

The Tale of Two Wives
Great Canadian Bibles Study for 2016
Written by Faye Reynolds for Canadian Baptist Women

The Bible shares many stories of husbands and wives and the influences that they have upon one another. There are infamous pairings like Ahab and Jezebel, Nabal and Abigail, Hosea and Gomer; or marriages facing challenges like Abraham and Sarah, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Jacob and Leah and Rachel. We have women who are known only as the wife of *so and so* that stand alone in their part of the Biblical narrative, and others whose actions cannot be separated from their spouse. This year, we want to take a look at two very different couples found in the book of Acts; Ananias and Sapphira and Priscilla and Aquila. One story is tragic and the other triumphant so let us delve into what might be some of the similarities and important differences of these marriages.

Begin by reading Psalm 128: Consider a family that has been an inspiration and witness to you because you have recognized that God was the center of the home. If it is your own family, *what blessings have you experienced by placing God's will and love first in your home?* Share as you feel led.

Part 1: Ananias and Sapphira

Turn the book of Acts and begin reading from 4: 32 – 37

1. The stage is set for the kind of community to which Ananias and Sapphira belong. Describe the attributes of this community. *Which practices of the early church are quite appealing to you and which aspects might be stretching?*
2. Luke uses this opportunity to introduce us to Barnabas, who will continue to feature greatly in *The Acts of the Apostles*, but this tidbit of information also helps to establish the contrast of behaviors soon to be witnessed. Consider the feelings of Ananias and Sapphira as Joseph is given this endearing new name of “son of encouragement”. *How might this have affected their consequent actions?*
3. In preparation, also read Matthew 19: 5 – 6 and consider what it means for a husband and wife to be of one flesh. *What does it mean for a couple to act in unity and how is this most often a positive thing? Is this necessarily a loss of personal independence?*

Read Acts 5: 1 - 11

4. The Scripture is very clear that this couple was working together. *What do you think was their motivation for selling their land?*

5. *Why the deception over the selling price? What did they hope to gain from this ill-conceived plan?*
6. Agreement does not necessarily mean discernment! Whether in marriage or in a working relationship or friendship, just because two people are in agreement over a certain action, it does not mean that it is the right thing to do. And, as we learned with Adam and Eve, it does no good to point the finger at someone else, for we are each responsible for our own actions before God. And this is the key to any relationship – both parties first must individually seek God’s will, before deferring to the other’s ideas. Who knows if this scheme was Ananias or Sapphira’s plan but it matters not in the Scriptures or in the consequences. Though we live in community and unity, we stand in judgment alone. *Discuss together in your marriage or other working relationships how decisions are generally made. How do you come to a sense of agreement?*
7. You will notice that there is no sense here that the man is the head and therefore responsible for the decision-making in the family. Have you ever deferred to your husband in hopes of washing your own hands of responsibility? When “two become one” the man does not become the brain and the woman the feet! God calls for unity but he calls for **two people together** seeking God’s will and best for their lives. *Discuss whether you agree or disagree with me in this statement and its implications.*
8. The early church never demanded that members give all they have – it was a voluntary program to help the needy amongst them. There seemed to be considerable poor in Jerusalem and we see throughout the book of Acts, the need for special offerings to be sent by other churches to Jerusalem. It is a mystery as to why the two felt the need to be deceptive about their donation. The couple seemed more concerned about appearances than about the needs of their community. Whether motivated by jealousy, the need for affirmation and attention or greed, their lie was not to the community but to God. Satan, the author of lies, fed on their need and exploited it. Rather than trusting in God to meet all of their needs, the couple doubted God’s faithfulness, which affected their ability to be generous. Human nature looks on the outside appearance, but God always looks upon the heart! *When do you find it most easy to give generously and what situations if any make it more difficult? Consider Matthew 6:3 – “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”. How does this play into your acts of charity and how could it have guided Ananias and Sapphira?*
9. *How did this couple struggle with authenticity? Are there times when we might hide behind a mask for fear of being unaccepted by others? What might be some other reasons for wearing masks within the Christian community?*

Part 2: Priscilla and Aquila: Read Acts 18: 1 - 4

Aquila was a Jew who was born in Pontus but lived in Rome. His wife has a Roman name but we are uncertain of her family of origin. Around the year 49 A.D. the Roman emperor Claudius issued an edict expelling all Jews from the city of Rome due to the unrest created between the Jews and the Christian converts and so Aquila and Priscilla left their city and moved to Corinth, a Roman colony where they continued their business of tent making. Tent making involved sewing woven goat hair (cilicium)¹, which was very heavy and tough material to work with, requiring a lot of hard labour. We do not know how long they had been settled there before they encountered Paul. We must assume that they were already believers and this drew Paul to them as well as the trade they held in common.

