

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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LIFE LESSONS FROM PAUL (Part 1)

Acts 20:17-24

September 26, 2021

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INTRODUCTION: After his seven-day visit with the church in Troas, Paul and his team resumed their journey to Jerusalem. Because of Paul's sense of urgency, he did not visit Ephesus but instead, asked the Ephesian leaders to meet him during a short layover. As you know, several passages of scripture in the New Testament are Paul's sermons that were transcribed and given to either a Jewish or Gentile audience, but today's passage of scripture is the only recorded address to a Christian audience. For this reason, it is especially relevant to us. In it, Paul—one of the most influential figures in Christian history and the author of the majority of our New Testament books—gives 8 specific lessons on how we should live. This is a two-part sermon. We will cover the first four lessons today, and the other four next week.

The points for today's message are as follows:

- Be a good example.
- Serve with humility.
- Preach with boldness.
- Live without fear.

Life lessons are good for all of us, aren't they? The older I get, the more life lessons I have. I share them with my kids, and they can probably quote me.

- Prepare for the worst, hope for the best.
- Anything can happen.
- Don't burn any bridges with anyone.
- Build your network of friends and stay in touch with as many as possible.
- When you don't know what to do, do what needs to be done.
- What you don't know what to do, follow the best light you have.

I am sure in time I'll have more. It's important to learn from others' life lessons. But Paul has eight to offer. Starting with...

BE A GOOD EXAMPLE

SCRIPTURE: Acts 20:17-18

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ 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.

EXPLANATION: On more than one occasion, Paul tells Christians to follow his example in the faith. He begins his address to the Ephesians with more of the same. "Look at me," he said. "Remember how I lived." The word "know" used here indicates a knowledge that is formed from close and personal observation. It could have been translated, "you have observed from close observation." It indicates familiarity and relationship.

ILLUSTRATION: An altercation took place at a ball park when a couple angrily accused Mrs. Jones of speaking roughly to their son. Mrs. Jones, wanting to avoid a confrontation, did not try to explain herself or the situation but quickly apologized. The other couple, however, wanted a fight. A coach intervened, and everyone left the park. Later, the coach spoke to the park superintendent on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Jones. He said, "I know all of these individuals. Mrs. Jones and her husband do not start trouble. I can guarantee you that they did not do anything wrong."

APPLICATION: The coach spoke on behalf of the Joneses because he had seen the way in which they lived. Paul often told believers to look at his life as an example of how to walk by faith. While this may seem arrogant to us, it's wasn't. Paul was in essence saying, "You know me. You know that I live what I believe." Paul did not try to hide his sinful past, but he was confident that Christ's work in him had resulted in a change. Paul reminded the Ephesians that they could be confident in the truth of what he said because he had lived it out in front of them. Can people say the same thing about you and me?

SERVE WITH HUMILITY

SCRIPTURE: Acts 20:19

I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents.

EXPLANATION: The word translated “served” comes from the Greek word that is translated as bond-servant. Paul often referred to himself as a bond-servant of Christ. A bond-servant is basically a slave. Paul used this term to indicate his willing submission to Christ’s complete authority. In other words, Paul is saying that he does only what Christ commands him to do.

ILLUSTRATION: There is something special about the prayers of a child. They are often simple and innocent. Timmy’s mom loved to hear him pray, and Timmy knew it. When little Timmy finished praying one evening, he looked up at his mom and said, “Wasn’t that such a sweet prayer, Mom?” For the sake of helping Timmy learn a little humility, mom decided to keep her opinions to herself.

APPLICATION: There is an old adage that says, “The minute you say you’re humble, you’re not.” However, the truth is not as much about what we say, as the attitude behind what we say. True humility results from a position of submission. Here, Paul is once again saying that he serves out of his submission to Christ and his care for others. Unlike Timmy, who as a little boy was looking for his mother’s praise, Paul is just making a statement.

