

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

Sermon title: Paul's Life Mission, Acts 20:20-38

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**INTRODUCTION:** Paul left Ephesus where there was a riot because the teaching about Jesus and salvation threatened their businesses of making idols out of precious metals. He traveled to several places, and a young man fell asleep as Paul preached. He fell from a third story window and died, but a miracle happened through Paul, and the man was brought back to life.

I've read this passage numerous times, and I am not sure of the significance of its placement in scripture:

- Perhaps it's a reminder not to fall asleep in church.
- Perhaps it's there to tell people not to sit in high windows.
- Perhaps it's there to let us preachers know, if Paul's preaching can put someone to sleep, our preaching will too.

Anyway, the people ate together and visited all night until the sun came up, and Paul sailed to Miletus. When he arrived there, he asked the elders from the church at Ephesus to come visit him. Paul reminded them how hard he had served them and how he declared salvation to all of them. It was a farewell speech. He wanted the elders to pass along to the people at Ephesus.

There are six main points to my message today, and they are:

1. Paul's life mission was clear to him.
2. Paul was faithful in his life mission.
3. Paul was confident his life mission would carry on without him.
4. Paul looked for new places to share his life mission of testifying the good news of God's grace.
5. Paul looked for new places to share the good news, and he also looked for people whom he could equip to carry on the mission.

6. Paul looked for new places to share, he looked for ways to reach people through their own culture, and he returned as often as he could to encourage them.

**First, PAUL’S LIFE MISSION WAS CLEAR TO HIM.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 20:20-24 <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.*

**EXPLANATION:** When he was converted many years earlier, he had one mission, one goal: to tell others the good news of God’s grace.

**APPLICATION:** Most of our goals are financial goals. Many of you today are thinking past the next financial hurdle. You’re thinking in terms of paying something off or buying something. You are thinking in terms of the next vacation.

I challenge you this morning to let those things be smaller goals and to work on a greater goal for your life. It’s clear Paul liked to travel. But, traveling wasn’t his goal. His goal was to share Jesus, and this goal directed his travels. So, it makes sense, if you have spiritual goals, you’ll get to do things you like doing along the way. In other words, don’t let the things you want to do be your main goal. Let those be a part of the goal.

From time to time, it’s important to step back and reexamine your life to see where you’re going. If you were to say my life goal is to go to Paris, then after you make it to Paris, where would you go next? If your life goal is to pay off your mortgage and all your debts, then when you are debt free, you’ve outlived your life goal, and you’ll spend the rest of your life looking back.

For many people, their life goal is to retire. Now, if that's your goal and you live 20 years past retirement, then you'll spend 20 years looking back at your retirement.

I propose to you, your life goal should be something like Paul's: testifying to the good news of God's grace. If you make this your goal, then as long as you live, you'll have a goal.

Do you have a life goal or goals? If not, why not start right now working on a draft of your life's goal? If you are married, work on it together. If you've outlived your spouse, why not work on another life goal? Why not work on a goal not about material things but a spiritual goal?

I don't see anywhere in the Bible where the Christian is allowed to retire and to do nothing for the Kingdom of God.

## **Second, PAUL WAS FAITHFUL TO HIS LIFE MISSION.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 20:25-31 <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, 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.*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul never wavered in any way. His life mission brought about so much passion it fueled him from the time he was converted until the very end. He said his life was worth nothing to him. In other words, he loved his mission more than his own life. He was completely consumed with telling about the good news of God's grace.

Paul knew human nature. He knew the nature of sin, and he knew Satan was alive and well. He knew the message of salvation would be perverted and people would mix it with false religions. He knew people would be discouraged.

So, he was faithful to his life mission, and he made sure people knew the basics.

To the people in Ephesus, he wrote at least one letter, and this is the Book of Ephesians. He called them faithful.

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 1:1 *<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the **faithful** in Christ Jesus:*

**EXPLANATION:** So, Paul's model of faithfulness carried over into the Ephesians.

In his letter to them, among other things, he reminds them that previously they were not included in the family of faith, but because of Jesus, both the Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to Jesus

**SCRIPTURE:** In Ephesians 3:15-19 Paul prays a prayer of encouragement:  
*.....<sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

**Third, PAUL WAS CONFIDENT HIS LIFE MISSION WOULD CARRY ON WITHOUT HIM.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 20:32-35 *<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.’ ”*

**EXPLANATION:** The reason he knew his life mission would carry on was because:

- He put his all into training them.
- He invested his time in so many people and so many places.
- His life mission was lived out with a predictable pattern.

