

## Finishing the Race With Purpose

### Acts 20:13-38

Purpose is defined as something you intend to do, resolve to do, aim to do, plan to do, determine to do. It is doing something with an end in view.

The most basic question we all face is why am I here, what's my purpose? There are those who believe that life has no purpose or meaning – that you just exist and when you draw your last breath that's it, nothing after death. To them there is no real purpose for being here, but most people want to know for what purpose they exist.

**Have you discovered that purpose? If so, is that what you are pursuing?**

If you're not certain what your purpose is in life, according to Steve Pavlina in his personal development for smart people, he suggests that you can find your purpose in 20 minutes. Simply write at the top of your page "what is my real purpose in life?" and then write the first thing that comes to your mind. Repeat that step of writing what comes to your mind until you write something that makes you cry. That, he says, is your purpose.

Posed in a different way the Westminster Shorter catechism begins with that very question and answers that we are created to give God glory. That purpose does not begin when we reach the golden shores of the celestial city. It is to begin now. Rick Warren, who authored the book, *The Purpose Driven Life* offers that God is the starting place for us to know our purpose. We must each come to a place where we understand God's eternal purpose for putting us here on earth. The end result is the same – the glory of God. The route by which that is accomplished through each of us is as unique and different as each one of us is.

God has a plan, a purpose for each of us. Do you know what that plan is? It's not just about where you live, what job you have, who you might marry

and all those daily kinds of life decisions. I'm talking about how all those decisions fit into God's grand scheme of how they weave into the fabric of glorifying God. Everything we do is about that purpose.

The apostle Paul discovered early on in his walk with Christ what his purpose was. Everything he did from that point on was about the fulfillment of that goal. His was a singular mindset: when he worked that purpose was his aim; when he traveled that purpose was his aim; when he preached that purpose was his aim.

**"For me to life is Christ." Philippians 1:21**

Paul's purpose is summed up in this passage that we will look at today. Turn with me again to the book of Acts, chapter 20, verses 13-38. **Acts 20:13-38.**

For a number of chapters we have been following Paul on his missionary expeditions as he trekked throughout much of the Roman Empire sharing the gospel. The message of Christ has penetrated into the hearts of Jew and Gentile alike. He has made three trips to continue evangelizing the lost and to continue encouraging the church in the cities where believers were gathered. In the first part of this chapter we discovered that Paul desired to travel to Jerusalem with the hope of arriving by the Passover, but because of an uncovered assassination plot he chose to alter his travel plans. The second reason for going to Jerusalem was to deliver a monetary gift to the church there from the Gentile believers in Europe as a way of combatting the widespread famine in Judea. But this passage reveals an underlying motivation for this journey, his purpose in it all.

It is in **verses 13-38** that we note three things about Paul each related to his purpose.

Paul's character was strong  
Paul's caution was specific  
Paul's charge was serious

## I. PAUL'S CHARACTER WAS STRONG – v. 13-27

Let me only comment briefly on the first several verses of this section. They are Paul's traveling itinerary of places he stopped en route to Jerusalem. His original intent was to get there by Passover but his altered plans would have him arriving hopefully by Pentecost. To ensure that would happen he avoided a stopover in Ephesus. It had been nearly a year since he was last there after having spent nearly three years ministering to the people. He had made many friends and he perhaps felt that time with them would delay his departure even longer. Our passage notes that he arrived in Miletus and from there called for the elders from Ephesus to meet him. It was about a 30 mile journey for them.

In this entire passage Paul has some specific points that he wants to share with them. He first describes the kind of character he had while living in their city. It is in this particular section that we uncover his purpose in life.

### A. His Walk is Observable – v. 18

Paul is describing to these men that while he was in Ephesus his life was an open book. They knew the kind of reputation he had. He was honest and hard-working. We'll see that a little later as he mentions that he didn't go after anyone's money in some kind of religious scheme. [You may have read recently after the May 21 rapture date came and went that there was a couple concerned about their grandmother who had invested or given a very large sum of money to this pastor to promote his May 21 rapture campaign.](#)

Paul had no intention of leading them astray for the purpose of monetary gain. We will read later in this chapter that he paid his own way. They didn't provide him with a salary or any kind of compensation. Paul will later testify before Felix while on trial that he had lived a life that was free of

offending both God and man. He had a good reputation. Like Daniel, it could perhaps be said that he was above reproach. That's what he told Timothy and Titus when writing about the kinds of men who should lead the church. They were to have the quality of being above reproach. That doesn't mean being perfect, but it does mean that no one can bring an accusation against you about anything.