Paul served as a missionary, but service can take many forms. God may ask you to serve by cooking meals. He may ask you to serve by changing someone’s tire. He may ask you to serve by holding someone’s hand or by cleaning a toilet or changing a baby’s diaper. When you serve with humility, no job is too big or too little if God wants you to do it. Paul served the Lord willingly, without arrogance or pride, even when it was painful and difficult. He encouraged the Ephesians and us to do the same.

- Be a good example.
- Serve with humility.

PREACH WITH BOLDNESS

SCRIPTURE: Acts 20:20-21

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. ²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

EXPLANATION: In other translations of the Bible, the word “hesitated” sometimes appears as “shrank away.” So, Paul says, “I have not shrunk away from preaching anything.” Paul wants to make it clear. He has not been shy. In addition to living his faith, he has also spoken it both publicly and privately. He has left nothing unsaid. He has not tried to mince words or tiptoe around issues. To the best of his ability, Paul explained the gospel message. He told people to repent. He encouraged them to have faith.

ILLUSTRATION: A pastor, after having completed his Sunday responsibilities, looked in the mirror and realized he had a bean shell covering one of his teeth. This gave him the appearance of having a rotten or missing tooth. Knowing he had been seen by so many people that day, the pastor was embarrassed but also slightly confused. “Why,” he asked, “did no one—not one of the friends and family among my congregation—pull me aside and tell me the truth?” That’s because sometimes we don’t want to say the truth.

APPLICATION: Unfortunately, it’s a question many people may ask when they face God for their final judgment. While not everyone is called to be a pastor, all of us, as Christians, are called to share our testimonies and to tell people the good news of the gospel. While we are to always show love and wisdom, we should not hold back or restrain ourselves from sharing the truth about sin, its consequences, and our need for a Savior. On the contrary, we should be active and excited to tell others about Christ. So, Paul reminded believers to:

- Be a good example.
- Serve with humility.
- Preach with boldness.

LIVE WITHOUT FEAR

SCRIPTURE: Acts 20:22-24

“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ 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: Fear is a natural emotion that allows us to adequately assess and avoid dangerous situations. Fear in itself is not a sin, but fear becomes a sin when we allow it to dictate the course of our lives and when we use it as an excuse not to do something God has clearly commanded us to do.

ILLUSTRATION: Around 1970, my family joined some other families for a Saturday of fun at Beech Bend. The park had a slide that was very high. Some of you remember it. Just climbing the stairs to get to the top took a while. They would give you a burlap sack to sit on. As a five-year-old, I saw it and was gripped with fear. I saw my dad ride down the slide, and he took me to the top. I remember how afraid I was. We both sat on the sack and started the descent, me in dad’s lap. At the end of the ride, I said, “Can we do it again?”

APPLICATION: Sometimes we are like that. We are gripped with fear. Then we see someone that we trust do it. Then we join that person. In life, we know what we need to do, even what we want to do, but we allow our fears to stop us. We do not share the gospel because we are afraid of rejection. We do not give what we know we should give because we are afraid we will not have enough for ourselves. We will not commit to missions because we’re afraid for our own health and safety. But if we would just go down the slide, we will likely be asking, “Can we do it again?”

CONCLUSION: Paul was not immune to fear, and he was not naïve. He had already undergone significant persecution, and he was fully aware that more was to come. However, Paul had committed himself to Christ’s leadership, and was, therefore, undaunted. He knew that his ultimate purpose in life was to share the Good News. Even though he understood the danger, he knew that he was in the hands of his God, that God was with him regardless of the circumstances. He

understood that anything, bad or good, could be used by God for the benefit of the kingdom.

As believers, we have a purpose on this earth. Our purpose, just like Paul's, is to proclaim Christ. Yet, how many of us allow fear to dictate how we live? How often do we fail to carry out the mission that God has set before us because we're afraid? Paul did not allow fear to get in the way of doing what Christ asked, and neither should we. We should:

- Be a good example.
- Serve with humility.
- Preach with boldness.
- Live without fear.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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