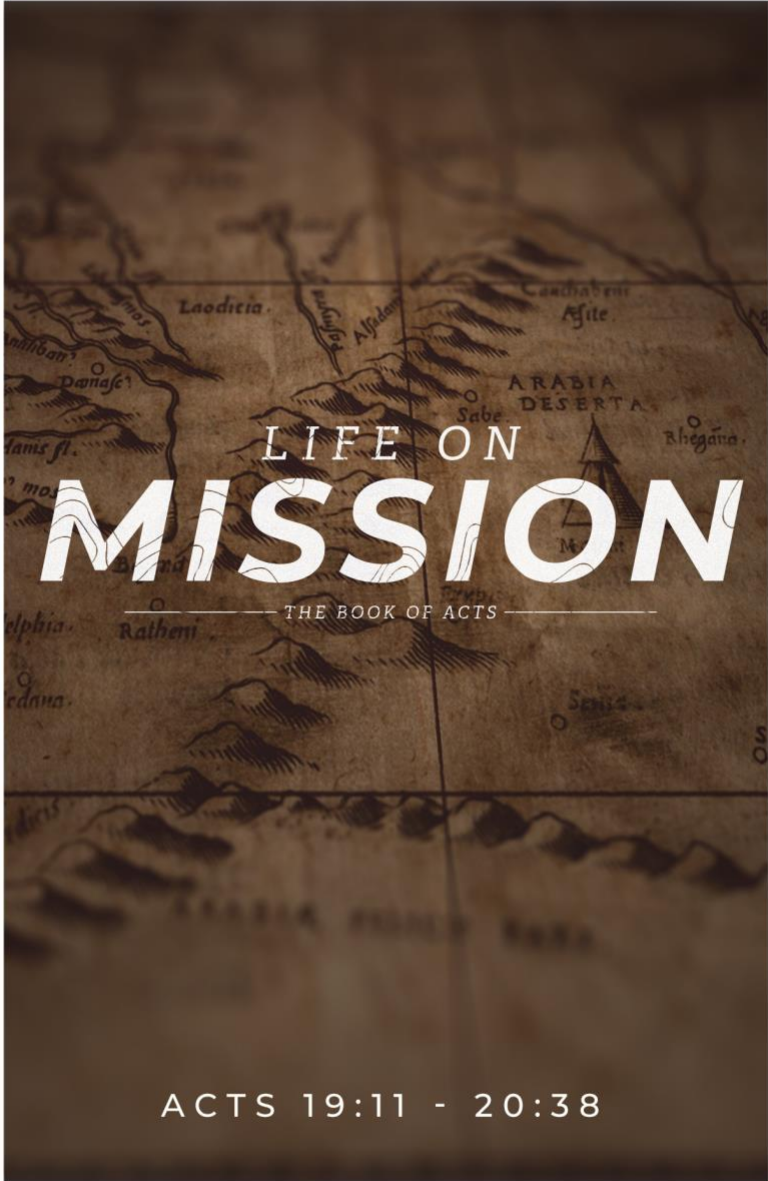




WORD TO LIFE

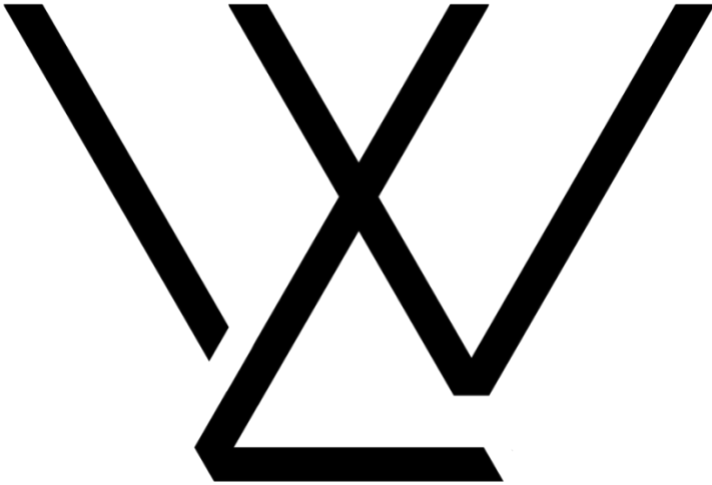
WEEKS 21 - 25



LIFE ON
MISSION

— THE BOOK OF ACTS —

ACTS 19:11 - 20:38



Word to Life's are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

Contributors

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Week 21: Acts 19:11-20

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 19:11-20

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 19:11-20 and complete the activities below.

- **Question:** What do you notice about the itinerant Jewish exorcists' response to God's power? What should we learn because of their example?

- **Question:** When the evil spirit spoke to the sons of Sceva it said, "*Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?*" When you read the evil spirit's response what other moments in Scripture come to mind?

- **Activity:** Spend time writing down, in order, the response of the Ephesians in Acts 19:17-20. After writing down their actions, write down what you notice in the biblical text.

- **Question:** According to the story, God was still worshipped even after the exorcists unsuccessfully attempted to manipulate His power. What do we learn from that aspect of the story?

Week 21: Acts 19:11-20

Day 2: Magical Hankies?

READ: Read Acts 19:11-20

EXPLORE:

This week's passage includes an interesting and unusual event in the ministry of Paul. Verse 12 explains that handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul's skin were taken to the sick and demon possessed. As a result, the sick were healed and demons came out of those who were possessed. While a similar event happened in the life of Peter¹, an initial pass-through of these verses can leave us with more questions than answers.

It is easy to get sidetracked by this unusual event, but we must always keep the context of Scripture in mind. The surrounding verses show God moving mightily to spread the Gospel in Ephesus. This movement included "*extraordinary miracles*"². These specific verses emphasize just how extraordinary this miraculous movement was.

Miracles and how they happen, however, are not the point. As we have seen all throughout the book of Acts, God's miracles always serve to emphasize His message. God never heals for the sake of physical healing. Even a healed person will die someday. When God brings physical healing, it is always a testament to the spiritual healing He offers to those who would put their trust in Him for the forgiveness of sins and new, eternal life in Him.

Verse 11 shows us that the focal point of this passage is God, not Paul. God was responsible for these unique and seemingly unorthodox events. Paul was merely a conduit for God's work. At no point do we see Paul instruct, or even condone distributing these handkerchiefs. This is a great reminder that Scripture contains both descriptive and prescriptive texts. Descriptive texts explain what events took place, while

¹ See Acts 5:15 for reference.

² See Acts 19:11 for reference.

prescriptive texts give a clear admonition to action. This text is descriptive. It reminds us that God is always about His redemptive work. He has invited believers to be a part of it. We don't deserve a spot on the team, but He has given us one. May we never underestimate His ability to use us for His glory. If God can use a sweaty handkerchief to testify to His goodness and redemption, He can use me.

