

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 20 — Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 20 is one of the most personal, pastoral, and emotionally powerful chapters in the book of Acts.

The chapter begins after the riot in Ephesus.

Paul continues traveling through:

Macedonia.

Greece.

Troas.

Assos.

Mitylene.

Samos.

Miletus.

Along the way, he continues doing what has marked his ministry throughout Acts:

Encouraging believers.

Teaching the Word.

Strengthening churches.

Preparing leaders.

In Troas, the believers gather on the first day of the week to break bread.

Paul speaks late into the night.

A young man named Eutychus falls asleep in a window and falls from the third floor.

Luke says:

He was picked up dead.

Paul goes down, embraces him, and announces:

“Don’t be alarmed. He’s alive!”

The young man is restored, and the church is greatly encouraged.

But the heart of Acts 20 begins when Paul reaches Miletus.

He sends for the elders of the church in Ephesus.

There he gives them a farewell address unlike anything else recorded in Acts.

Paul does not merely tell them what to believe.

He reminds them:

How he lived.

He served:

With humility.

With tears.

Through trials.

He taught:

Publicly.

From house to house.

He proclaimed:

Repentance toward God.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He tells them he is going to Jerusalem even though the Holy Spirit has warned him that:

Prison.

Hardships.

Suffering.

Await him.

Yet Paul says:

“I don’t count my life as precious to myself.”

His goal is:

“To finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus gave me.”

That task is:

“Testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”

Then Paul turns directly to the elders.

He tells them:

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock.”

This establishes a foundational truth about pastoral ministry.

A shepherd must first watch:

Himself.

Then:

The flock.

The church does not belong to the pastor.

It belongs to:

God.

And Paul says God purchased the church:

“With His own blood.”

Paul warns that:

Savage wolves will come.

False teachers will arise.

Some will even come from within the church.

They will distort truth.

They will gather followers around themselves.

Therefore:

“Be on guard!”

Then Paul does something deeply important.

He cannot remain with them forever.

So he entrusts them to:

God.

And:

The Word of His grace.

Paul finishes by reminding them that he did not serve for money.

He worked with his own hands.

He helped the weak.

Then he quotes words of Jesus preserved here by Luke:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

The chapter ends with tears.

Paul kneels.

They pray.

They embrace him.

They weep.

They accompany him to the ship.

Acts 20 therefore gives us one of Scripture’s clearest pictures of:

Faithful Christian leadership.

Pastoral responsibility.

Sacrificial ministry.

Doctrinal vigilance.

Courage under suffering.

Generosity.

And finishing well.

The central truth of Acts 20 is:

Faithful Christian ministry serves with humility, teaches the whole counsel of God, calls people to repentance and faith in Christ, guards the church against spiritual danger, values the gospel above personal safety, and finishes the God-given race with sacrificial love.

I. PAUL LEAVES EPHESUS

Acts 20:1

“When the uproar in Ephesus was over, Paul called the disciples together, encouraged them, and said goodbye. Then he left for Macedonia.”

Paul does not leave without strengthening the believers.

Cross References

Acts 19:23

A major disturbance had arisen in Ephesus concerning the Way.

2 Corinthians 1:8

Paul later described severe affliction in Asia that placed enormous pressure upon him.

2 Corinthians 2:13

Paul's concern for fellow believers deeply affected his missionary travels.

Spiritual Principle

A faithful servant thinks about strengthening others even while personally carrying the wounds of conflict.

II. PAUL ENCOURAGES BELIEVERS THROUGHOUT THE REGION

Acts 20:2

“As he traveled through those regions, he encouraged the believers with many words and came to Greece.”

Encouragement is not incidental to Paul's ministry.

It is constant.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 2:13

Paul's travels through Macedonia were connected with concern for the churches.

2 Corinthians 7:5

Paul later described conflict on the outside and fears within during his time in Macedonia.

Romans 15:26

The believers in Macedonia and Achaia participated in helping needy believers in Jerusalem.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian encouragement is not shallow optimism; it strengthens believers to remain faithful in difficult circumstances.

III. ANOTHER PLOT AGAINST PAUL

Acts 20:3

“He stayed there three months. When the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.”

Paul again changes plans because of danger.

Cross References

Acts 20:19

Paul later reminds the Ephesian elders about the trials he endured through plots against him.

2 Corinthians 11:26

Paul described repeated dangers from enemies throughout his travels.

Acts 9:23

Even early in Paul's ministry, enemies plotted to kill him.

Spiritual Principle

Changing plans because of danger can be wisdom rather than fear.

IV. PAUL TRAVELS WITH A TEAM

Acts 20:4

“Several men traveled with him: Sopater from Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica; Gaius from Derbe; Timothy; and from Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus.”