To the Thessalonians he wrote (2:10-12) **“You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory.”**

Co-workers can't say anything bad about you. Neighbors know you to be a person of your word. Friends can count on you because of your character. Family members see consistency in your character. You're the same at home with them as you are when interacting with others. Paul's walk was observable and he reminded them of the integrity that marked his life.

### B. His Work was Objective – v. 19

Notice that his work was in serving the Lord. It's the word we get for bond-servant. Paul had made a conscious choice that he was going to serve the Lord by obeying wherever the Lord led him, whatever the Lord asked him to do without question and without hesitation. As a Jesus follower he was motivated to serve the Lord. Paul never did his work to please men. His work was always in service for the Lord. When we understand that our work is for the Lord, not just serving in church, but doing dishes, or working our job, or cleaning the house, whatever it is, we will then glorify God.

Not only was he willing to serve, notice how he served. He served with humility. He didn't do it to

bring attention to himself or to get his name in lights. He never wanted any accolades, it was always done with humility pointing people to Christ. He never talked about how many people were saved under his ministry. He never talked about how many churches he established. Souls saved and churches started were all for the Kingdom of God – for the Lord’s glory.

His work was in humility and his work was done with tears. He had great compassion for the lost to get saved and for the saved to grow. At one point he expressed his great concern for the Jews by stating that if it were possible he would give up his own salvation so that the Jews would be saved. Paul had such urgency about him to share the gospel and have them mature he wept for others.

**Psalm 126:5 “Those who sow in tears will reap in joy.”**

His singular focus was to serve the Lord. His work was objective. It was done with purpose

#### **C. His Witness was Open – v. 20-21**

One thing is for sure about Paul. He was never ashamed of the gospel. He boldly preached Christ regardless of the opposition. He never shrunk away from the opportunity to proclaim the good news.

**Verses 20-21** state that he never hesitated, he never wavered in teaching and preaching what they needed to hear. He never withheld anything that would be of benefit in the spiritual growth of believers. Young or old, rich or poor, slave or free – his witness was open. Notice the forums that he used to proclaim the gospel. He did his preaching and teaching both publicly and privately. He preached in the market place. He preached in the synagogue. He preached in prison. He was never ashamed of the gospel of Christ in front of any audience regardless of the cost to him.

He preached from house to house, knocking on doors.

His message was constant – everywhere he went, with whomever he could.

His message was consistent – always about the death, burial and the resurrection of Christ and the need regardless of social status in life to repent of sin and believe in Christ for salvation.

His witness was open.

#### **D. His Way was Obedient – v. 22-23**

Once Paul was saved, he never thought of his life as his own. His life belonged to Christ and Paul was driven in obedience to follow his Master. Paul was being led by the Spirit to head to Jerusalem. It wasn’t as simple as going there to observe Pentecost. It wasn’t as simple as delivering the monetary gifts to the Jerusalem church. It was much more significant. It had been revealed by the Spirit to Paul that trouble awaited him there, trouble that would ultimately lead to his arrest and more hardship. In spite of all this, in spite of knowing what waited for him, in obedience Paul continued to obey the leading of the Spirit. **Can that be said of us? Are we obedient to the Spirit’s direction whether it’s a direction to take or a character trait to change?** Paul’s way was obedient.