BIG IDEA: Whether a murderer turned missionary or a sweaty handkerchief, God often uses the unexpected for His purposes.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you struggle with doubt about God's ability to use you based on a sin you have already been forgiven for?

- **Question:** How has God worked in unexpected ways in your life?

- **Question:** Why do we tend to focus more on physical miracles than the eternal miracle of new life in Christ?

Week 21: Acts 19:11-20

Day 3: The Miraculous and God's Glory

READ: Acts 19:11-20

EXPLORE:

If Acts 19:11-12 were inappropriately separated from its surrounding context, we may confuse or perhaps even contradict the primary point of the biblical text. The narrative we have been studying this week is yet another reminder that context truly matters for understanding! For example, it could be possible to become so enamored with the miraculous handkerchiefs that we miss the cautionary stories that follow.

In contrast to Paul's God-honoring ministry, we are introduced to a group of itinerant Jewish exorcists. Historically, Jewish exorcists were revered and admired for their assumed ability to manipulate the supernatural to provide cures for disease, blessing during trials, and even spells for spiritual favor. They would mutter strange Hebrew incantations and even invoke the names of foreign gods in their conjuring of spells and all things supernatural.³ This, unsurprisingly, was all done for financial compensation.

When we encounter the Jewish exorcists in the story, it should come as no surprise that they sought to acquire the genuine power of God that was being made visible in the ministry of the apostle Paul. The Jewish exorcists tried to manipulate the power of God without submitting to the Lordship of Christ. Their failed attempt to strongarm the power of God and the embarrassing events that followed are a visceral reminder that the power of God is not meant to be coerced and His glory ought never be claimed by another.

After failing to liberate the man who was possessed by an evil spirit, they ran naked and embarrassed as a sign of total helplessness and

³ Various papyri have been discovered that referenced Jewish exorcists muttering in various forms of gibberish mixed with Hebrew Scriptures to call on God and other foreign divinities. These exorcists are an example of what is often entitled "religious syncretists."

humiliation. We ought to notice that, in agreement with James 2:19, the true power of Christ alone holds total victory over the forces of spiritual darkness!

The example of the exorcists and the following narrative concerning the magicians ought to serve as a reminder that Christianity is neither founded nor dependent on magic. It is founded on the unrivaled power and authority of the resurrected and ascended King Jesus. For this reason, it was the name of Jesus that was extolled in Ephesus amongst Jews and Greeks alike.⁴

BIG IDEA: The example of the exorcists ought to caution us against trying to manipulate God's power or steal His glory.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Today's story introduced us to the Jewish exorcists who tried to manipulate God's authority for personal gain and power. What are some examples of how people today try to steal God's glory or manipulate His power for selfish gain?

⁴ See Acts 19:17 for reference.

Week 21: Acts 19:11-20

Day 4: Fear, Confession, & Repentance

READ: Acts 19:17-19

EXPLORE:

Have you ever feared God? Have you trembled to think about what you deserve for your sin? Or have you just assumed you're not that bad, and God forgives everyone anyway?

In Ephesus, there were many self-proclaimed exorcists and dabblers in the occult. They sought secret spells to manipulate the spiritual world for personal power and financial gain. Some tried to enhance their sorcery by mixing in the name of Jesus. This culminated in the public failure of seven exorcists, who were overpowered and humiliated by a demon they could not control.

This should serve as a stern warning to nominal Christians that their spiritual adultery put them outside of God's protection. Before this incident, they were ignorant of the true power of the demonic realm, and of Jesus' holiness and purity. Knowledge of the truth shook them from complacency and false confidence as *"fear fell upon them all."* They realized they had not been serving God, and they feared the consequences of their misuse of Jesus' name in the service of the devil.

Their newfound fear of God did not drive them away from God. Rather, they *extolled* the name of the Lord Jesus, who had died for their sins so they could be forgiven. They followed Psalm 2:11-12: *"Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling."* They also confessed their wickedness: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 Jn 1:9). Like these Ephesians, we should be specific in our confession to God about how we have sinned. Make this a daily habit.

Finally, they publicly repented of their sins by burning their books of sorcery. Although their books were worth a huge sum of money, the mere possession of them would be a temptation to wickedness. They did not sell them to recover their bad investment, as that would be spreading the snare of demonic activity to others. Rather, they

understood that the holiness of God's people was worth more than any monetary fortune, so they burned the occult books.

"If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away" (Matt. 5:29). These repentant Ephesians didn't have to blind themselves, but they did have to burn their books. Take radical steps to avoid your old sinful ways. Are there forms of media that lead you into temptation? Just as the Ephesians burned their books, you may need to eliminate your access to such media.

Is fear necessary for salvation? It was for these Ephesians. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."⁵ Fear is the beginning, but it's not the end. As you repent of sin and receive forgiveness, your fear is replaced with the comforting assurance of God's love and favor. *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love."*⁶

BIG IDEA: Fear of God should lead to worship of Jesus, specific confession of sin, radical repentance, and ultimately, the comforting assurance of God's love and favor.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Considering God's holiness, righteousness, purity, and power, what aspects of your own life cause you to fear God? Do you make a daily habit of confessing your sin to God? If not, will you start now?
- **Activity:** Ask God if you need to make a change (major or minor) to radically repent of sin. If you have an idea of what you need to do, seek the Holy Spirit's power to follow through. You may need to discuss this with another Christian for advice, accountability, and prayer.

⁵ See Proverbs 19:10 for reference.

⁶ See I John 4:18 for reference.

Week 21: Acts 19:11-20

Day 5: A Game of Pretend

READ TOGETHER: Acts 19:11-20, Luke 18:10-14

Instructions: *We believe that Biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Most young people like to play “pretend”. My (Sabino’s) kids do it all the time. My son normally pretends to be a daddy or superhero like Spiderman. My daughter pretends to be a mommy or a princess. This kind of play is normally great for childhood development as they will hopefully grow up to be fine parents one day and virtuous heroes.

However, some forms of “pretend” are not good. For example, a child should never pretend to be a superhero and do something physically dangerous. A teenager should never pretend to be their parent to get out of trouble. An adult shouldn’t pretend to be someone else to get special benefits or privileges. This is called identity fraud. In our passage we see some identity fraud and pretend play gone wrong.

The seven sons of Sceva pretend that they are like the apostle Paul. God was using Paul to do some extraordinary miracles. People were taking his sweat rags and putting them on the sick and deranged and they were being healed. The sons of Sceva saw this and they thought they could be like Paul. The problem was they didn’t want to be like Paul for good reasons but for selfish ones. They were not interested in Paul’s message of Jesus but only in what they could selfishly receive from pretending to be like Paul. Well, as we see in our story, this did not turn out well for them.