Again we see ministry partnership.

Cross References

Ephesians 6:21

Tychicus later became a beloved brother and faithful servant who carried ministry news.

Colossians 4:7

Paul called Tychicus a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.

2 Timothy 4:12

Paul later sent Tychicus to Ephesus.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy ministry develops coworkers rather than building everything around one person.

V. THE TEAM WAITS AT TROAS

Acts 20:5

“These men went ahead and waited for us at Troas.”

Luke again uses:

“Us.”

He is traveling with Paul.

Cross References

Acts 16:10

Luke had earlier joined Paul’s missionary company as indicated by the “we” language.

Acts 20:4

Paul’s team represented believers from several regions.

2 Corinthians 2:13

Troas had previously been an important location in Paul’s travels.

Spiritual Principle

The book of Acts repeatedly shows gospel ministry carried forward through teams, not isolated personalities.

VI. THEY ARRIVE IN TROAS

Acts 20:6

“After the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we sailed from Philippi and joined them in Troas five days later, where we stayed for a week.”

Luke gives precise travel details.

Cross References

Exodus 12:15

The Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorated Israel’s deliverance from Egypt.

Acts 12:3

Luke previously used the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a chronological marker.

1 Corinthians 5:8

Paul later used the imagery of unleavened bread to teach about sincerity and truth.

Spiritual Principle

God's redemptive mission unfolds within real history, geography, travel, and time.

VII. THE CHURCH GATHERS ON THE FIRST DAY

Acts 20:7

“On the first day of the week, the believers gathered to break bread. Paul spoke to them, and because he planned to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight.”

The church gathers on:

The first day of the week.

Breaking Bread

Fellowship and likely the Lord's Supper.

Teaching

Paul speaks extensively.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 16:2

Paul instructed believers to set aside offerings on the first day of every week.

Acts 2:42

The early church devoted itself to apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer.

Luke 24:35

The risen Jesus was recognized by disciples in connection with breaking bread.

Spiritual Principle

The gathered church should center upon fellowship, remembrance of Christ, and the teaching of God's Word.

VIII. MANY LAMPS IN THE ROOM

Acts 20:8

“There were many lamps in the upstairs room where they were meeting.”

Luke gives another eyewitness detail.

Cross References

Acts 1:13

Believers had previously gathered in an upstairs room for prayer and fellowship.

Mark 14:15

Jesus and His disciples also used an upper room for an important gathering.

Acts 12:12

Early believers often met in homes.

Spiritual Principle

God often does significant spiritual work in ordinary rooms filled with ordinary believers.

IX. EUTYCHUS FALLS FROM THE WINDOW

Acts 20:9

“A young man named Eutychus was sitting in a window. He sank into a deep sleep as Paul went on speaking, and he fell from the third floor and was picked up dead.”

The event is sudden and tragic.

Cross References

1 Kings 17:17

Elijah encountered a widow whose son died unexpectedly.

2 Kings 4:20

Elisha also faced the death of a child in the home of a faithful woman.

Luke 8:42

Jesus repeatedly entered situations where death and deep grief confronted families.

Important Truth

Luke, a physician, describes Eutychus as:

Dead.

This is not merely fainting.

Spiritual Principle

Unexpected tragedy can interrupt even a deeply spiritual gathering.

X. EUTYCHUS IS RESTORED

Acts 20:10

“Paul went down, threw himself on him, and put his arms around him. He said, ‘Don’t be alarmed. He’s alive!’”

God intervenes.

Cross References

1 Kings 17:21

Elijah stretched himself over the dead child and cried out to God for life to return.

2 Kings 4:34

Elisha similarly embraced the dead child while seeking God’s restoring power.

Mark 5:41

Jesus took Jairus’ daughter by the hand and called her back to life.

Spiritual Principle

Life belongs to God, and death itself remains under His authority.

XI. FELLOWSHIP CONTINUES UNTIL DAWN

Acts 20:11

“Then Paul went back upstairs, broke bread, ate, and talked with them until dawn. Then he left.”

The church returns to fellowship.

Cross References

Acts 2:42

Breaking bread was central to early Christian fellowship.

Acts 20:7

The believers had gathered for teaching and breaking bread.

1 Corinthians 10:16

The shared cup and bread represent fellowship in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

God's restoring grace strengthens fellowship rather than merely producing amazement.

XII. THE BELIEVERS ARE GREATLY ENCOURAGED

Acts 20:12

"The young man was taken home alive, and everyone was greatly encouraged."

Naturally:

They rejoice.

Cross References

Luke 7:15

Jesus restored a widow's son to life and returned him to his mother.

John 11:44

Lazarus came from the tomb alive after Jesus called him.

Acts 9:41

Peter presented Tabitha alive after God restored her.

