

# Finding A New Life Focus Spiritually

## Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders



In Acts 20, Paul called the Ephesian elders to meet with him (20:17). The NT churches seem to have been led by a plurality of elders, that is, spiritual leaders. This was especially true of larger churches like the church at Ephesus. The NT indicates that elders were to be spiritually mature and devoted men who taught, led, and protected the church from doctrinal perversion. Their qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

Paul had ministered in Ephesus for three years. He was moving on to other territories and was **passing the ministry baton on to them**. This would be the last time they would see him (20:25). He was giving them his last instructions to prepare them for the responsibility ahead. **Paul was giving them a new focus for their lives**. This passage also gives us a new focus for our lives for the remaining time God gives us on this earth. *Do you want to make your life count for eternity? Are you ready to refocus the aim of your life for Christ?*

### Central Lesson:

**God has an assignment for your life—will you accept it?**

#### 1. Spend time **ALONE** with God (20:13-14).

*"13 Paul went by land to Assos, where he had arranged for us to join him, while we traveled by ship. 14 He joined us there, and we sailed together to Mitylene."* Warren Wiersbe explained, "Paul decided to walk alone the twenty miles that separated Troas from Assos. Perhaps he was seeking the mind of the Lord regarding his visit to Jerusalem. While he loved the fellowship of other saints (v. 4), He knew he must get alone with God and seek his mind." (Wiersbe Expository Outlines on the New Testament, p. 335).

#### 2. Serve the Lord **HUMBLY** and with perseverance (20:19).

Serving Christ required persevering many "trials," that is, difficult times. *"19 I have done the Lord's work humbly and with many tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews."*

#### 3. Never stop **SERVING** Christ regardless of how difficult the situation (20:20).

*"20 I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes."*

#### 4. Keep the Gospel message central, simple, and **CLEAR** for people to understand (20:21).

*"21 I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike—the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus."* Too often, people today make the Gospel confusing or secondary. They get caught up in pet teachings and issues that may be biblical, but not the urgent message people need to hear. A good principle for us is—the **Gospel first!**

#### 5. Always seek to follow the **LEADING** of the Holy Spirit, even when it is unclear (20:22-23).

*"22 And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don't know what awaits me, 23 except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead."*

Paul sought to follow the Holy Spirit even when he was not fully sure what was ahead. He had to step out in faith. The *Life Application Study Bible* comments, "The Holy Spirit showed Paul that he would be imprisoned and experience suffering. Even knowing this, Paul did not shrink from fulfilling his mission. His strong character was a good example to the efficient elders, some of whom would also suffer for Christ." (20:23).

#### 6. Find fulfillment in living for the **ASSIGNMENT** God has for your life (20:24).

*"24 But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God."*

You have to decide what gives your life worth. Paul found worth in fulfilling the work Jesus assigned him. **What work has God assigned you?** The Bible tells us. That assignment varies with different stages of life, and with who you are. God may assign you to be a Spirit-filled, Jesus serving mother or father, or husband or wife, or business person. For some, because of age and health, God may call you to be a prayer warrior. All of us share the calling to be a disciple-maker in some form or capacity (see Matthew 28:19-20).

#### 7. Determine that your life will be characterized by **FAITHFULNESS** (20:26).

*"26 I declare today that I have been faithful..."*

#### 8. Collectively as a church body, let's work evangelistically to make it very difficult for anyone to go to **HELL** (20:26-27).

*"26 I declare today that I have been faithful. If anyone suffers eternal death, it's not my fault, 27 for I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know."* Paul boldly, lovingly, and persistently shared the Gospel with the lost. He basically said, if anyone ended up in hell, it would not be because they never heard the Gospel from him. If they ended up in hell, it will be because they repeatedly rejected his witness and chose hell. Paul worked and witnessed to make it as difficult as possible for anyone to go to hell.

#### 9. Along with being evangelistic, be devoted to helping people **GROW** spiritually by feeding them the scripture and leading them to walk with Christ (20:28).

*"28 So guard yourselves and God's people. Feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders."*

The two keywords in this verse are "feed" and "shepherd." The idea is to "teach" and "disciple."

#### 10. Guard against church **TROUBLE**-makers (20:29-30).

*"29 I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. 30 Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following. 31 Watch out!..."*

### Central Lesson: God has an assignment for your life—will you accept it?

► Accept Christ as your Savior. ► As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ► Invite someone to next Sunday's study. ► Attend a small group. ► Read the Bible this week & journal meaningful verses. ► Pray for friends that need Jesus.