

Living Life on Purpose

Acts 20:13-27

All right, we are getting started right now on our Connect podcast. I'm so glad that you're joining me today. I hope everything's going well for you. I'm excited about talking about the word of God, getting God's word into our life, and getting it out of our life into the world around us. So this is going to be a great day.

And as we look here at Acts 20 verses 13 through 27, we find this really powerful passage about Paul's journey towards Jerusalem. And in this part of the story, Paul is saying goodbye to the leaders of the church in Ephesus. And it is a really emotional moving moment as we see him saying goodbye to some of his friends and partners there and Paul here, he's talking about his commitment to spread the message of Jesus no matter what challenges he faces he's telling the leaders about all the hard work that he's put into preaching the gospel and how he's been reaching out to Jews and Gentiles about repentance and about putting their faith in Jesus and even though he knows that they're going to be some hard times ahead and some persecution, Paul is still determined to finish the race and complete the job that Jesus has given him. And he shares some really valuable advice with the leaders about how they can be good shepherds of their people and stay strong in their faith. This is a great reminder for us in our own lives that no matter what we're facing, we need to stay committed to our purpose, keep working hard toward the goals that God has placed in our hearts, just like Paul did. So

we're going to get into it, we're going to see what it looks like today to live out your life purpose. And the first thing that you're going to have to do is to make the most of your time. We see this in Acts 20, verses 13 through 16. So as we turn there, if you have your Bibles, follow along.

It says this, we went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos where we were going to take Paul aboard. He made this arrangement because he was going there on foot and when he met us at Assos we took him aboard and went on to Mitaline and the next day we set sail from there and arrived off Chios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Meletus. Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost. We see that Paul had this incredible passion to go and visit Jerusalem. In fact, he set his face for Jerusalem and nothing would stop him from reaching that destination.

He wanted to minister there in Jerusalem to his own people and to be there when that relief help was delivered for the poor. Paul was in a hurry. He rushed to get on board the ship and set sail. In fact, he was in such a rush that he left some of his baggage behind and he left his scripture behind. We see this in 2 Timothy 4.13 that says, *When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas and my scrolls, especially the parchments.* So this raises the question, how do we make the most of our own time in light of God's purposes? First, do you know your purpose? Do you know who you are and what you're called to do? Because

a lack of purpose can put you on the sidelines. Your purpose is bigger than your job. Follow Jesus and purpose will fill your life.

You are blessed so you bless others. Save people, save others. Reach out to others with the good news. Serve people, serve others. The problem happens when we pursue poor purposes. Say that five times. We don't know what to do with the time we have when we're pursuing the wrong purpose. And here's how to make the most of your time. I'm talking T-I-M-E. It says, so.

We should treasure time as a gift, okay? We all have the exact same amount of time. Every day, God gives us 86,400 seconds. It's like if someone gave you \$86,400 and told you, you've gotta spend all this in one day and you would lose any money that you had left over. What would you do? You would shop till you dropped. Because...

There's no promise or guarantee that you're going to get any more tomorrow. And that's the same thing with our time. The letter I is for intentional. If you don't intentionally choose how to invest your time, you're going to waste your time. In 1 Corinthians 9:26, Paul said, so I run with purpose in every step. I'm not just shadow boxing. And that's how we got to treat our time.

You can tell what's really important to someone when you look at how they use their time. When you waste your time, you are wasting your life. When you kill time, you can't resurrect it, it's gone. There are 168 hours every week, and the average person spends about 56 of those hours sleeping, about 24 of those hours eating and getting clean and dressing, and about 50 of those

hours working or commuting to and from work. That means that there are only about 35 hours a week left over. That's about five hours a day. So the important question is, what are you doing with those five hours? Now if I watched what you did with those five hours every day, I would know what is most important to you. And you might not agree with me, you might not like it, but for some people, scrolling social media is the most important thing in your life? How much of that time are you intentionally spending with God? How much of that time are you spending with your family? And what's most important is spending time leading your kids to know God. That is your most important role as a parent. So how do you do that? Well, by praying with them, by opening the Bible and reading with them, making sure they're plugged into the church, and making sure that you're living out your faith in front of them, because they can see what's really going on in your life. So you've gotta be real about this. You know, the actual amount of time that you spend with your family, talking and having fun together and making memories, that will last for a lifetime.