Spiritual Principle

God's works should strengthen faith and encourage His people.

XIII. PAUL WALKS TO ASSOS

Acts 20:13

"We went on ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, where we planned to pick up Paul. He had arranged this, because he wanted to travel there on foot."

Paul chooses to walk while the others sail.

Cross References

Acts 20:5

The team regularly coordinated travel arrangements.

Acts 21:1

Luke continues giving detailed travel accounts.

Acts 27:2

Paul's later journey toward Rome would also include detailed navigation.

Spiritual Principle

Even great missionaries lived through ordinary schedules, walking, sailing, planning, and travel.

XIV. PAUL REJOINS THE TEAM

Acts 20:14

“When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene.”

The journey continues.

Cross References

Acts 20:15

The team proceeds through several coastal locations.

Acts 21:1

Their travel continues toward Jerusalem.

Acts 27:2

Luke frequently records Paul's sea journeys carefully.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness is often built through thousands of ordinary steps between dramatic moments.

XV. THE JOURNEY CONTINUES TO MILETUS

Acts 20:15

“The next day we sailed past Chios, then to Samos, stayed at Trogyllium, and the following day reached Miletus.”

Luke documents the route carefully.

Cross References

Acts 20:16

Miletus becomes the setting for Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders.

Acts 21:1

The journey later continues toward Jerusalem.

Acts 27:3

Luke consistently preserves geographic detail.

Spiritual Principle

God's sovereignty works through ordinary geography as well as extraordinary miracles.

XVI. PAUL HURRIES TOWARD JERUSALEM

Acts 20:16

"Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so he wouldn't spend too much time in Asia, because he was hurrying to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by Pentecost."

Paul has priorities.

He knows stopping in Ephesus could delay him.

Cross References

Acts 18:21

Paul's travels had previously been influenced by his desire to reach Jerusalem.

1 Corinthians 16:8

Paul had earlier planned to remain in Ephesus for a particular season.

Acts 24:17

Paul later explains that he came to Jerusalem carrying aid and offerings.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faithful ministry sometimes requires saying no to a good opportunity in order to complete a greater responsibility.

XVII. PAUL CALLS THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

Acts 20:17

“From Miletus, Paul sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus.”

Paul wants one final meeting with these leaders.

Cross References

Titus 1:5

Paul later instructed Titus to appoint elders in every town.

1 Peter 5:1

Peter addressed elders as fellow shepherds responsible for God’s flock.

Acts 14:23

Paul and Barnabas had previously appointed elders in the churches.

Spiritual Principle

Local churches need recognized, spiritually responsible leadership.

XVIII. PAUL POINTS TO HIS LIFE

Acts 20:18

“When they arrived, he said: ‘You know how I lived the whole time I was with you from the first day I came to Asia.’”

Paul begins not with:

His title.

But:

His life.

Cross References

1 Thessalonians 2:10

Paul reminded believers that they had witnessed his holy, righteous, and blameless conduct.

2 Corinthians 1:12

Paul testified that he had lived with sincerity and godly integrity.

1 Thessalonians 1:5

The Thessalonians knew what kind of men Paul and his coworkers had been among them.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A leader's life should support the message coming from his mouth.

XIX. HUMILITY, TEARS, AND TRIALS

Acts 20:19

“I served the Lord with humility, tears, and trials caused by the plots of the Jews.”

This is Paul's description of ministry.

Not:

Celebrity.

Prestige.

Comfort.

Humility

Tears

Trials

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:23

Paul described imprisonments, beatings, dangers, and hardships.

Philippians 3:18

Paul wrote with tears concerning people living as enemies of Christ's cross.

Acts 20:31

Paul reminds the elders that he warned people night and day with tears.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

True ministry is not measured by how impressive the servant appears but by how faithfully he serves through humility, tears, and trials.

XX. PAUL HELD NOTHING HELPFUL BACK

Acts 20:20

“I did not hold back anything helpful, but taught you publicly and from house to house.”

Paul’s teaching was:

Public.

Personal.

Comprehensive.

Cross References

Acts 5:42

The early believers taught publicly and from house to house.

Ezekiel 3:18

A watchman is responsible to give necessary warning.

Acts 20:27

Paul soon says that he proclaimed the whole will of God.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful ministry does not hide necessary truth because that truth may be uncomfortable.

XXI. REPENTANCE AND FAITH

Acts 20:21

“I declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and believe in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is a concise gospel summary.

Repentance Toward God

A changed mind and direction concerning sin and God.

Faith in Jesus Christ

Trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation.

Cross References

Mark 1:15

Jesus proclaimed that people should repent and believe the good news.

Acts 26:20

Paul later described preaching repentance and turning to God with lives demonstrating that change.