When it comes to our Christian faith we should never pretend. We should never pretend to be something we are not. We should never pretend to be “good” Christians while secretly covering up sinful ways. The Lord wants us to walk in the light. If we have sinned or if we are hiding things, we ought to confess it. God is pleased when we confess our sins and walk in the light. This is what we see with the Christians of Ephesus. They brought their magic books out in the public and they had them burned turning from their old way of life. Thankfully we don’t have to pretend to be something we are not when following Jesus.

BIG IDEA: Pretending to be something you are not ends in destruction. Being honest about who you are and what you have done ends in blessing.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Why do we sometimes pretend to be something we are not?

- **Activity:** List out 5-10 reasons why we don’t have to pretend as Christians.

Week 22: Acts 19:21-41

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 19:21-41

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 19:21-41 and complete the activities below.

- **Question:** Acts 19:23 refers to the early Christians as those of “The Way.” Where else have we seen the church referred to as “The Way?” Why do you think they received that specific name as a community?

- **Question:** Acts 19:24-28 details a conversation between a silversmith named Demetrius and the other craftsmen. What was Demetrius trying to get his fellow workers to realize about the implications of Paul’s gospel ministry?

- **Question:** What was Paul’s reaction to the crowd in Acts 19:30? Why do you think he had that response?

- **Activity:** Do your best to summarize the town clerk's response to the angry crowd in Acts 19:35-40 in your own words.

- **Activity:** We may not have an identical cultural situation to Ephesus, but each of us ought to see how the gospel challenges idolatry in each of our lives. Spend time today praying about how Jesus might dethrone the lesser things we worship.

Week 22: Acts 19:21-41

Day 2: Big Significance in the Little Details

READ: Acts 19:21-22

EXPLORE:

One of the beautiful things about Scripture is its depth and complexity. Acts 19:21-22 is no exception. Although Paul's travel plans can seem a little bit bland at first glance, they are crucial for the unfolding narrative in Acts. Today's study will unpack some of the goodness of vv. 21-22 that might not be able to be explored in the upcoming weekend's sermons. It might be dense, but it is important!

First, the past few sections of Acts have been structured by the Holy Spirit through Luke to show how the roadblocks of Paul's missionary trips are continually being laid to the side so that the gospel can continue onward. For example, the barriers of baptism misunderstandings, magic, demonic possession, sickness, and false theology are all continually being relocated so that the gospel advancement can continue. The geography of Acts 19:21-22 is a crucial verse that connects the previous chapters with Paul's unfolding mission.

Second, this section of biblical text begins to set the trajectory of the rest of the book toward Rome. In fact, Acts 19:21 is the first mention of Paul desiring to advance the message of Jesus to Rome.⁷ This initiatory declaration of Rome marks a major transition in the storyline. In both subtle and explicit ways, the continuing story of Acts drives toward Rome. We need to notice the unique role of this passage in the whole of early church history.

Third, in mentioning Paul's movement toward Jerusalem, we ought to be reminded of what Luke wrote in his gospel account of the life of Christ. In Luke 9:51, Jesus resolutely moved toward Jerusalem and

⁷ This moment of Paul's sight being set on Rome is often referred to as a moment of *divine necessity*. In short, it is a moment in which the leading of God by the Holy Spirit clearly sets the trajectory for His follower who is compelled to follow in obedience.

experienced immense hardship and difficulty. In the same way, Paul was faithfully following the leading of His God and Savior in setting his sight toward Jerusalem. Difficult times were coming, but, as the story makes clear, Paul was not alone!

Finally, we need to notice the significance of both Timothy and Erastus. Timothy was mentioned in Acts 18:5 and it is possible that he may have accompanied Priscilla and Aquilla to Ephesus in Acts 18:18. Erastus, on the other hand, was a Corinthian who was mentioned in Paul's greetings elsewhere in Scripture.⁸ The mention of Paul's companions in Acts 19:22 helps to set the proverbial stage for a great deal of significant events which transpire in the development of the Ephesian and Corinthian churches. The travel plans and companions may seem mundane, but they are packed with significance!

BIG IDEA: Paul's plans and companions are a reminder of the incredible significance that can often be packed into small sections of biblical text.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** To understand the significance of Paul's trip toward Rome, it may be valuable to search for other sections of Acts in which Paul mentions this God-given ambition. As you search for other references in Acts, what do you notice as significant?

⁸ See Romans 16:23 and 2 Timothy 4:20 for reference.

Week 22: Acts 19:21-41

Day 3: Following Jesus: Good or Bad for Business?

READ: Acts 19:23-27

EXPLORE:

In today's passage, we listen as Luke describes a great disturbance in the city of Ephesus. Paul was faithfully preaching the gospel of Jesus and a great distress and anxiety had erupted concerning "The Way."

Although we have studied the early church designation of "The Way" in our study of Acts 9, it might be helpful today to slow down and ponder a few of the ways in which "The Way" is utilized in the biblical text.

- *This is the way, walk in it*- Isaiah 31:21
- *Jesus is the New and living Way*- Hebrews 10:19
- *Jesus is the Way through suffering*- Hebrews 10:19, 20
- *Jesus is the Way to the Father*- Ephesians 2:18
- Jesus is the Way into Salvation- John 10:9
- *Jesus is the Way to approach God the Father into the Holy Place*- Hebrews 9:8
- *Jesus is the Way consecrated for us*- Hebrews 10:20

Now, with just a brief survey of some biblical context in mind, it is possible to see how followers of Christ who were living in empowered and equipped by the only true way maker, would create a disturbance in a city made of idols. Simply, if God is supreme and worthy of worship, other idols cannot be. We need to remember what God spoke to his people following the miraculous deliverance from Egypt.

God said, "*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery... You shall have no other gods before me... You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God...*"⁹

⁹ See Exodus 20:1-15 for reference.

Paul's teaching about the supremacy of Jesus as the way did not just unsettle their minds, it upset their proverbial apple carts of business as well. Their precious shrines and statues to Artemis would be rendered useless and powerless if "The Way" was allowed to flourish in Ephesus. Demetrius and the silversmiths knew what many people have come to realize throughout time. Namely, embracing The Way would uproot all lesser things. When Jesus is Lord, Savior, Sanctifier, and Coming King it ought to leave no aspect of our lives unchallenged for His glory alone!

BIG IDEA: True allegiance to Christ will threaten idolatry that exists in our hearts, lives, and finances.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Today's study centered on a text in which the Christian message unsettles the status quo of idolatry that is often allowed to exist. How would a lifestyle of faithfully following Jesus radically reorient your life, business practices, and streams of income?
 - **Pray:** Pray that the Lord would convict your heart and change your life.