1. Though it must have been hard for Aquila and Priscilla to leave their home in Rome, God seems to have a wonderful plan for them. *In what ways have hardships or unplanned events turned into a blessing for you as you look back over the circumstances?*
2. Not every couple can work together well. *How do you think this couple worked out their partnership in the business as it was quite physically taxing?*

Continue their story at Acts 18: 18 – 21

3. It is estimated that Paul stayed there for 18 months and then invited Priscilla and Aquila to accompany him on a journey. *What does this tell you about the relationship that has formed between them? Why would they so willingly pack up and leave once more?* (note: Ephesus was nearer to Pontus)
4. *What kind of faith did Paul have in their gifts that he would leave them in Ephesus to build a church on their own? Name some of the gifts you think that they had together?*
5. **Now read Acts 18: 24 – 28.** The picture of their gifts begins to expand as they minister to Apollos, a Jewish preacher from Alexandria in Egypt, who was teaching in the synagogue. *Do you put any merit to the fact that Priscilla's name is now preceding Aquila? What might that tell you about their marriage, their business, their relationship and their gifts? Is it proper that Priscilla take the lead over her husband?*
6. When Paul left Antioch on his third missionary journey, he traveled through Asia Minor by land and returned to Ephesus, where he remained teaching the

¹ <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2013/06/12/Aquila-and-Priscilla-A-Godly-Marriage-for-Ministry.aspx#Article>

Word of God for approximately three years in partnership with Priscilla and Aquila. During that period of time, he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians and said, *“The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house”* (1 Cor. 16:19). Once again the picture of their ministry and influence of these two people is expanded. *Contrast their devotion with that of Ananias and Sapphira. Where do you see evidence of generosity, sacrifice, commitment and devotion to community that was lacking in Ananias and Sapphira? How did their passions differ and what role did material comfort play in each one’s choices?* (Note: Prisca is the formal name and Priscilla the diminutive or name of affection)

7. After three years, Paul left Ephesus for Greece. It seems that Priscilla and Aquila evidently believed God was directing them back to Rome. Claudius was dead now, so it was likely safe to return and they were drawn back to their roots. In Paul’s letter to the Romans he writes this greeting, so they must be living now in Rome. *“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”* (Rom. 16:3-5). What a wonderful recommendation of these two saints as they continue to build church communities wherever they go and offer their homes. It is my personal speculation that Priscilla continued to take the lead as the church leader and Aquila provided the financial support with his tent-making, as it was such tough, physical work to sew the heavy goat-hair canvases. *Am I making a gender stereotype? Why is gifting more important than assigned gender roles?*
8. Aquila and Priscilla together endangered their own lives to save Paul’s. We do not have the story in the Scriptures of this event, but we see once again the contrast of Ananias and Sapphira who worked hard to save their own reputation and ended up losing their lives with Aquila and Priscilla who were willing to risk their lives for the Gospel. *How hard is it for you to take risks, knowing how it might affect your family? How do you discern what God might require of you in light of family responsibilities?* One simple, personal example was deciding whether to do doctoral studies and the financial cost that would be to our family at the time. I could not justify taking \$40,000 of our family income for personal study and was not convinced that the doctoral degree would necessarily enable God to use my gifts in a broader way. I am not certain but at the time, it seemed the best decision though my dear husband would have supported me either way. *Do you have any similar stories or struggles to share of how God’s call on your life would mean sacrifice for your family?*
9. Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned one more time in the New Testament, in the last chapter of the last book the Apostle Paul wrote. It had been sixteen or so years since Paul first met them at Corinth, and now he was in a Roman

prison for the second time. His death at the hands of the emperor Nero was imminent, and he was writing the last paragraph of his long and fruitful life. *“Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus”* (2 Tim. 4:19). We note that Paul does not mention a church meeting in their house and perhaps they even live with Onesiphorus. The Great Fire of July 19, AD 64 completely destroyed or seriously damaged 10 of the 14 districts of Rome², and so it is highly possible the Priscilla and Aquila lost everything in that fire and returned to Ephesus where they would find support from the Christian community. Timothy was now leading the church in that community and Priscilla and Aquila would have been a great support to him as he carried on where Paul would leave off. *What does Paul’s final greeting tell you of his relationship to this couple?*