Romans 10:9

Salvation is connected with confessing Jesus as Lord and believing in His resurrection.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Gospel Calls Us to Turn From Sin and Trust in Christ.”

XXII. PAUL IS COMPELLED TOWARD JERUSALEM

Acts 20:22

“Now I am compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.”

Paul does not know every detail.

But he knows the direction.

Cross References

Acts 19:21

Paul had already resolved in the Spirit to go toward Jerusalem.

Acts 21:4

Believers later expressed serious concern because of the suffering awaiting Paul.

Acts 21:11

Agabus would prophetically warn that Paul would be bound.

Spiritual Principle

God may reveal the direction without revealing every detail of the journey.

XXIII. PRISON AND HARDSHIP WAIT

Acts 20:23

“I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are waiting.”

Paul knows suffering is ahead.

Yet he continues.

Cross References

Acts 9:16

Jesus had said from the beginning that Paul would suffer for His name.

Acts 21:11

Agabus later gave a specific warning about Paul's coming imprisonment.

2 Corinthians 11:23

Paul had already experienced many imprisonments and hardships.

Spiritual Principle

Knowing hardship is coming does not always mean God is telling us to avoid it.

XXIV. "I MUST FINISH THE RACE"

Acts 20:24

"But I don't count my life as precious to myself. My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus gave me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

This is one of Paul's greatest statements.

The Race

His life of service.

The Task

His God-given calling.

The Message

The gospel of grace.

Cross References

2 Timothy 4:7

Near the end of his life Paul said he had fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith.

Philippians 3:14

Paul pressed toward the goal for the heavenly calling of God in Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:24

Paul compared Christian discipline to running a race with purpose.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Goal Is Not Merely to Start Well but to Finish the Race God Gave You.”

XXV. A FINAL FAREWELL

Acts 20:25

“I know that none of you among whom I have preached the kingdom will ever see me again.”

Paul understands the seriousness of this meeting.

Cross References

Acts 20:38

This statement causes the elders profound grief.

Colossians 1:28

Paul’s ministry centered on proclaiming Christ and bringing believers toward maturity.

Acts 19:8

Paul had preached the kingdom boldly in Ephesus.

Spiritual Principle

Awareness that time is limited should make ministry more faithful, not less meaningful.

XXVI. INNOCENT OF THE BLOOD OF ALL

Acts 20:26

“Therefore I declare today that I am innocent of the blood of all.”

Paul uses watchman imagery.

Cross References

Ezekiel 3:18

A watchman who refuses to warn bears responsibility for failing to speak.

Ezekiel 33:6

The watchman must sound the warning when danger approaches.

Acts 18:6

Paul had earlier declared himself innocent after faithfully warning those who rejected the gospel.

Spiritual Principle

The servant cannot force belief, but he must faithfully deliver the message.

XXVII. THE WHOLE WILL OF GOD

Acts 20:27

“I did not hesitate to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”

Paul did not preach only:

Comfort.

Encouragement.

Popular themes.

He preached:

The whole counsel.

Cross References

Ezekiel 3:17

The watchman must faithfully deliver God’s message.

2 Timothy 4:2

Ministers are commanded to preach the Word faithfully in favorable and unfavorable circumstances.

Acts 20:20

Paul had already said he held back nothing that was spiritually helpful.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“A Faithful Pulpit Does Not Only Preach What People Want to Hear; It Preaches What God Has Said.”

XXVIII. WATCH YOURSELF AND THE FLOCK

Acts 20:28

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock the Holy Spirit has made you overseers of. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood.”

This is one of the strongest pastoral verses in Scripture.

First:

Watch yourselves.

Before guarding others:

Guard your own heart.

Doctrine.

Conduct.

Then:

Watch the flock.

The congregation matters.

The Holy Spirit Made Them Overseers

Leadership is sacred stewardship.

The Church Belongs to God

Not the pastor.

Not the elders.

Not a family.

Not a denomination.

Purchased With Blood

The church is precious because Christ paid an immeasurable price.

Cross References

1 Peter 5:2

Elders are commanded to shepherd God’s flock willingly and faithfully.

John 21:16

Jesus told Peter to shepherd and care for His sheep.

1 Timothy 4:16

Timothy was told to watch his own life and doctrine carefully.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Before a Shepherd Watches the Flock, He Must Watch Himself.”

XXIX. SAVAGE WOLVES WILL COME

Acts 20:29

“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come among you and will not spare the flock.”

Paul warns about false teachers from outside.

Cross References

Matthew 7:15

Jesus warned about false prophets who appear like sheep but inwardly are dangerous wolves.

2 Peter 2:1

Peter warned that false teachers would secretly introduce destructive teachings.