Week 22: Acts 19:21-41

Day 4: Seeking to Follow or Stuck in Confusion

READ: Acts 19:21-41

EXPLORE:

The scene that ensues in Ephesus is nothing short of chaotic. Hopefully, by this point in the week, you have had the chance to read and re-read the text to get an accurate glimpse of what it might have been like to be there. The crowd had inhaled desperation and exhaled anger as they were stirred by Demetrius and the other silversmiths. In the frustration and intensity of the moment, we should not miss the interesting summary statement written by Luke through the Holy Spirit.

Acts 19:32 reads, *“Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.”* It is important to note that it was not just violence and anger that permeated the atmosphere in Ephesus, it was confusion! Confusion was and often is the chosen tactic of the enemy to delay spiritual progress or destroy spiritual fortitude.

Demetrius’s fear of lost income eventually morphed into a desire to see widespread uncertainty and chaos. Simply put, the idolatry of Artemis did not stand a chance against the prevailing word of God. Since the opponents of the early church were not able to refute the gospel preaching of Paul, they resorted to the confusion tactic.

Often, when the gospel is faithfully preached, chaos and confusion are not far behind. The stories of Paul’s ministry in different cities testify to the power of chaos and confusion. The truth is that when the Holy Spirit is making progress in the hearts of those whose lives are ensnared by sin, a muddling of biblical truth is often a chosen weapon of the forces of evil. Spiritual progress is often met with attempts to sow discord, unbelief, and confusion.

This dynamic plays out so obviously in Ephesus that it should challenge us to think about all the examples in our lives in which confusion has been allowed to inappropriately rob us of God-given confidence and hope. On the one hand, we ought to notice the severity and potential damage that can be caused by confusion. On the other hand, we ought to, with confidence, notice that the best our enemy can do is attempt to create chaos. Remember, the devil cannot reverse the completed work of Christ.

BIG IDEA: Confusion is a work of the enemy. It ought to be acknowledged and exposed against the surpassing greatness and truth of Christ.

APPLY:

- **Question:** When you are presented the truth, do you tend to draw near to God to ponder and obey what's right no matter the personal cost?

- **Question:** In what ways do you actively work to resist temptation in your life?

Week 22: Acts 19:21-41

Day 5: The Power of a Phrase

READ TOGETHER: Acts 19:21-44

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Just do it! It's a piece of cake. That cost me an arm and a leg. Many of us are familiar with these phrases and we may have even used them a time or two. Some phrases are harmless but other phrases can pack a mean punch! You see what I (Sabino) did there? In our story today we see how one phrase by the apostle Paul put the whole city of Ephesus in an uproar. Paul said, "gods made with hands are not gods."

This is the phrase that put the whole city in a panic. The reason is because people began believing it and the city of Ephesus was filled with gods that were made with hands. Demetrius, who made false gods in Ephesus, felt threatened by this one phrase. He started to notice that people were not buying the gods that he made as often as they used to. he was starting to lose money. He gathered up some of his friends who also made gods and they became angry with him. Demetrius and his fellow idol makers came up with their own phrase.

They began to shout, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" They city was confused at the chants and went into an uproar. They grabbed some of Paul's co-workers and dragged them into the theater. They blamed Paul's friends for what was going on. Paul wanted to go and speak to the crowd that had gathered but the other disciples of Jesus wouldn't let him. They were afraid of what the crowds might do to Paul since he came up with the phrase "gods made with hands are not gods."

Isn't it amazing what one little phrase can do? As Christians we have many true phrases that God has given us to repeat in the cities that we live in. Here are a few: He is risen! Jesus is Lord. Christ died for our sins. These phrases are short, but they are powerful. They may sometimes even make people upset with us. However, we are to go on speaking. People need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. May we be bold like Paul and may the people who hear them begin to believe!

BIG IDEA: One true phrase can have a big impact.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Why do you think the city reacted so loudly to the phrase, "god made with hands are not gods"?

- **Activity:** Name some other Christian phrases that we can share with others.

Week 23: Acts 20:1-6

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 20:1-6

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 20:1-6 and complete the activities below.

- **Activity**: The opening verses remind us of the uproar which took place in Acts 19:23-40. Briefly summarize the events which took place in Ephesus and were studied in the previous week's Word to Life studies.

- **Question**: According to Acts 20:1, Paul encouraged the disciples. Although we are not given specific words chosen by the apostle Paul, what do you imagine his encouragement would have been like following an uproar?
 - **Question**: When have you felt really encouraged by another Christian? What was it about their words and/or actions that made you feel encouraged?

- **Question:** On several occasions in Acts, we have been given traveling itineraries and companions in early church ministry. Why do you think these details were significant enough to be included by the Holy Spirit through Luke?

- **Question:** Acts 20:1-6 lists several different companions for Paul. What do you notice about the different roles that each of them played? How should their cooperation with Paul inform our understanding of teamwork in ministry?

Week 23: Acts 20:1-6

Day 2: Encouragement: Engaging in the Eternal Perspective

READ: Acts 20:1-2 and Hebrews 10:24-25

EXPLORE:

Before we dive into Acts 20:1-3, it would be helpful for us to briefly summarize what took place in the previous story. Paul had declared that gods made by hand were not gods at all. As we might imagine, this statement caused quite an uproar in a city that was filled with idol worship. Paul's statement did not just create a religious dispute, it upset an entire economic system. Silversmiths, who had been rallied by one of their own, were afraid that they would lose finances because the false deity named Artemis was losing influence in Ephesian culture. Eventually, everyone was thrown into a brief, yet intense uproar which was eventually met by the town clerk.

With this summary in mind, we can jump back into Acts 20:1-2. For today's study, we are going to focus on how Paul encouraged the disciples after the uproar and the believers throughout the Macedonian region. Although we do not know the specifics of what Paul said, I (Michaela) want us to focus on the legacy that he left through his encouragement. We ought to ask the question, "In what ways should Paul's legacy of encouragement be challenging for us today?"

I believe that Acts 20:1-2 ought to remind us that we are not only called to encourage, but we are also in need of encouragement. God's Word is full of examples of how we are supposed to be in encouraging community with each other through the difficulties of life.¹⁰ Think back to the setting in Ephesus and Paul's missionary journey. The believers were shaken up by their difficult experience, but Paul would have certainly encouraged them to redirect their focus from an earthly to an eternal perspective. Simply, that is what biblical encouragement ought to do!

¹⁰ See many of Paul's letters in which people were encouraged to redirect their focus and love toward Jesus once again.

Even in the aftermath of an uproar, Paul redirected their gaze back toward Christ through encouragement. Christian encouragement is a calling to strengthen one another toward Jesus and to strive alongside one another toward a unified, larger goal. Acts 20:1-2 is powerful because it reminds us that Paul left a legacy of encouragement everywhere he went. Through Paul's words of encouragement, the Lord used him to strengthen the churches and help them thrive in pursuit of holiness.