#### **E. His Worth was Overshadowed - v. 24-27**

It is here that we find the real purpose of Paul’s life. It is here that we see what drove him. At one point Paul had a high and mighty opinion of himself. He was the Jews Jew. But now his opinion of himself paled in comparison to knowing Christ. Listen to his own testimony given to the **Philippians (3:5-7)**. **“Yet I could have confidence in myself if anyone could. If others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! For I was circumcised when I was eight days old, having been born into a pure-blooded Jewish family that is a branch of the tribe of Benjamin. So I am a real Jew if there ever was one! What’s more, I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the**

**strictest obedience to the Jewish law. And zealous? Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church. And I obeyed the Jewish law so carefully that I was never accused of any fault. I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ.”**

Paul had no ambition to pursue his own pleasures. He was about one thing: finishing well the task the Lord had given to him. He didn't want to end his race in life with anything left, wishing he had done more for the Lord. *I ran a road race many years ago. When I got done a friend asked if I could have gone any faster.* Paul didn't want to look back and ever question whether he had given the Lord his all. He didn't want to rust out for God he wanted to run out for God. In **Philippians 3:14** he stated **“I press on.”**

The task given to him by the Lord was to preach the gospel. He could end his life in good conscience stating that he was guilty of no man's blood – meaning that he shared with everyone he could the gospel of Christ and their need to repent and be saved. He was saying that no one could look him in the eye and say that he never told them. Paul's worth was overshadowed by the person of Christ and the task given to him and that was just fine. Paul lived his life for Christ.

**What about your character? Are these the kinds of things you that describe you? Are they your aim?**  
Paul's character was strong.  
Paul's caution was specific.

## **II. PAUL'S CAUTION WAS SPECIFIC – v. 28-31**

There are some generic terms that we often use as warnings and just using the term by itself can imply any number of things. Here are just a couple.  
Stop! Quit! Don't!

Stop what? Stop breathing? Stop walking? Stop shopping? Stop snoring?  
Quit what? Quit working? Quit doing homework?  
Quit watching tv?  
Don't what? Don't drive? Don't leave? Don't go there?

Depending on the activity being engaged in will determine the context in which the phrase is used. However, being specific is essential if the appropriate warning is to be heeded. For example: If the word stop is used in the context of a robbery, the police officer may better state the warning as “stop or I'll shoot.”

Don't touch that burner because it's hot.

Quit pestering your sister or you'll be in trouble.

Paul gives four specific warnings to these elders to help them in his absence. These men were the pastors of the individual house churches meeting throughout the city. Specifically the word elder speaks to their responsibilities as pastor. They were to be overseers or shepherds of the church entrusted to them.

### **A. Watch Yourself – v. 28a**

It was a call to these church leaders to be right with God. Paul was telling them not to teach one thing and live another. Watch your own spiritual life. It was a call to personal holiness. It was a call for self-examination. It was a call for them to walk with God, to be holy, to be vigilant for their own spiritual growth.

Specifically to Timothy (**I Timothy 4:16**) Paul exhorted him to watch or guard his life and his

doctrine closely. The idea of watching comes from the guard stationed on the wall tower who was to be on the lookout against the enemy.

To the Corinthians Paul told them to watch and stand fast in their faith (**I Corinthians 16:13**).

For the minister and for each of us there can be so many subtle things that can enter in and steal away bits of our character. They can cause an erosion to our spiritual walk with Christ. Good and important things can keep us from spending the time we need to stay sharp spiritually. Other demands on time can take away time we spend with God. How important it is for us as individual followers of Christ to watch our spiritual walk closely, because it doesn't take much to get us off track.

Guard you walk (what you do), guard your word (what you say), guard your way (where you go). Aspire to personal holiness.

How important it is for the minister and leaders of the church to first of all take care of themselves spiritually so that in turn they can adequately watch out for their flock.

That is Paul's next point. Not only were they to watch out for themselves as individual Jesus followers, they were also to watch the flock.

### **B. Watch Your Flock – v. 28b**

An overseer is someone who looks after another. Paul refers to their congregations as flocks, implying their role as a shepherd. We all have an idea of what a shepherd does. The word overseer encompasses all the tasks of the shepherd. A shepherd leads his sheep. He leads by example. He leads them to places of nourishment, peace and contentment. The writer of **Hebrews** encourages his readers to consider the life of their leaders and imitate their faith (**13:7**).