John 10:12

A hired worker abandons the sheep when the wolf comes.

Spiritual Principle

Church leaders must protect believers from doctrine that destroys rather than nourishes.

XXX. FALSE TEACHERS CAN ARISE FROM WITHIN

Acts 20:30

“Even from your own group, men will arise and distort the truth to draw away disciples after them.”

This warning is even more sobering.

Not all danger comes from outside.

Cross References

1 Timothy 4:1

Scripture warns that some will depart from the faith and follow deceptive teachings.

2 Timothy 4:3

A time comes when people gather teachers who tell them what they want to hear.

1 John 2:19

Some who depart from the fellowship reveal that they were never truly of it.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A false teacher is especially dangerous when he uses truth to build followers around himself instead of around Christ.

XXXI. “BE ON GUARD”

Acts 20:31

“So be on guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”

Paul’s warnings were:

Persistent.

Personal.

Emotional.

Cross References

Acts 19:10

Paul had invested years teaching extensively in the Ephesian region.

1 Thessalonians 2:11

Paul described himself as encouraging and instructing believers individually.

Colossians 1:28

Paul warned and taught everyone with the goal of maturity in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Pastoral warning should come from love, not from delight in conflict.

Paul warned:

With tears.

XXXII. COMMENDED TO GOD AND THE WORD OF GRACE

Acts 20:32

“Now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among those who are sanctified.”

Paul cannot remain.

But God can.

To God

Ultimate security.

To the Word of Grace

Spiritual nourishment.

It Can Build You Up

Truth strengthens.

It Gives an Inheritance

Grace reaches eternity.

Cross References

Ephesians 1:18

Paul prayed that believers would understand the hope and glorious inheritance God has prepared.

Colossians 3:24

Believers will receive an inheritance from the Lord as their true reward.

1 Peter 1:4

God has prepared an incorruptible inheritance kept in heaven.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Church’s Future Does Not Ultimately Depend Upon the Continued Presence of One Leader; It Depends Upon God and His Word.”

XXXIII. PAUL DID NOT COVET WEALTH

Acts 20:33

“I have not coveted anyone’s silver, gold, or clothing.”

Paul addresses ministry motives.

Cross References

1 Samuel 12:3

Samuel publicly asked whether he had taken anyone’s property dishonestly.

2 Corinthians 12:14

Paul emphasized that he did not seek the Corinthians’ possessions but their spiritual good.

1 Thessalonians 2:5

Paul denied using ministry as a disguise for greed.

Spiritual Principle

Money must never become the hidden master of ministry.

XXXIV. PAUL WORKED WITH HIS HANDS

Acts 20:34

“You yourselves know that these hands of mine supplied my own needs and the needs of those who were with me.”

Paul points to his hands.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:12

Paul said he labored with his own hands.

1 Thessalonians 2:9

He worked night and day to avoid unnecessarily burdening others.

2 Thessalonians 3:8

Paul worked hard rather than living irresponsibly at someone else’s expense.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful ministry is willing to sacrifice personal comfort for the spiritual good of others.

XXXV. “MORE BLESSED TO GIVE”

Acts 20:35

“In everything I showed you that by working hard like this we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

This saying of Jesus is not recorded in the four Gospels.

Acts preserves it for us.

Cross References

Ephesians 4:28

Believers should work honestly so they have something to share with those in need.

Luke 6:38

Jesus taught generosity and giving toward others.

2 Corinthians 9:7

God loves cheerful, willing giving rather than forced generosity.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Biblical Prosperity Is Not Measured by How Much You Can Collect but by How Much Good You Can Do With What God Gives You.”

XXXVI. PAUL KNEELS AND PRAYS

Acts 20:36

“When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed.”

The farewell ends with prayer.

Cross References

Acts 21:5

Paul later knelt in prayer with believers before another departure.

Ephesians 3:14

Paul described bowing his knees before the Father in prayer.

Acts 9:40

Peter knelt and prayed before God's powerful intervention.

Spiritual Principle

The proper conclusion to serious spiritual responsibility is dependence upon God in prayer.

XXXVII. THEY WEEP AND EMBRACE PAUL

Acts 20:37

“They all wept and embraced him, kissing him.”

This is not cold institutional leadership.

They love Paul.

Cross References

Genesis 45:14

Joseph and his brother Benjamin embraced and wept together.

Genesis 33:4

Esau and Jacob embraced and wept during their reunion.

Luke 15:20

The father of the prodigal son embraced him when he returned home.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy ministry creates genuine spiritual relationships, not merely organizational connections.

XXXVIII. THE FINAL GOODBYE

Acts 20:38

“What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.”

The chapter closes with:

Tears.

Love.

Farewell.

Cross References

Acts 21:1

Paul's journey continues after this emotional separation.

