

# WE ARE SENT

LESSONS FOR TODAY FROM THE EARLY CHURCH

## Growth Group Curriculum Week 8 – October 31, 2021 – Acts 20:17-36

**Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at church. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.**

After the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19) the apostle Paul began some extensive traveling which took him away from Ephesus. However, as he made his way back to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, he had to sail by Ephesus. He chose not to stop there and instead docked in Miletus and asked for the leaders of the Ephesian church to come meet with him. The speech, in chapter 20, is the only speech of Paul that is given to an all Christian audience.

This serves as Paul's farewell speech and looks to the past and the future, and also instructs the elders as to how they are to lead currently. He talks about how he served faithfully among them and warns them about future trials that will occur in their church. He tells them to be on their guard because savage wolves will come after the flock they have been tasked with shepherding.

We know from the letters to Timothy, as well as Revelation 2, that the church in Ephesus did face trials, and Revelation tells us that that they did indeed "forget their first love."

As Paul concludes his speech, he commits them to God and to God's grace. He reminds them of the inheritance that is theirs because of Jesus Christ. This is an inheritance that 1 Peter 1:4 tells us will not perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is what will allow them to persevere and to remain hopeful when things get difficult.

Paul connects this idea of an inheritance with how the Ephesians are to live. He quotes the words of Jesus, even though these specific words are not found in the gospels. However, the theme is consistent with what Jesus taught. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Paul wants the Ephesians lives to be marked by generosity. He wants them to see that true satisfaction and peace come when a person lives a generous life.



Generosity is not simply financial generosity, but instead an overall lifestyle that looks for ways to bless others. Sometimes that involves money. Sometimes that involves time, and sometimes that involves using your passions and gifts as a way of building up others.

## Exploring the Text

Acts 20:17-36

<sup>17</sup> From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. <sup>18</sup> When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. <sup>19</sup> I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. <sup>20</sup> You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. <sup>21</sup> I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

<sup>22</sup> “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. <sup>23</sup> I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. <sup>24</sup> However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

<sup>25</sup> “Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. <sup>26</sup> Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. <sup>27</sup> For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. <sup>28</sup> Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God,<sup>[a]</sup> which he bought with his own blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. <sup>30</sup> Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

<sup>32</sup> “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. <sup>33</sup> I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. <sup>34</sup> You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. <sup>35</sup> In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

<sup>36</sup> When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed.



## Questions

*If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.*

- 1) Who has been an example of generosity in your life? What did you learn from them?
- 2) Throughout the past couple of chapters, people have been trying to talk Paul out of going to Rome. Have you ever tried to talk someone out of going somewhere or doing something dangerous? Even if it was something God was calling them to do? What was the outcome of that?
- 3) In vs 19, Paul looks back and reminds the church leaders that he served the Lord with great humility and tears. In spite of that, he was still tested. People doubted his integrity and faithfulness. Can you recall a time when your faith was tested or questioned by doubters? How did that go?
- 4) As in vs 25, have you ever been faced with knowing you'll no longer have a teacher or mentor leading you anymore? Did you feel equipped to carry on without their guidance? Explain.
- 5) How do you stay "on your guard" when it comes to your faith? How do you make sure you are walking in the path that God has set out for you? (vs. 31)?
- 6) In vs. 28, the apostle Paul is passing along the responsibility of overseeing the flock to the leaders of the church. In Galatians Paul tells believers that they are to "bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." What role do each of us play in helping to oversee the flock and bear other's burdens?
- 7) Where is it reflected in Jesus' teachings that, "It is more blessed to give than to receive?" Why do you think Paul ends his speech by talking about the importance of caring for others and the blessing that comes from that?
- 8) The generous life is not just about being generous with our money. It also means that we are to be generous with our time and talents as well. Where, in your life, do you need to be more generous?