Consider today the encouragement of Hebrews 10:24-25 in which we are called to spur one another on toward love and good deeds, gathering and encouraging each other.¹¹

BIG IDEA: The encouragement we give to others leaves a lasting impact.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Think of a time when someone encouraged you. How did that help you to both endure and redirect your gaze to Christ? Who is someone you can encourage right now in your life?
- **Activity:** In the book of Acts, count how many times the word encouragement is used and read the passages surrounding the word.
- **Activity:** Write down a list of people to encourage and send them a nice card, text message, or even speak to them in person, giving words of love and encouragement.

¹¹ See Hebrews 10:24-25 for full reference.

Week 23: Acts 20:1-6

Day 3: Ministry is Fundamentally Communal

READ: Acts 20:1-6

EXPLORE:

Cliff Barrows and George Beverly Shea... It is possible that you are familiar with those names, though it is somewhat unlikely. These men may be unknown to you, but they existed in close relationship with one of the most powerful voices in American Christianity throughout the twentieth century. Barrows and Shea were coworkers and friends with none other than Billy Graham. Billy Graham may have preached and led in the proverbial spotlight, but he certainly regarded ministry as a team effort in the fullest sense. Barrows and Shea were always close by.

When we investigate Acts 20:1-6 we see the same concept of team ministry and communal relationships present within the missionary work of the apostle Paul. The biblical text is detailed not only about Paul's travel itinerary, but also about his travel companions. For Paul, much like Billy Graham, ministry was fundamentally communal.

Notice how the Holy Spirit, through Luke, articulates this truth in the text. We are told that when violent threats forced Paul to leave, *"Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus."*¹² It is clear in the biblical text that God had commissioned Paul to be supported and encouraged in communal ministry.

In order for us to unpack the full weight of how the companions and co-laborers of Acts 20:1-6 would have helped Paul; it would be beneficial to read all of 2 Corinthians 1-7. In that longer retelling of the Paul's difficulties, the apostle explained how he encountered unbelievable tension within the Corinthian church which caused him great pain and

¹² See Acts 20:4 for reference.

sadness.¹³ Although Acts 20:1-6 is an abbreviated summary, its content represents the incredible impact of communal ministry in the development of the early church.

Whether it is the contemporary example of Barrows and Shea or the ancient model of Paul and his ministry partners, we ought to be reminded today of the incredible value of communal ministry in everyday life. Allow yourself to be prayerfully challenged as you ask the following questions. What could you do to better partner with others in ministry? In what way or ways are you guilty of thinking that ministry is an individual effort rather than a communal affair? Spend time in prayer and in action so that the Lord would convict your heart and change your life.

BIG IDEA: Christian ministry is fundamentally communal.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What are some reasons for why it can be challenging to think of ministry as a communal rather than just individual?

- **Optional Activity:** If you have time, a reading of 2 Corinthians 1-7 would prove to be incredibly helpful background information to read. Notice how Paul includes a more detailed retelling of the events described in Acts 20.

¹³ See 2 Corinthians 2:3 for reference.

Week 23: Acts 20:1-6

Day 4: Passover in Philippi

READ: Acts 20:1-6 and Acts 16:11-40

EXPLORE:

Evidently, the threat on Paul's life made it impossible for him to reach Jerusalem alongside other travelers in time for Passover. As a result, Paul celebrated the days of the unleavened bread in none other than Philippi. Today, we are going to pause for a moment and notice how striking and significant this brief reference to the Philippian Passover would have been for the ancient audience.

We need to remember that Philippi was thought of as a lawless city. It was a heavily militarized place with great resistance toward the Christian faith. When we are first introduced to Philippi in Acts 16:11-40, we encounter not only hostility, but the absence of the Jewish place of worship called the synagogue. To put it simply, Philippi was not the ideal location for the devout Jew to celebrate the Passover festival. Paul's participation in the Philippian Passover would have been nothing short of astonishing!

Despite the undesirable location, there Paul was. In none other than Philippi, the apostle Paul was celebrating the miraculous, liberating power of God. Acts 20:6 reads, *"We sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days."* For the ancient readers of church history and for us today, Paul's desire to celebrate Passover in the very non-Jewish city of Philippi would have reiterated that he did not need to stop being Jewish in order to embrace Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Paul was celebrating Passover with God-fearing Gentiles in none other than Philippi! Paul, like many Messianic Jews before and after him, integrated the practices of his ancestral faith with the firm belief that Jesus was the promised deliverer of God's people and the world. We need to notice how significant this moment would have been not just because of its geographic location, but because of the missional expansion in the early church.

Think about this. Paul was joining God in expanding the gospel to the world. Even as he ministered to the nations, however, a distinctly Jewish identity was still maintained! It was incredibly important for Luke to highlight how Christ-followers, even those in Philippi, were joining in the rich history of remembering the God of deliverance. The Christian gospel for the world did not and does not mean an omission or alteration of its deeply Jewish heritage. For Paul and all Christians today, we ought to be reminded that the God who is celebrated in Passover is the same liberating God who reconciles and redeems people from slavery to sin here and now.

BIG IDEA: Paul's participation in the Philippian Passover would have powerfully emphasized the transformative work of the liberating God in a certain place and with a certain people.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Whether Paul celebrated Passover in the very non-Jewish city of Philippi or in Jerusalem, the festival would have still been incredibly significant. Why then do you think it is particularly significant that Paul celebrated Passover in Philippi specifically?

- **Activity:** In Passover and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread remember how God delivered the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. In what ways does Jesus reveal the same liberating power of God?

Week 23: Acts 20:1-6

Day 5: Legacy of Encouragement

READ TOGETHER: Acts 20:1-6, Hebrews 3:13-15

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

How many things would you have left undone had you not been encouraged? You may have never played a sport, joined a band, rode a bike or rollercoaster had you never been encouraged. Encouragement is such an important part of life and ministry and many times we don't even realize it is happening. As Christians we are called to be encouraging to one another and this gift of grace will have untold benefits and rewards.

The apostle Paul is leaving Ephesus after the uproar and as he travels, he leaves us with a gospel legacy of encouragement. First, we see him call the church of Ephesus together to encourage them. He has built a strong bond with this church, having spent over two years with them. He has not only shared the gospel with them but also his life. As a significant person in their life who is about to leave he reminds them that it is the Lord who will supply all their needs. Paul then heads off to Macedonia where the churches of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea were located. We are told that he gave them much encouragement. It seems he worked hard and stayed up late encouraging these churches with whom he only had a little bit of time. Finally, he spends three months in Corinth encouraging a church that he wrote multiple letters to. If we learn anything about Paul here it is that he thorough when it comes to encouragement.