1 Thessalonians 2:17

Paul spoke elsewhere about the pain of being physically separated from believers he loved.

2 Timothy 4:9

Near the end of his life Paul again expressed longing for companionship.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes faithfulness to God requires painful goodbyes.

XXXIX. WHAT ACTS 20 TEACHES ABOUT ENCOURAGEMENT

Paul repeatedly:

Encourages.

Strengthens.

Warns.

Teaches.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian leadership does not merely point out what is wrong; it strengthens believers to continue doing what is right.

XL. WHAT EUTYCHUS TEACHES US

Eutychus' story is unusual.

But the emphasis is not:

Paul preached too long.

The emphasis is:

God restored life.

Spiritual Principle

God can turn a moment of tragedy into a testimony of encouragement.

XLI. WHAT ACTS 20 TEACHES ABOUT LEADERSHIP

Paul's farewell describes the character of spiritual leadership.

Humility

Tears

Endurance

Teaching

Warning

Hard Work

Generosity

Courage

Faithfulness

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical leadership is less about being above people and more about giving yourself for people.

XLII. THE LEADER'S LIFE MATTERS

Paul says:

"You know how I lived."

Spiritual Principle

A ministry cannot remain healthy indefinitely when public teaching and private living contradict each other.

Character matters.

XLIII. PUBLIC AND HOUSE-TO-HOUSE MINISTRY

Paul taught:

Publicly.

Privately.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Healthy ministry needs both the pulpit and personal relationships.

Public teaching reaches many.

Personal ministry reaches specific needs.

XLIV. REPENTANCE AND FAITH BELONG TOGETHER

Paul preached:

Repentance toward God.

Faith in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical conversion turns from sin toward God and rests upon Jesus Christ for salvation.

XLV. SUFFERING DID NOT CONTROL PAUL

Paul knew:

Prison was coming.

Hardship was coming.

Yet:

He continued.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“Do Not Let the Cost of Obedience Become Greater in Your Mind Than the Value of Your Calling.”

XLVI. FINISH THE RACE

Paul does not say:

I want the easiest race.

He says:

I want to finish.

Spiritual Principle

The Christian life should be evaluated at the finish line, not merely at the starting line.

Many start enthusiastically.

Faithfulness means continuing.

XLVII. THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

Paul defines his mission as:

“Testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The center of Christian ministry is not self-improvement but the announcement of God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ.

XLVIII. THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

Paul did not select only comfortable doctrines.

Grace

Repentance

Judgment

Salvation

Holiness

Church leadership

False teaching

Sacrifice

Eternal inheritance

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A balanced church needs the whole Bible, not merely a collection of favorite themes.

XLIX. WATCH YOURSELF FIRST

Paul tells the elders:

“Keep watch over yourselves.”

Before:

Your congregation.

Your critics.

Your ministry.

Your numbers.

Yourself.

Spiritual Principle

One of the greatest dangers to a ministry can be the unchecked heart of the minister himself.

L. THE FLOCK BELONGS TO GOD

Paul calls it:

“The church of God.”

Pastors are:

Shepherds.

Not owners.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

“The Pastor Does Not Own the Sheep; He Serves the Shepherd Who Bought Them.”

LI. THE PRICE OF THE CHURCH

Paul says the church was purchased:

With blood.

That makes every believer spiritually precious.

Spiritual Principle

Pastoral care should reflect the value Christ placed upon His people at the cross.

LII. SAVAGE WOLVES

False teaching is not presented as harmless disagreement.

Paul says:

Wolves.

Why?

Because false doctrine can:

Destroy faith.

Divide churches.

Exploit believers.

Distort Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A shepherd who refuses to protect the flock from spiritual danger is neglecting part of shepherding.

LIII. FALSE TEACHERS WANT FOLLOWERS

Acts 20:30 says they draw disciples:

“After them.”

That phrase exposes motive.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy teachers point disciples toward Christ; unhealthy teachers make disciples increasingly dependent upon themselves.

LIV. WARNING WITH TEARS

Paul warned:

Night.

Day.

Three years.

With tears.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical warning should come from a broken heart, not a proud spirit.

LV. GOD AND THE WORD OF HIS GRACE

Paul leaves the church with something greater than himself.

God

And:

God's Word

Spiritual Principle

The best leader prepares people to depend increasingly upon God rather than increasingly upon the leader.

LVI. MINISTRY AND MONEY

Paul says:

“I have not coveted.”

This is crucial.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When money becomes the purpose of ministry, ministry eventually becomes a business rather than a calling.

LVII. WORKING TO HELP THE WEAK

Paul's work was not merely self-support.

He says:

Help the weak.

Spiritual Principle

Christian labor should create capacity for generosity.

