



Summary

What does it truly mean to love the way God calls us to love? In this rich walk through Acts chapter 20, we find ourselves standing alongside the Apostle Paul at one of the most emotionally charged moments of his ministry — his farewell to the elders of Ephesus, men he had poured himself into for three years and over 3,100 hours of teaching. The heart of what emerges is not a doctrinal lecture but a deeply personal charge rooted in love, sacrifice, and faithfulness. Paul's traveling companions alone tell a story — men who were willing to give up their lives to journey with him, a testament to the kind of winsome, grace-filled character that genuine Christian love produces. We are drawn into 1 Corinthians 13 and reminded that love is not merely a feeling but a standard — one that suffers long, bears all things, and never fails. The challenge placed before us is simple but searching: can we put our own name where the word love appears and find it holds? The answer reshapes how we understand our calling to one another within the body of Christ, and it invites us to pursue that standard not out of obligation but out of a deep and growing devotion to the One whose name alone truly fits.





Points

Title: Faithful to the End: Paul's Farewell and the Whole Counsel of God

Sermon Summary: Drawing from Acts chapter 20, this sermon follows Paul's conclusion of his third missionary journey, tracing his travels through Macedonia and Greece before his final farewell to the Ephesian elders at Miletus. The sermon highlights Paul's character as a loving, servant-hearted apostle whose winsome personality drew devoted traveling companions willing to risk their lives alongside him. Central to the message is Paul's declaration that he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God, a statement the pastor uses as the foundation for expository, systematic Bible teaching. The sermon also addresses the nature of agape love as defined in 1 Corinthians 13, the miracle of Eutychus being raised from the dead, the early church's practice of gathering on the first day of the week, and the serious responsibility of church leadership to guard the flock against false teachers and divisiveness. Paul's farewell serves as both a pastoral model and a solemn warning that the church must remain anchored to God's word, alert to spiritual danger, and devoted to its first love, Jesus Christ.

Key Points:

- Paul's traveling companions revealed his winsome, loving personality, demonstrating that one cannot champion the grace of Christ without being gracious
- The early church gathered on the first day of the week, Sunday, which corresponds to the Feast of Firstfruits and the day of Christ's resurrection, as well as the day of Pentecost, refuting the claim that worship must occur only on Saturday
- Paul's extended teaching at Troas until midnight, followed by the raising of Eutychus from the dead, demonstrated both his urgency to leave nothing unsaid and God's power working through him
- Paul's declaration of innocence regarding the blood of all men was rooted in his faithfulness to declare the whole counsel of God, drawing from the watchman principle in Ezekiel chapter 3
- Systematic, expository teaching through the entirety of Scripture ensures that congregants receive God's word at the frequency and depth He intends, equipping believers thoroughly for every good work as stated in 2 Timothy chapter 3



- Church leaders are shepherds, not cowboys, called to lead the flock by example rather than drive them, and to guard against savage wolves who enter from outside and from within the congregation
- God hates the sowing of discord among the brethren, as stated in Proverbs chapter 6, and requires believers to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly as described in Micah chapter 6
- The church at Ephesus, despite its doctrinal faithfulness and perseverance, was warned by Jesus in Revelation chapter 2 that it had left its first love, a warning applicable to all churches and leaders

Scripture Reference:

- Acts 20:1-38, the primary passage covering Paul's farewell journey and address to the Ephesian elders
- 1 Corinthians 13, Paul's definition of agape love
- Ezekiel 3:17-21, the watchman principle underlying Paul's confidence of innocence before God
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17, the sufficiency and profitability of all Scripture
- Micah 6:8, God's requirement to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly
- Proverbs 6:16-19, the seven things God hates, including sowing discord among the brethren
- Leviticus 23, the seven feasts and their fulfillment in Christ
- Revelation 2:1-7, Jesus' letter to the church at Ephesus
- Matthew 7, Jesus' warning about false prophets in sheep's clothing
- Hebrews 13:17, the accountability of church leaders and the call for congregational submission
- 1 Peter 5:5-11, the call to humility and vigilance against the devil



Stories:

- Paul's extended midnight sermon at Troas, during which a young man named Eutychus fell asleep in a third-story window, fell to his death, and was raised back to life by Paul in a manner reminiscent of Elijah and Elisha raising the dead in 1 Kings chapter 17 and 2 Kings chapter 4
- The riot at Ephesus, which had concluded prior to Acts chapter 20 and prompted Paul's departure from the city after three years of ministry
- The historical account of Timothy, later pastor of the Ephesian church, being beaten to death for opposing a processional march honoring the goddess Diana
- The pastor's personal account of painting the church building with high-VOC paint alongside his son and fellow church members, used to illustrate the overwhelming effect of fumes in an enclosed space in connection with the Eutychus narrative
- The account of the founding of Calvary Chapel Gulf Coast in 2004 and the church's three consecutive journeys through the entire Bible, used to illustrate the pastor's personal commitment to declaring the whole counsel of God