So, I (Sabino) must ask you. Are you also thorough in encouragement? If we are going to be thorough in encouragement, we first must be intentional. Christians need help in their faith and God places us in their lives to help them. Secondly, if we are going to be an encouraging to our fellow believers, we also need to be biblical. The content of Paul's encouragement was the word of God. Lastly if we are going to be encouraging to our fellow believers then we need to be prayerful. We may say some good things, but we need God to do the transformative work in people's hearts.

BIG IDEA: As Christians we are called to encourage one another.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** What is the most memorable time that you have received encouragement from a fellow believer?

- **Activity:** Make a list of a few people that you can pray for and encourage this coming week.

Week 24: Acts 20:7-16

Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 20:7-16

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 20:7-16 and complete the activities below.

- **Question:** What do we learn from the example of the believers who listened to Paul's teaching throughout the night? How should we apply this truth?

- **Question:** Why do you think Paul was "*hastening*" to be in Jerusalem specifically for the remembrance of Pentecost?

- **Question:** If you were in Paul's position after Eutychus fell, how do you think you would have responded?

- What do you think enabled Paul to respond the way he did?

- **Optional Activity:** Re-read Acts 2 from our earlier study of Pentecost and Peter's Sermon. This context will help to enhance your understanding of Acts 20.

Week 24: Acts 20:7-16

Day 2: Dangerously Sleepy

READ: Acts 20:7-12

EXPLORE:

With sleepy eyes and ears, I (Stephen) can remember the first time I heard the story of Eutychus. He was a young man grew weary, fell asleep, and fell to his death from a window while listening to Paul's famous marathon sermon, and was resuscitated. A story like that really has a way of sticking in the mind of a young boy who sat in the balcony of the church he attended regularly struggling to pay attention to the sermon. I had rarely heard the Word of God spoken to me so clearly!

The story told in Acts 20:7-12 is undoubtedly one of the iconic moments in the ministry of Paul. Like me, maybe you've heard the story before, and identified with Eutychus in your memory. Regardless of your prior experience, I would like to invite you to experience this story with fresh eyes and note the underlying beauty of the text. It is brimming with the significance of the resurrection.

First, the gathering took place "*on the first day of the week.*"¹⁴ This is the first New Testament reference to Christians gathering for worship, teaching, and fellowship on a Sunday. The churches gathered on Sunday to serve as a continual memorial of the Resurrection.¹⁵

Second, we need to notice that Paul spoke about the gospel with those who were gathered. In fact, the language chosen by Luke to describe Paul's speech mirrors the language previously used to describe how the apostle spoke to people concerning Christ as the Messiah. We can be sure that it was not just their day of gathering, but also their way of remembering Jesus's resurrection that was central to their lives.

¹⁴ See Acts 20:7 for reference.

¹⁵ See Luke 24:1, I Corinthians 16:2, and Revelation 1:10 for reference to this language.

Finally, note that the resuscitation of the boy who died also contains the resurrection theme. Eutychus, whose name ironically means “lucky,” was resuscitated in ways that are reminiscent of miracles performed by Jesus, Peter, Elijah, and Elisha.¹⁶ It was not just the length of Paul’s teaching or the day of their gathering, but also the boy who was revived that proclaimed the resurrecting and sustaining power of Jesus. The story may be well-known because a boy was revived, but it is powerful because of the Christ who was raised!

BIG IDEA: Paul’s marathon teaching, including the resuscitation of Eutychus, is overflowing with the resurrection power of Christ.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What do you think it would have been like to experience Paul’s conversation and teaching before and after the resuscitation of Eutychus?

- **Question:** Why do you think it is possible for us to remember this story of Eutychus’s restoration and miss the larger resurrection theme in the text?

¹⁶ See Mark 5:40, Acts 9:40-41, 1 Kings 17:21-22, and 2 Kings 4:34-35 for references to the respective individuals.

Week 24: Acts 20:7-16

Day 3: Urgency vs. Importance

READ: Acts 20:7-16

EXPLORE:

You have probably heard it said that “We often miss the important in light of the urgent.” This sentiment is true and worth consideration. It is equally true, on the opposite end of the spectrum, that we are capable of missing urgent and critical things because we have a poor concept of what is truly important in the moment.

Misplaced priorities can often keep us from seeing the urgent needs that exist all around us. The question must be asked, “How can we balance the urgent situations with the important endeavors in everyday life?” In a very real sense, the biblical scene we have been studying this week introduces us to the moments in which the importance of our mission and the urgency of our situation collide! Let’s take a closer look.

The intensity and urgency in Acts 20:7-16 is nothing short of incredible. Only one day before he needed to depart toward Jerusalem, Paul was intent on maximizing his time teaching the believers who had gathered to break bread and to learn. As the night grew late, Paul continued to teach until a moment of tragedy struck. Then, after Eutychus’ revival, he continued to preach and teach until daybreak.

Paul was willing to pause his teaching to deal with the tragedy, but he was not willing to give up the precious time of fellowship altogether. He was not willing to overlook the tragedy of Eutychus any more than he would have been willing to stop teaching after the disaster struck. In this moment, Paul models what it looks like to possess situational urgency without inappropriately sacrificing missional importance.

Note that Paul’s compassion toward Eutychus’ terrifying fall was not a break from Gospel proclamation; it was a unique continuation of it. Like Paul, we too should learn to be aware of our situation so we might be mindful of how the Lord would use us in each moment. If Paul had not paused for the injured young man, he would not have appropriately

demonstrated the gospel. On the other hand, if Paul had cancelled the rest of the night's teaching in vv. 11-12, the community would have missed out on crucial edification.

For some of us who are distracted by every situation around us as though it were an emergency, Paul's determination to continue teaching should challenge us to stay focused. For others who refuse to be distracted by needs around us, the willingness of Paul to pause for the immediate critical situation should challenge us to become conscious of circumstances that may need our attention for the glory of God!

BIG IDEA: Christians ought to balance situational urgency with things of missional significance.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Which of the two extremes are you most likely to fall into: being distracted by everything as though it were urgent...or...refusing to be distracted by urgent things even if are critical and require action?

- **Question:** What advice would you give to yourself and others about how to balance things that are urgent with things that are important? Write down your thoughts to share with your LifeGroup.

Week 24: Acts 20:7-16

Day 4: Celebrate Well

READ: Acts 2:1-13

EXPLORE:

“For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.”¹⁷

Paul was a man on a mission. His vision was set, the course was laid out. He had a schedule to keep. Paul yearned to celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem. To understand the weight of this desire, we need to jump back into a text we studied in February of 2021—Acts 2.