LVIII. “MORE BLESSED TO GIVE”

Jesus reverses normal human thinking.

The world asks:

How much can I get?

Jesus asks:

How much good can I do?

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The richest life is not necessarily the life receiving the most but the life faithfully giving the most for God's purposes.

LIX. LEADERSHIP AND TEARS

Acts 20 contains tears repeatedly.

Paul served:

With tears.

Warned:

With tears.

The elders:

Wept.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical leadership is not emotionless professionalism; it involves loving people deeply enough that ministry affects the heart.

LX. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 20

1. Encourage Believers Continually

Principle:

Strong Christians still need encouragement.

2. Finish the Race

Principle:

Faithfulness matters more than personal comfort.

3. Preach the Whole Counsel of God

Principle:

Do not hide necessary truth.

4. Shepherd the Flock Carefully

Principle:

Church leaders must guard both themselves and the congregation.

5. Watch for False Teachers

Principle:

Spiritual danger can come from outside or inside the church.

6. Serve Without Greed

Principle:

Ministry should not be driven by money.

7. Give Generously

Principle:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

LXI. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What did Paul do after the riot in Ephesus ended?

He gathered the disciples, encouraged them, said goodbye, and traveled toward Macedonia.

Question 2

What happened to Eutychus?

He fell asleep while Paul was speaking, fell from a third-story window, and was picked up dead.

God restored him to life through Paul's ministry, and the believers were greatly encouraged.

Question 3

Why did Paul call the Ephesian elders to Miletus?

He wanted to give them final pastoral instruction and prepare them for the responsibilities and dangers they would face after his departure.

Question 4

How did Paul describe his ministry among them?

He served the Lord with humility, tears, and trials.

He taught publicly and from house to house.

He held back nothing spiritually helpful.

Question 5

What gospel message did Paul preach?

He preached:

Repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Question 6

What did Paul mean by wanting to finish his race?

He wanted to complete the ministry assignment Jesus had given him regardless of personal cost or suffering.

Question 7

What did Paul mean when he said he proclaimed the whole will of God?

He did not selectively teach only popular or comfortable truths.

He faithfully taught everything God's people needed to hear.

Question 8

What did Paul tell church leaders to watch first?

Themselves.

Then:

The flock.

Leaders must guard their own life and doctrine before properly protecting others.

Question 9

What danger did Paul warn would come after he left?

False teachers would enter like savage wolves, and some would even arise from within the church and distort truth.

Question 10

To whom did Paul entrust the church?

He commended them:

To God and to the Word of His grace.

Question 11

What did Paul say about money?

He said he had not coveted anyone's silver, gold, or clothing.

He had worked with his own hands and helped support others.

Question 12

What words of Jesus did Paul quote?

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

LXII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 20 asks several serious questions.

Am I Encouraging Other Believers?

Paul continually did.

Does My Life Support My Christian Testimony?

Paul could say:

“You know how I lived.”

Am I Willing to Hear the Whole Counsel of God?

Or only the parts I prefer?

Have I Truly Repented and Believed in Jesus Christ?

That was Paul’s message.

Am I Determined to Finish My Race?

Paul was.

Do I Value obedience above comfort?

Paul did.

If I Lead Others, am I watching myself first?

That was Paul’s first instruction.

Do I recognize false teaching as dangerous?

Paul called false teachers wolves.

Am I depending upon a personality or upon God and His Word?

Paul commended the church to God.

Does money control my service?

Paul rejected greed.

Am I helping the weak?

Paul said believers should.

Do I believe it is more blessed to give than receive?

Jesus said it is.

LXIII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Finish the Race God Gave You”

Paul knew prison was coming.

Yet:

He did not change his definition of success.

Success was:

Finishing.

Principle

The goal of Christian service is not to avoid every hardship but to complete faithfully what Christ has assigned.

LXIV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Watch Yourself Before You Watch Everyone Else”

Leaders can become experts at seeing:

Other people's sins.

Other people's weaknesses.

Other people's doctrine.

Paul says:

Watch yourself.

Principle

Private spiritual neglect eventually becomes public ministry danger.

LXV. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Preach the Whole Bible, Not a Comfortable Bible”

Paul proclaimed:

The whole will of God.

Principle

If Scripture says it, the faithful church must be willing to teach it with truth, wisdom, and love.

LXVI. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Shepherd What Christ Bought”

The church cost:

The blood of Christ.

That should change how leaders treat people.

Principle

Never handle casually what Jesus purchased sacrificially.

LXVII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Build a Ministry Around People Needing You Forever”

Paul left.

But he said:

“I commend you to God and to the word of His grace.”

Principle

Mature ministry equips believers to stand upon God’s truth even after the teacher is gone.

LXVIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Shepherd Must Recognize Wolves”

Love does not mean:

Ignoring error.

Refusing confrontation.

Pretending dangerous teaching is harmless.

Principle

A shepherd who loves sheep must also recognize what can destroy sheep.

LXIX. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Give More Than You Take”

Paul did not exploit the church.

He worked.

He served.

He helped the weak.

Then he quoted Jesus:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Principle

Christian leadership should leave people spiritually richer, not financially or emotionally exploited.

LXX. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 20 presents Paul approaching a major turning point.

His ministry is moving toward:

Jerusalem.

Imprisonment.

Eventually:

Rome.

He knows suffering is coming.

Yet he is not obsessed with:

Protecting himself.

Preserving comfort.

Extending his reputation.

He is concerned with:

Finishing his race.

Completing his task.

Protecting the church.

Teaching truth.

Helping the weak.

Paul could look at the Ephesian elders and say:

“You know how I lived.”

That is powerful.

His life had been visible.

His ministry had been consistent.

He served:

With humility.

With tears.

Through trials.

He taught:

Publicly.

House to house.

He preached:

Repentance toward God.

Faith in Jesus Christ.

He held back:

Nothing helpful.

He declared:

The whole counsel of God.

That is a model for every pastor, teacher, preacher, elder, missionary, and Christian leader.

The goal is not merely:

To have a ministry.

The goal is:

To be faithful.

Acts 20 also gives a serious warning.

The church will face wolves.

Some come from outside.

Some arise from within.

They distort truth.

Why?

To draw disciples:

After themselves.

That is always dangerous.

The faithful teacher says:

Follow Christ.

The false teacher increasingly says:

You need me.

Paul therefore points the elders beyond himself.

He says:

I am leaving.

But:

God remains.

The Word remains.

Grace remains.

That is why the church can survive the departure of any human leader.

Then Paul speaks about money.

He had not coveted:

Silver.

Gold.

Clothing.

He worked.

He helped others.

He helped the weak.

And he remembered Jesus' words:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Acts 20 therefore asks every Christian:

What am I living for?

Comfort?

Safety?

Money?

Recognition?

Or:

The assignment Christ has given me?

Paul's answer was clear:

“My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus gave me.”

That is finishing well.

There will be:

Hardship.

Tears.

Opposition.

Goodbyes.

False teachers.

Weakness.

But:

The race is still worth running.

The task is still worth completing.

The gospel is still worth proclaiming.

The flock is still worth shepherding.

The weak are still worth helping.

And Christ is still worth following.

Therefore:

Serve humbly.

Teach faithfully.

Repent genuinely.

Believe in Christ.

Watch yourself.

Guard the flock.

Recognize wolves.

Refuse greed.

Help the weak.

Give generously.

And:

Finish your race.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Acts Chapter 20.

Thank You for the example of Paul.

Give us humility in service.

Give us compassion that can weep.

Give us strength to endure trials.

Help us teach truth publicly and personally.

Keep us from holding back anything Your people need to hear.

Give us courage to proclaim:

Repentance toward God.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Help us value our calling more than our comfort.

When hardship comes:

Keep us faithful.

When suffering is ahead:

Keep us obedient.

Give us Paul's determination:

To finish the race.

Help pastors and elders watch themselves carefully.

Protect their hearts.

Protect their doctrine.

Protect their families.

Protect their churches.

Give them wisdom to recognize wolves.

Give them courage to confront dangerous teaching.

But let every warning come with:

Truth.

Love.

Humility.

And tears.

Thank You that the church ultimately belongs to You.

Thank You that Christ purchased His people at an immeasurable price.

Help every shepherd remember:

The sheep are Yours.

Keep ministry free from greed.

Keep money from becoming our master.

Give us hardworking hands.

Generous hearts.

Compassion for the weak.

Teach us to live by Jesus' words:

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

And when our season of service comes to an end:

May we be able to say:

We fought the good fight.

We finished the race.

We kept the faith.

May our lives point people toward:

You.

Your grace.

Your Word.

And Your Son.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But I don’t count my life as precious to myself. My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus gave me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.” — Acts 20:24

Central Truth

Faithful Christian ministry serves with humility and sacrifice, proclaims repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ, teaches the whole counsel of God, guards the church against false teaching, refuses greed, helps the weak, and values finishing Christ’s assignment above personal safety or comfort.

Acts 20 in One Sentence

Paul strengthens believers throughout Macedonia and Greece, witnesses God restore Eutychus at Troas, and then gives the Ephesian elders a deeply personal farewell in which he calls them to shepherd God’s blood-bought church, guard against false teachers, proclaim the whole counsel of God, serve without greed, help the weak, and faithfully finish the race entrusted to them by Jesus Christ.