10. Personal influence carries much power in relationships and this can be used and abused. Paul obviously was a very powerful influence upon Priscilla and Aquila, and the couple was also influential upon one another as was Ananias and Sapphira. *Where do you recognize your own sphere of influence? How do you use this influence in a positive way and are their times that you have abused the power that you have in a relationship?*

The call of God upon the lives of Priscilla and Aquila was much more costly than the obedience required of Ananias and Sapphira, who simply could have offered the proceeds from one of their fields. The legacy of deception cannot begin to compare to the legacy of sacrifice and obedience. The names of Priscilla and Aquila are never mentioned separately but always “two-gether” as they ministered in unity out of their personal giftedness and calling. There is no evidence of hierarchy within their marriage but a working out together their call to gospel ministry. We are not always so blessed to have that kind of unity in our marriages as many women often attend church alone, bringing their children to Sunday school. There is no shame in being the spiritual lead if that is your life’s situation, for though there is great blessing in unity, ultimately God will still call each one to be accountable for the faith that we have and how we have responded to God’s hand upon our lives. And whether married or single, may we truly live out of obedience to God alone.

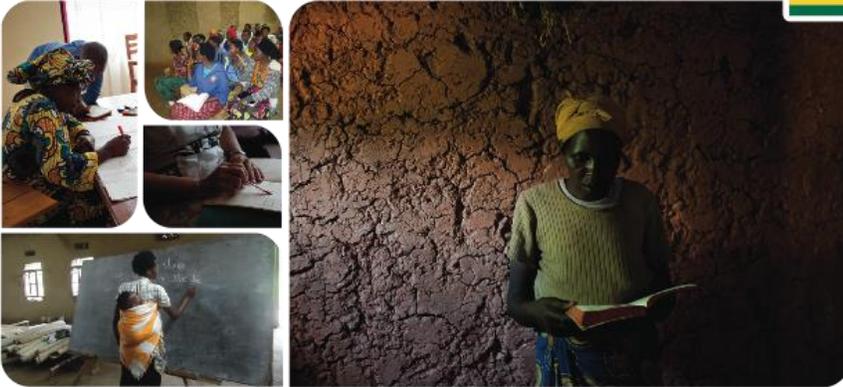
² <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2013/06/12/Aquila-and-Priscilla-A-Godly-Marriage-for-Ministry.aspx#Article>

For the next three years, your contributions to the Great Canadian Bible study will go toward women' literacy.

PROJECT
PROFILE

Food & Community Development

Women's Literacy



Although the literacy rate among young women in Rwanda has improved over the last decade, about 50% of women living in the Association of Baptist Churches of Rwanda (AEBR) communities are illiterate. Many are in this situation because of the events surrounding the 1994 genocide that further eroded the ability of families to send their children to school.

For girls living in poverty, the situation is particularly difficult. Their families rely on them to care for siblings, to earn money as domestic workers, or do chores around the home while parents look for work on a daily basis. Getting an education for these girls is simply not the highest priority. For many women today, illiteracy has left them feeling isolated, self-conscious and unable to support the education of their children. The lack of literacy skills also affects their ability to be fully trained in economic initiatives which are key programs in emerging from cycles of poverty.



"I'm very thankful to the AEBR literacy program for now I can read. It was so sad for me and my husband not to be able to help our children with their homework when they asked. My first three children we couldn't help them, but gladly I can help the two youngest."
Pascasie, a mother of five children who benefited from AEBR's literacy program.

HOW THE PROJECT WORKS

Since 2010, CBM has worked alongside the AEBR to provide literacy classes for women. The majority of these women live on less than a dollar a day, mainly earned through subsistence agriculture. Many of them dream of learning a trade, getting a better job, even reading the Bible and teaching others to read as well. Because of this initiative they are each closer to realizing their dreams. Upon the successful completion of their literacy classes, each student receives a Bible. The Women's Department of the AEBR mentors Bible study leaders to help these women read the Word and understand the plans God has for them. There is great potential for them to take leadership roles in their churches and communities. This program is now expanding to help even more women realize their potential. They will receive the necessary training in vital areas such as governance of savings and loan groups and the development of effective self-help groups.

GET INVOLVED

Visit us at www.cbmin.org for information on how you can support this valuable project through financial contributions and short-term mission opportunities.

- **\$7** provides a Bible for each student
- **\$30** enables a woman to participate in Bible study and gender training
- **\$40** provides books and learning supplies for each student

Your prayers and generosity are deeply appreciated.

In the event a particular project or program is oversubscribed or where local conditions prevent implementation, CBM will redirect your donation to where it is needed most.

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