**Fourth, PAUL LOOKED FOR NEW PLACES TO SHARE HIS LIFE MISSION OF TESTIFYING THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD’S GRACE.**

And, he went there. Then he looked for an inroad to share the good news through the local circumstance. Sometimes it was at the synagogue. Sometimes it was looking for sick people and healing them. Sometimes it was through confronting pagan worship. If he felt welcomed to stay, he stayed. If he didn’t feel welcome, he moved on. Sometimes he just passed through a city.

**APPLICATION:** We must look for ways to reach out to people through their own circumstances and their own culture. You see, culture is the way our minds are formatted. If you were raised in Tennessee and had to choose between a nice ripe tomato and pickled cabbage, you’d choose the tomato. If you were born in Korea, though, you’d choose the pickled cabbage.

What I am getting at here is: Paul’s life goal had flexibility built in. Now think of it: What if Paul’s life goal had been “to share the good news of God’s grace only through the synagogue,” or what if he’d been asked by some sending church to write a mission statement which included how he was going to go about his work? What if Paul’s life goal had been “to share the good news of God’s grace while promoting Southern Baptist programs and materials, staying for exactly two weeks at each location, and keeping records of every person he talked with?”

This sounds crazy, but in many ways, it’s the way we plan ministry. As many of you know, the resources available to us helped us for many years, but times have changed indeed, and we must be flexible.

Our church mission cannot read like a business plan.

**Fifth, PAUL LOOKED FOR NEW PLACES TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS, AND HE ALSO LOOKED FOR PEOPLE WHOM HE COULD EQUIP TO CARRY ON THE MISSION.**

Paul's ministry was not like a traveling carnival. Think about it. A traveling carnival shows up to entertain. They have all their rides. They have all their displays and their staff. They show up, entertain, and then move on. The goal of the carnival is to make a bunch of money by providing a fun experience.

And, throughout history, there have been traveling salesmen: the tinker, the snake oil salesman, the healing potion salesman. All of them showed up, did their thing, and moved on.

But, Paul's work was distinctly different. He actually lived with the people. He ate their foods, he lived in their homes, and he worked side by side with them. He suffered through their trials, and he rejoiced at their victories. He "did life" with them.

But, the main thing he did was equip them to carry on the mission without him. Just think: What if Paul thought no one could do it like him? Just think: What if Paul thought he was the only person who could share the gospel? I have literally heard preachers say, "No one can do it like me." I've got news for you. All of us are expendable. God doesn't need any of us. The mere fact he uses such broken vessels to accomplish his plan is remarkable—a fact we should remember.

**APPLICATION:** I have a vision for our church, and my vision is that each of you serves in a ministry and equips someone to do it with you. I've talked about this some. I'll do my best to model this for you. Here's what Paul did:

- He did the work while others watched.
- Then he trained others how to do the work.
- Then he worked alongside them.
- Then he let others do the work on their own.

As a Church, we must reach out to people to carry on the mission when we are gone. We must train them, we must allow them to do it their own way, and we must encourage them to keep it going.

**Sixth, PAUL LOOKED FOR NEW PLACES TO SHARE, HE LOOKED FOR WAYS TO REACH PEOPLE THROUGH THEIR OWN CULTURE, AND HE RETURNED AS OFTEN AS HE COULD TO ENCOURAGE THEM.**

When he could not go to them, he wrote to them.

I've often heard it said: The Christian army is the only Army who shoots its own. I've seen new converts not cared for, and they fell by the wayside. I've seen new born Christians pretty much abandoned in the same way a cruel mother abandons a child.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I've loved being a dad, and along with this fact come challenges and responsibilities. I cannot just love being a dad but hate the responsibilities which come with it.

Let us remember how many times Paul returned to his converts to encourage them.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I have a few friends on two small, tiny islands. They tell me we have no idea how much it encourages them when Christian groups come to visit. While I appreciate all our efforts on mission projects, it makes since the main reason we go is to encourage the believers there.

**APPLICATION:** Let us have solid and strong ministries of encouragement.

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 20:36-38 <sup>36</sup> *When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. <sup>37</sup> They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. <sup>38</sup> What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.*

Paul headed to Jerusalem, never to return to Ephesus. But, the legacy he left—the strong, the solid, the well-worked legacy he left behind—was a strong group of believers who could carry on the message of the grace and salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ without Paul.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Thanks to Judy Andrews and Nancy Claire Smith for their editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Nashville, Tennessee  
USA