A shepherd feeds his sheep. If I don't feed regularly on the Word of God how can I stand in this pulpit and feed you from the Word of God. The shepherd who is watching out for his sheep will lead and feed them with what is good to help them grow and mature into healthy Jesus followers. What a great admonition for each leader in the church who teaches regardless of the age of those you are teaching. Feed yourself so that you can feed the flock under your care, so they can grow to be healthy and strong in their faith.

We are overseers of the flock. We must remember that those entrusted to our spiritual care don't belong to us, they belong to the Lord for it was His blood that bought them to be His own. We are stewards. Watch out for your flock.

### **C. Watch Out for Your Adversaries Outside – v. 29**

Paul uses a very graphic description of false teachers as he describes them as salvage wolves. The imagery is clear. They have only one intent – ripping you from your faith. In His word to the church of Ephesus in the book of Revelation, the Lord spoke about their strong stand against false teachers. They couldn't tolerate them. They were everywhere and if the church wasn't watching and wary they would come in and destroy them. They are dangerous. Be on the lookout for them.

### **D. Watch Out for Your Adversaries Inside – v. 30-31**

Perhaps even more dangerous than false teachers outside the church are those false teachers who are inside the church. Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus with the specific task of guarding the church against false teachers and not allowing them to teach their false doctrine. He even named a number of them in his letters to Timothy. They were to be opposed because their teachings indicated they had strayed from the truth. **Do we know the word well enough**

**to spot false teachers and oppose them?** We need to be students of the Word so we stand strong in our faith not easily tossed here and there by every new idea of doctrine that comes along.

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### III. PAUL'S CHARGE WAS SERIOUS – v. 32-35

#### A. A Word About Growing – v. 32

Paul committed them to God and the Word of His grace which was able to build them up and give them an inheritance. Paul was entrusting them to God and His Word. God was able to keep them. God's Word was able to encourage them and help them grow.

**I Peter 2:2 “Like newborn babes, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”**

**II Timothy 2:15 “Do you best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of truth.”**

**II Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**

They were committed to the Word of God which is a lamp that guides and a light that illuminates.  
They were committed to the Word of God that would keep them from sin.  
They were committed to the Word of God that would encourage them.  
They were committed to the Word of God that would change them, correct them, transform them.

His grace will keep them, His Word will change them.

I would do well to commit you to the same. Be students of the Word. How unfortunate that people know more about sports statistics and where to find items in their grocery store than they know where to find something in the Word of God. Let's get serious about it. It will help us stand strong.

#### B. A Word About Giving – v. 33-35

Paul speaks about his own self-interest. He wasn't in ministry for the money or the accolades. He worked hard at what he did so that he wouldn't be a burden to anyone. Quoting Jesus, he states **that “it is more blessed to give than to receive.”** Paul focused on giving not getting. It's a strong message to us as well that we should consider acts of service rather than being served. We need to look for opportunities to give. It is in giving that we are truly blessed. We have recorded by **Mark (10:45)** that Jesus came to serve rather than be served.

As Paul gives final instructions to these church leaders of Ephesus, words that we as well should heed, he was very clear on the focus of his purpose and wanted them to sharpen their focus so that they were aiming toward the same goal he was – the evangelism of the world and the edification of the believer.

**He knew his purpose, do we? What is our purpose as a church? Why does Fellowship Bible Church exist?** Taken from Scriptural principles, our Church Constitution lays out our specific purpose. **“The purpose of this Church shall be the edification of the believers, the evangelism of the non-believers, and the fellowship of its members through worship, preaching and teaching, and Christ-centered activities.”**

**How are we doing? If you were to individually rank our efforts on a scale from 1-10 what number**

would you give? If you were to take each component of our purpose and do the same how would you rate this church?

We are to edify or believers. Edification is instructing others in such a way that they improve or grow spiritually. Are you being encouraged to grow in your walk with Christ to become like Christ?

We are to evangelize the lost. Are we sharing our faith with others so they not only have an opportunity to hear of the saving grace of God but can respond in repentance by faith to that saving grace?

We are to fellowship.

We are to fellowship through worship.

We are to fellowship through preaching and teaching.

We are to fellowship through Christ-centered activities.

That's our purpose.

Stated succinctly we are to gather in Christ, go for Christ, and grow in Christ.