Pentecost is a celebration that occurs after the completion of the seventh seven-day period following Passover.¹⁸ As Acts 2 opens, the fiftieth day had arrived, the expectation was high, and thousands of people had gathered to celebrate Pentecost. For several weeks, the early church had studied the teachings of Jesus and they were awaiting the promised Holy Spirit for the global proclamation of the gospel.¹⁹ The time of waiting had come to an end and God’s promises had been fulfilled before their eyes.

Pentecost was one of the most celebrated pilgrim festivals in first-century Jewish communities. All work ceased and many gathered from every region and walk of life. It was into that environment that the global expansion of the mission of Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, began. The followers of Jesus, in Acts 2:1-13, were enabled to speak in many different languages through the gift of tongues. Pentecost was and is all about the mission of God on earth.

¹⁷ See Acts 20:16 for reference.

¹⁸ Biblical numbers are often filled with significance. Pentecost is no different. ($7 \times 7 = 49$) ($49 + 1 = 50$)

¹⁹ For reference to this sequence of events, read Acts 1-2. Specifically notice Acts 1:1-8.

Why did Paul want desperately to be in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost? The answer to this fundamental question is neither abstract nor is it hard to grasp. Paul represents one among many faithful Jews who came to embrace Jesus as the Messiah and how God used His Holy Spirit to invade the lives of the believers who were gathered.

Verse 16 says that Paul decided to sail past Ephesus. It may have been that Ephesus was not safe for Paul at that time as 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 seems to indicate, or it could be that Paul was tied tightly to his ship's schedule. Regardless, Paul was clearly set on remembering the faithfulness of God on the Day of Pentecost right where it first took place.

Paul's tenacious commitment to remembering God's faithfulness ought to challenge us to reflect upon how we ought to diligently celebrate and purposefully commemorate the faithfulness of God in our own lives!

BIG IDEA: Paul's desire to remember God's outpouring of His Holy Spirit on Pentecost ought to challenge us to consider how we might also purposefully remember spiritually significant milestones!

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you have any personal practices of spiritual remembrance or celebration? Why or why not?

Week 24: Acts 20:7-16

Day 5: Sleeping in Church

READ TOGETHER: Acts 20:7-16

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

If you have grown up in church, you have probably fallen asleep in a service on more than one occasion. As a kid, my (Sabino's) church had a Sunday evening service that my family and I always attended. After a long Sunday playing football, hide and seek, or foosball with my church peers, my brother and I were always tired by the time for evening service. I remember often sleeping on my mom's shoulder. Luckily, in the 90's women's dresses had shoulder pads. They were great for a Sunday nap! Well, my Sunday evening naps were no comparison to the Sunday evening nap Eutychus took.

Just as the Sunday night meeting was hard on me as a young boy, so it was with Eutychus in our story. The meeting starting to creep past midnight and Eutychus was already exhausted. He didn't have shoulder pads to sleep on though, and since he was sitting in the window when he fell asleep, he fell from the third floor to his death. Imagine the panic that would have set in on the whole church that was gathered. He wasn't breathing when they got down to him, but Paul told them not to be alarmed. Apparently, Paul had faith that God would restore his life. The boy's life was revived, and everyone was comforted.

One of the things that we see here is that the message of the Scriptures is worth making sacrifices for. It's worth it to lose some sleep to hear God's Word. It's worth it to pull an all-nighter when an important

missionary is in town. I love the commitment of the Christians in Troas. They were eager to hear God's Word.

BIG IDEA: Our commitment to God's Word should cause us to be willing to stay up past our bedtime now and then.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Has there ever been a time you stayed up late with family or friends talking about the Lord? Describe it to the group.
- **Activity:** Pick a day in the next couple of weeks to let your kids stay up past their normal bedtime. Spend time talking about the Lord. Make it fun with a camp out or popcorn.

- **Question:** In your opinion, how would Acts 20:17-38 be enhanced by reading Paul's letter to the church: Ephesians?

- **Question:** Paul briefly details how he endured hardship on their behalf. What are some good pieces of advice and bad pieces of advice you have received when enduring hardship in life?

Week 25: Acts 20:17-38

Day 2: How to minister well in a hard season

READ: Acts 20:17-38

EXPLORE:

Have you ever experienced something that seemed to bring more heartache and cause more burdens than you originally thought? Perhaps, you even realized the potential struggles that awaited you, but underestimated how significantly they would impact your life? Seasons and situations like this often force us to ask the question, “What is capable of sustaining a person when the inevitable difficulties of life surface?”

It is precisely into this final question that our focus will now turn for our continuing study of Acts 20:17-38. Specifically, today’s study will unpack three simple, yet profound biblical truths that ought to inform how we experience burdens, setbacks, and heartaches in ministry. The truths are enumerated below and further explained.

1. Godly character is often refined through heartache and trial.

In Paul’s reflection with the Ephesian church and its leadership, he reflected on the fact that godly character is often refined through heartache and trial. He spoke of how the Lord had developed humility and an ability to help his fellow believers not despite the trials, but in the midst of his hardship!²⁰ Additionally, Paul made reference to how his ministry through trial had resulted in joy.²¹ Paul illustrates what Scripture uniformly affirms. Endurance in hardship is rooted in an ability to perceive how godly character is being developed and refined in trial.²²

2. The development of effective witness begins before the first act of service.

²⁰ See Acts 20:19,20 for reference

²¹ See Acts 20:24 for reference.

²² See James 1:2-4 and Hebrews 12:1-2 for reference.

Paul's journey for effective witness unto Christ began long before he ministered to the Ephesians. Acts 20:18 reads, "*You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you.*" His impact upon the church and influence for the gospel did not begin when the trial started, it was inaugurated long before. Often, we are unable to maintain our witness through trial because we neglect the developmental stages of long before. He was faithful the whole way through as he pointed others to life in Christ.

3. The source of our desires and affections is crucial for our spiritual health in trial.

Paul's story and example point us to the reality that we ought to care deeply about the God who forms our character before we focus upon our ministerial gifting in difficult times. Paul's affection and desire was toward the Lord first and foremost. Without proper character, even if we are competent and gifted in a specific area of service, we will be unable to fully please the Lord.

BIG IDEA: With God as our source and deepest affection, difficulties in life can be used to form and refine godly character toward faithful ministry.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How does 1 Peter 1:3-9 (specifically verse 6 and 7) inform us about trials?

- **Question:** What happens when a person has gifting but lacks character?