And we also need to, the M is manage our time. We manage our time. I heard Emmitt Smith one time admit that even though he is a legendary running back, he's not the biggest or the fastest or the strongest. He said his secret was he had the ability to run with his eyes open.

and he's one of the best at seeing holes as they open and then running through them. That's the way that we should live, looking for every opportunity to invest our time wisely, those openings and darting through them, because when an opportunity passes, it's gone forever. That's what it means to make the most of your time.

Ephesians 5.15 says, *so be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise make the most of every opportunity in these evil days.* He says, be careful, be wise. How do you make the most of every opportunity? Well, that's a hard question because there are a lot of opportunities that come our way every day about how we're going to use our time. And really, there's more to do in a given day than you can ever really get done. Some people would look at this and they'd say, well, no matter how busy you are, you can always find more time to do more. But that's simply not true. You've got to determine what is most important in your life and then prioritize those things. Do those things first. Do the first things first. And the E in time is enjoy. God says we should enjoy spending time with our family, enjoy spending time with the people we love.

That is a good thing. Time is a gift. And I just want to encourage you that today, this is the good old days. These are the days you're going to look back on and remember. Enjoy these moments. So how are you intentionally managing your time? What areas of your life do you need to realign your priorities to line up with God's purpose? We see Paul here in Acts 20. He was rushing from place to place. He wasn't wasting time, but he was pushing to reach Jerusalem before the day of Pentecost. He wanted to celebrate the pouring out of the Holy Spirit with the believers in Jerusalem. He even planned to go around Ephesus, but for some reason the ship was delayed for several days in the port of Maletus. So Paul sent for the leaders in Ephesus to come and to meet with him. And when they came, he shared one of the most touching, heartwarming scenes that you can think of as the final testimony of a faithful minister to the people he loves. That's

what we're seeing here in this passage. So secondly, to live out your purpose, serve consistently with humility. Serve consistently with humility. We see this beginning in verse 17 that says, from Meletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.

And 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, I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. Well, Paul, he was totally committed from the very first day that he arrived and through all the situations and all the difficult circumstances that he faced. He served the Lord.

He wasn't serving himself and the word serving here is taken from the word bond slave. Paul constantly called himself the slave of Jesus Christ and his service, you see three things in his service. He served humbly. He was with all the people. He recognized everyone. He saw everyone. He acknowledged. He shared with everyone the rich and the poor, the down and outs and the up and ends. He

stopped to help people all along the way in any way he could and he served with tears From the heart. He had a tender compassionate Understanding heart and he literally was shedding tears. We see this throughout the New Testament He he shed tears over the unsaved world. He he shed tears about believers who were living as if they were of the world and of apostate ministers he was shedding tears. He served in the middle of severe trials, he says, especially in being attacked by religious leaders.

So what does humble and persevering service look like in our own lives? Well, there's several key points here, several key attributes of humble persevering service. The first one is just what does servanthood look like? Humble service starts with adopting a mindset of being a servant. That's following the example of Jesus who came not to be served but to serve others. It means putting other people's needs over your own and looking for opportunities to serve. It also looks like patience because you will face challenges, setbacks, and obstacles anytime you set out to serve. It requires consistency. You've got to keep showing up daily, regularly, to do what you're responsible to do and what you've committed to do. At the Connection Church, we have a saying, we say anything, everything, or nothing at all. And what that means is, you know, I'm not just serving in my own area. If somebody needs me somewhere else, I'll step over to it.

If somebody asks me to sit on the sidelines for the day, I can do that too, because it's not about me. It means serving even when the job seems boring, it's not glamorous, knowing that every act of service has the potential to make a difference. But then it also requires humility. You've got to recognize your own limitations, your own weaknesses, and your own need for God's grace.