Scripture

Here is a list of all scripture references mentioned or alluded to in the sermon:

Acts	- Ezekiel 3:17-21	**1 Peter**
- Acts 19:21-22	**Colossians**	- 1 Peter 5:5-11
- Acts 20:1-38	- Colossians 4:10	**Proverbs**
- Acts 2:42		- Proverbs 3:34
	Galatians	- Proverbs 6:16-19
1 Corinthians	- Galatians 4:4 (allusion to "fullness of time")	
- 1 Corinthians 13:1-13		**2 Corinthians**
- 1 Corinthians 15:20		- 2 Corinthians 11:12-15
	James	
Leviticus	- James 3:1	**Micah**
- Leviticus 23:11		- Micah 6:8
- Leviticus 23:16	**2 Timothy**	
	- 2 Timothy 3:16	**Revelation**
1 Kings		- Revelation 2:1-7
- 1 Kings 17:17-24	**Hebrews**	
	- Hebrews 13:17	**John**
2 Kings		- John 13:34-35 (allusion to the final commandment to love one another)
- 2 Kings 4:33-36	**Matthew**	- John 10:27 (allusion to "my sheep know my voice")
	- Matthew 7:15-20	
Ezekiel		



Quotes

- you cannot be a proponent of the grace of Jesus Christ without being graceful yourself, can you?
- there's only one name that you can put there who does meet this standard of what love even is.
- But none of these things move me, nor do I count my life dear to myself so that I may finish my race with joy and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.
- I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.
- I remain confident in God's word alone to accomplish everything needful in the lives of everyone in this church, adult and child alike.
- I am not interested in any of you following me. I am interested in you following Jesus. You are disciples of Jesus. If you didn't even know my name, it wouldn't matter to me at all.
- God hates the one who sows discord among the brethren. God hates that.
- the only way that you can do justly is if you seek to find out both sides of the story. Right? Because when you respond to one side of the story, then you are acting unjustly.
- you can do all these things and forget about focusing on Jesus.
- I've been rejected by about 9,575 people in the course of my ministry life. So that's part of it as well. You take rejection. These are God's people, not my people.



Discussion Questions

Paul describes love in 1 Corinthians 13 as the greatest spiritual pursuit, even above prophecy, knowledge, and faith -- in what ways does your daily life reflect or fall short of this definition of agape love, and what specific quality from that passage do you most need to grow in?

Paul says in Acts 20 that he is 'bound in the spirit' to go to Jerusalem despite knowing that chains and tribulations await him -- what does it look like in your own life to follow the Holy Spirit's leading even when you know the path ahead will be difficult?

The sermon emphasizes that the early church gathered on the first day of the week and that this practice is rooted in both the resurrection of Christ and the birthday of the church at Pentecost -- how does the day and manner in which you gather for worship reflect your understanding of what Christ accomplished?

Paul tells the Ephesian elders he is 'innocent of the blood of all men' because he declared the whole counsel of God without holding anything back -- what does it mean for ordinary believers, not just pastors, to take responsibility for sharing the full truth of God's word with those around them?

The sermon draws on Ezekiel 3 to show that God holds watchmen accountable for warning others of danger -- in what areas of your relationships or community might God be calling you to speak a difficult truth that you have been holding back?

Paul warns the Ephesian elders that savage wolves will come not only from outside the church but also from within, and Jesus echoes this in Matthew 7 by saying false prophets come in sheep's clothing -- how do you personally discern the difference between genuine spiritual leadership and those who seek to draw followers after themselves?

Micah 6:8 calls believers to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God, and the sermon applies this specifically to how we respond to conflict and one-sided stories within the church -- how might practicing this standard change the way you handle the next piece of troubling news you hear about someone in your church community?

Proverbs 6 reveals that God hates the one who sows discord among the brethren, placing it alongside serious sins like lying and shedding innocent blood -- why do you think God regards divisiveness within the body of Christ so severely, and what personal habits or tendencies might contribute to it without your realizing it?



Jesus commends the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2 for its hard work, discernment, and perseverance, but then rebukes it for leaving its first love -- how can a church or an individual believer maintain outward faithfulness in doctrine and service while quietly losing their passionate devotion to Christ, and what safeguards help prevent that drift?

Paul models a ministry of servant leadership, supporting himself with his own hands and traveling with companions who were willing to give up their lives to journey with him -- what does this picture of sacrificial, love-driven community challenge you to offer to your own local church body?