Week 25: Acts 20:17-38

Day 3: A Resolve to Suffer

READ: Acts 20:22-24

EXPLORE:

On his last journey to Jerusalem, the apostle Paul stopped at Miletus, a coastal community on the West coast of Asia. This is located in modern-day Turkey. From there, he summoned the church elders from Ephesus for a last farewell. In his parting remarks, he reminded them of his conduct and his firm resolve.²³ He also commissioned them to protect the church and warned against rebellion within their own ranks,²⁴ and committed them to God.²⁵ Here we focus on the primary point, his conduct among them.²⁶

Paul's resolve to fulfill his mission—testifying to the gospel²⁷—was his example to the church leaders from Ephesus. Simply, he suffered because he was obedient to the mission. Verses 22-23 reveal why; the Holy Spirit compelled him to Jerusalem and warned him of the suffering that awaited him there.²⁸ These verses illuminate the choice believers must make. Is your goal to preserve your life and avoid suffering? Will you obey the Lord in the face of hostility?

Your answer will determine your response when the stakes are high.

Paul was certain that hardship lay in his path. He revealed his concern when he asked the believers in Rome to intercede on his behalf.²⁹ But he was ready to surrender his liberty and his life for Jesus's sake and for the sake of his ministry. It was an ambition to finish well, not to

²³ See Acts 20:18-27, 33-35 for reference.

²⁴ See Acts 20:28-30 for reference.

²⁵ See Acts 20:32-38 for reference.

²⁶ Acts 20:18-27. It was typical of farewell speeches in the ancient world for the speaker to mention themselves as exemplars for their audiences.

²⁷ See v. 24 for reference.

²⁸ See also Acts 21:4,11 for reference.

²⁹ See Romans 15:30-31 for reference.

preserve himself that motivated him. His highest priority was to magnify Christ in his body, “*whether by life or by death.*”³⁰

Pastors who call on believers to suffer, to endure hardship, to persevere in the face of trials rarely draw sizeable crowds. Nonetheless, the church needs to be prepared to face widespread hardship to maintain faithful witness. Perhaps Paul’s example of commitment to the gospel, even at the risk of suffering, may motivate us to bold witness in the face of hostility.

BIG IDEA: Paul possessed a willingness and resolve to suffer for his faith.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What do most Christians fear about witnessing or having spiritual conversations with unbelievers? How does Paul’s example of having his priorities straight help you deal with your fears of witnessing or of enduring hostility for the sake of Jesus?

- **Question:** If God spoke with you about your life priorities, how would he tell you to rearrange things?

³⁰ See Philippians 1:20 for reference.

Week 25: Acts 20:17-38

Day 4: Church Leadership

READ: Acts 20:17-31

EXPLORE:

On his last journey to Jerusalem, the apostle Paul met the church elders from Ephesus so that he could pass the baton for them to carry on in his absence. In Judaism, the term “elder” conveys dignity and honor upon those who are called to lead God’s people. We also known them as “overseers,” a term that describes their responsibilities.³¹ They are older, more mature men of the faith who lead, feed, and protect the church.³²

Paul knew the dangers facing the church. So, in this farewell meeting, he commissioned them to always be on guard against hostile external influences that would corrupt the church, harm the saints, and destroy lives.³³ He also warned them to keep watch over themselves and one another lest one of them depart from the path and ruin many lives. If they failed to keep watch, some of them would become deceivers who would lead others away from the biblical path to engage in sinful behavior.

Paul had been warning them for a long time.³⁴ Mention of his tears shows his deep anguish over what would soon beset the church.³⁵ He feared what these leaders, whom he had nurtured and trained, would

³¹ See Acts 28:29 for reference.

³² Acts 28:29 uses a verb which may also be translated as “to pastor.” Like the verb, the noun form could also be translated as shepherd or pastor. These elders / overseers are to pastor the congregation; they are its pastors. As in Acts 28:28-31, elder, overseer, and pastor (appearing in the verb form) are synonymous in 1 Peter 5:1-2. In apostolic times there were no distinctions between elders, overseers, and pastors.

³³ See Acts 28:29 for reference.

³⁴ See Acts 28:31 for reference.

³⁵ Within just a couple of decades the church had wandered from its devotion to Christ, Revelation 2:4.

do to those in their care. Prospects for the church's future were not promising. Storm clouds loomed on the horizon.

His concern was justified by later events. 2 Timothy 1:15 mentions a general revolt against Paul's ministry and his teachings throughout Asia.³⁶ This was a reprise of the unruly church at Corinth, which also mounted an attack on Paul's apostleship and his gospel.

Church leadership is hard work. It requires constant vigilance and willingness to step in at a moment's notice when trouble crops up. Those on whom the mantle falls take up a substantial burden. They also subject themselves to rigorous judgment before the Lord Jesus.³⁷

BIG IDEA: Church leadership is hard work. It requires constant vigilance and willingness to step in and step up.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Considering Hebrews 13:17, what are our responsibilities towards the pastors, elders, and other spiritual leaders here at our church?

- **Question:** What do most people do when their church leaders must wade into difficult situations, make tough decisions, and perhaps even exercise church discipline?

³⁶ Ignatius's letter to the Ephesians, written a few decades later, shows that they listened to the warning and recovered their full measure of love for Christ.

³⁷ See Hebrews 13:17 for reference.

Week 25: Acts 20:17-38

Day 5: A Heartfelt Goodbye

READ TOGETHER: Acts 20:17-38

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

By God's grace I (Sabino) was able to spend 3 ½ years on the mission field in England. One of the days I will never forget is my last day in Plymouth. We packed up our things, our two young kids included who were born in England, and we made our way to the train station. There at the train station three of our closest English friends who came to faith through our witness, were there to see us off. As we got on the train, they remained on the platform with tears flowing down their cheeks as they waved goodbye. Of course, we couldn't stop the tears from flowing down our cheeks either. It is hard to say goodbye to people you love deeply. The apostle Paul was saying goodbye to people he loved deeply.

Paul reminds the Ephesian elders how he lived among them. He went through many difficult things on their behalf. He did not shrink from teaching them anything that was profitable. He did this publicly in the hall of Tyrannus and in their homes. Paul was no stranger to these men. He knew their wives and their children's names. Paul also gave them some personal admonition.

He told them to pay careful attention to themselves. This is an important truth for a leader. Before a leader can take proper care of others, they must make sure that they are first attending to the ministry of their own hearts. He reminds them that it was God the Holy Spirit who made them overseers of the church. He warns them that false

teachers will rise from within the church, and it will be their job to protect the sheep. Finally, he commends them to the word of God that can build them up and give them the inheritance of the saints.

Paul ended his time with them in prayers. They were weeping and Paul was weeping. They were mostly sad because this would be the last time, they would see Paul this side of eternity. Paul gave them everything he had. He left an indelible mark upon them. Tears are fitting for a time like that.

BIG IDEA: Paul's final instructions to the Ephesian elders end in tears.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Activity:** Share of a time that you had a heartfelt goodbye with a fellow believer. Share what they did that made your relationship special.

- **Activity:** Make a list of the ways Paul lived among the Ephesian elders and spend some time discussing it.



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