you.

Word number three is Yes: Say yes.

Say "yes" to praying for revival. Would you join me in praying that revival would spring up in our day as it did three centuries ago in the First Great Awakening? Would you pray that it starts right here in New England, in the Farmington Valley, at this church?

Say "yes" to seeking God's guidance. God has called YOU to IMPACT our world for Christ. Until you know where and how, would you keep seeking?

Then say "yes" to IMPACTing our world for Christ.