Small Group Guide:

Small Group Guide: Acts 20 -- Paul's Farewell and the Call to Faithful Ministry

Overview

This week's sermon walked through Acts 20, covering Paul's final journey toward Jerusalem, the raising of Eutychus at Troas, and Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus. The passage calls us to examine our own faithfulness, our love for one another, the importance of God's Word as our foundation, and our responsibility to guard the unity of the church.

Key Takeaways

- Paul's winsome personality and deep relationships with his traveling companions demonstrate that genuine Christian love, as defined in 1 Corinthians 13, is not merely theoretical -- it is lived out.
 - The early church gathered on the first day of the week, Sunday, in recognition of the resurrection of Christ and the birth of the church at Pentecost.
 - Paul's confidence as he departed from the Ephesian elders rested on one thing: he had not failed to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).
 - Danger to the church comes from both outside and within. Shepherds are called to remain watchful and guard the flock.
 - God requires his people to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with him (Micah 6:8) -- especially in how they handle conflict and information within the body of Christ.
 - The greatest of all spiritual pursuits is love -- agape, unconditional, Christlike love (1 Corinthians 13).
-

Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Think of someone in your life who has genuinely modeled servant leadership. What was it about them that made their example so compelling?



Section 1: Paul's Character and Relationships (Acts 20:1-6, 1 Corinthians 13)

- 1. Paul is sometimes perceived as a hard, unyielding figure, yet men were willing to give up their lives to travel with him. What does this tell us about the relationship between sound doctrine and genuine love? Can you have one without the other?**
 - 2. Read through 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 together as a group. The sermon suggested substituting your own name wherever the word "love" appears. Take a moment to do that silently. What did you notice? Where do you find yourself falling short?**
 - 3. The sermon pointed out that the Greek language distinguishes between different kinds of love, while English uses one word for all of them. Why does it matter that the love Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13 is agape -- unconditional love -- rather than affection or friendship?**
-

Section 2: Eutychus and the First Day of the Week (Acts 20:7-12)

- 4. The early church consistently gathered on the first day of the week. What significance does Sunday worship hold for you personally? How does understanding the resurrection and Pentecost as Sunday events shape the way you think about gathering with your church?**
 - 5. Paul spoke through the night, knowing it was his last opportunity to teach this congregation. He wanted to leave nothing unsaid. If you knew this was the last time you would speak to someone you loved, what would you most want them to know or remember?**
 - 6. Luke's account of the raising of Eutychus closes with what the sermon called an understatement: the people "were not a little comforted." Why do you think Luke recorded the miracle so matter-of-factly? What does that tell us about the atmosphere of the early church?**
-

Section 3: Paul's Charge to the Ephesian Elders (Acts 20:17-35)

- 7. Paul declared in Acts 20:27 that he had not failed to declare the whole counsel of God. The sermon described this verse as foundational to the ministry of this church. Why is it significant that a pastor or teacher be committed to teaching all of Scripture rather than selecting only comfortable or popular topics?**
- 8. Paul told the elders in Acts 20:28 that the church belongs to God, purchased with his own blood. How does remembering that the church belongs to Jesus -- not to any pastor, elder, or member -- change the way we think about conflict, preferences, and decisions within the church?**



9. Paul warned that savage wolves would come from outside the church and that men would rise up from within the church speaking perverse things to draw disciples after themselves (Acts 20:29-30). Without naming individuals or groups, what are some ways you have seen this kind of danger appear in churches today? How can a congregation guard against it?
 10. The sermon referenced Proverbs 6:16-19 and emphasized that God hates the one who sows discord among the brethren. Why do you think discord in the body of Christ is listed alongside things like lying and shedding innocent blood? What does that tell us about how seriously God takes the unity of his church?
-

Section 4: Doing Justly, Loving Mercy, Walking Humbly (Micah 6:8)

11. The sermon made the point that doing justly requires hearing both sides of a story before responding. Think about a time when you acted on incomplete information. What was the result? What would it have looked like to "do justly" in that situation?
 12. How does the combination of doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly apply specifically to how we handle rumors, conflict, or criticism within the church? What would it look like practically to apply all three at once?
-

Section 5: The Letter to Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7)

13. Jesus commended the church at Ephesus for their hard work, their discernment, and their endurance -- yet he held one thing against them: they had left their first love. Is it possible to be doctrinally sound, morally upright, and spiritually diligent while still losing your first love? What are some warning signs that this is happening?
 14. Jesus told the Ephesian church to remember from where they had fallen and to repent. What does it look like practically to return to your first love for Christ? What habits, rhythms, or practices help you keep that love at the center?
-

Practical Applications

- This week, read 1 Corinthians 13 slowly and prayerfully, substituting your name for the word "love." Identify one specific area where you want to ask God to grow you, and share it with someone in your group who can pray with you and follow up.
- Before responding to a conflict or a piece of news about someone in the church, commit to seeking out the other side of the story first. Ask yourself: Do I have enough information to act justly? If not, withhold judgment until you do.



- Reflect on your own "first love" for Christ. Ask yourself honestly: Is my relationship with Jesus the driving motivation behind my service, my giving, and my presence in this church -- or have I drifted into going through the motions? Spend time this week in prayer asking God to renew that first love.
 - Consider the whole counsel of God. If you are not regularly attending both Sunday morning and Wednesday evening services, think about what you might be missing in your understanding of Scripture. Make a fresh commitment to consistent engagement with the teaching of God's Word.
 - Practice the three requirements of Micah 6:8 in one specific relationship this week. Identify a relationship where you could do justly, love mercy, or walk more humbly, and take one concrete step in that direction.
-

Closing Prayer Focus

Close your group time by praying together for the following:

- That each member of the group would grow in genuine agape love for one another and for those outside the church
 - That your church would remain faithful to the whole counsel of God's Word
 - That God would guard your congregation from division and from those who would seek to draw people away from Christ
 - That each person in the group would return to or strengthen their first love for Jesus
-

Scripture references: Acts 20:1-38, 1 Corinthians 13, Leviticus 23, 1 Kings 17:21-23, 2 Kings 4:33-36, Ezekiel 3:17-21, Micah 6:8, Proverbs 6:16-19, Matthew 7:15-20, 1 Peter 5:5-11, James 3:1, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 13:17, Revelation 2:1-7



5-Day Devotional:

5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Based on Acts 20 and Related Themes

Day 1: The Mark of a Servant Reading: Acts 20:17-21; 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

Devotional: Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he served the Lord with all humility, with tears, and through trials. He did not hold back anything helpful. True Christian ministry is never about platform or recognition — it flows from a heart shaped by agape love. Paul's definition of that love in 1 Corinthians 13 makes clear that without it, even the most impressive spiritual gifts amount to nothing. Consider the relationships in your own life — your home, your workplace, your church. Are you known more for what you know or for how you love? Humility and love are not weaknesses. They are the very marks of Christ.

Day 2: The Whole Counsel of God Reading: Acts 20:26-27; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Ezekiel 3:17-21

Devotional: Paul declared with confidence that he was innocent of the blood of all men because he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God. This was not arrogance — it was faithfulness. God told Ezekiel that a watchman who fails to warn the wicked bears responsibility for the consequences. The same principle applies to every believer. We are all, in some measure, responsible to speak truth to those around us. Scripture equips us to do exactly that. It is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction. Do not neglect it. The Word of God is not one resource among many — it is the only resource that is God-breathed.

Day 3: Compelled by the Spirit Reading: Acts 20:22-24; Romans 8:14-18; Philippians 1:21

Devotional: Paul journeyed toward Jerusalem knowing that chains and tribulations awaited him. He did not go reluctantly or in ignorance. He went because the Holy Spirit compelled him, and because he did not count his own life dear to himself. This is one of the most striking postures in all of Scripture — a man walking willingly into suffering because he trusted the One leading him there. Suffering does not mean God has abandoned you. It may mean he is sending you somewhere only you can go, for purposes only he fully understands. The question is not whether the road is hard. The question is whether you trust the One who set you on it.



Day 4: Guarding Against Wolves Reading: Acts 20:28-31; Matthew 7:15-20; Proverbs 6:16-19

Devotional: Paul warned the elders plainly — savage wolves would come, and some would rise from within the church itself, speaking perverse things to draw disciples after themselves. This was not a possibility he left open. He said it would happen. Jesus issued the same warning, telling his followers to recognize false teachers by their fruit. God himself declares in Proverbs 6 that he hates the one who sows discord among the brethren. The remedy is not suspicion of everyone, but discernment rooted in Scripture and the wisdom of Micah 6:8 — to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly. Seek both sides of every story before you respond. Guard the peace of the body.

Day 5: First Love and Faithful Endurance Reading: Revelation 2:1-7; Acts 20:36-38; Hebrews 12:1-2

Devotional: The church at Ephesus — the very church Paul addressed through its elders in Acts 20 — later received a sobering word from Jesus himself in Revelation 2. They had labored faithfully, tested false apostles, and persevered without growing weary. And yet Jesus said he had something against them. They had left their first love. All their activity had continued, but the heart behind it had drifted. This is a warning for every believer and every church. Spiritual discipline without devotion becomes religion. Labor without love becomes exhaustion. Return to what drew you to Christ in the first place. Fix your eyes on him. He is both the author and the finisher of your faith.