You've got to have a teachable spirit and be open to feedback. I say feedback is the breakfast of champions and correction and acknowledge others as they're serving alongside of you. But then also this humble consistent service. If you're going to go the distance despite the challenges, despite the sacrifices, it takes a joy-filled attitude. Finding joy in the little things, finding fulfillment

and purpose as you serve people, and experiencing the joy of making a difference in people's lives, and seeing lives change through simple acts of love and of kindness. So one way to know whether or not you are truly a servant is how do you feel when somebody treats you like a servant? Very quickly, you will see if you're serving with the right attitude. So I want to encourage you to live a life of purpose, make a commitment to serve humbly and don't give up. But then also to live out your purpose, you have to share the good news of Jesus every chance you get with everyone you can. Verse 20 of Acts 20 says, *you know that I've not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but I've taught you publicly and from house to house, I've declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.* And Paul taught the whole gospel. He taught it plainly. He taught it in a simple way. He didn't hold anything back. The Greek says he did not shrink back or draw back from any part of the gospel. He wasn't ashamed.

He didn't sugarcoat it. The whole truth was preached and taught. He didn't use flowery language. He didn't use big words to try to impress people. He spoke simply on the people's level. What I like to call that is putting the cookies on the bottom shelf where people can get to the good stuff. And here's what he said in 1 Corinthians 2. He said, *and so it was with me, brothers and sisters, when I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaim to you the testimony about God. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.* Also, sharing the gospel, Paul taught both publicly and privately. He used every opportunity he could to teach. He went door to door.

And this is true in our own lives. We've got to be public about our faith and private. People need to see us in those times when we're not out there on an official basis, but we're just living our life and it comes up, Jesus is going to come up in our conversation. But Paul taught powerfully as a man of integrity, he spoke when he spoke with authority. He didn't show favoritism or partiality. He was a Jew, but he didn't just favor the Jewish people. He was called by God to reach the Gentiles and he was severely persecuted but he didn't ignore those who were persecuting him. He preached to every skin color, every nationality, every belief, every social status. He reached out to everybody and so why is it that sharing the gospel is so important for living out God's purpose?

Well, because God wants everyone to be saved. That's the first thing. We know that there's no one who is too far gone. And there's been a lot of controversy recently online about those who lived very sinful lives and people are saying, "Oh, they're too far gone to be saved." Well, nobody is beyond God's reach. In fact, 2 Peter 3:9 says, *the Lord is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but wants everyone to come to repentance.* But also, we've gotta share the Gospel because Jesus commanded it, fulfilling the Great Commission is the command of Jesus. He told his followers to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that he commanded. So sharing the gospel is a central part of fulfilling the great commission and spreading the message of Jesus to people all over the world. You can't disciple people if you're not first reaching them.

Every day we have chances around us to share the message with people who need to hear it. We just have to be available and willing to speak up.

and share the good news. And then we have to follow God's will with boldness. Beginning in verse 22, it says, and now compelled by the Spirit, I'm going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city, the Holy Spirit warns me that prisons and hardships are facing me. And notice the similarity there between Jesus' commitment, to make his final journey to Jerusalem, and Paul's commitment. Both of them set their faces to go to Jerusalem. In Luke 9.51, it says, *as the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.* And so we see that similarity there.

If you want to know God's will for your life, you have to get along with God and ask him to reveal it to you, especially when there are some big changes in your life that are happening or changes in the world around you. Paul knew that in going to Jerusalem, that he would be persecuted. He didn't know what that would look like, but he was certain that he would have to suffer when he got to Jerusalem. And people who love sin reject God because God has a standard for our lives that is offensive to their way of thinking and their way of living. And this rejection is specifically directed to followers of Jesus because Christianity is very clear about what is right and what is wrong. God has given us very clear instructions in the Bible about the way we should live. And this way of life is directly opposed to the way the world wants to live.

And it's interesting to me that other world religions here in America, they don't get the same hate that Christians do, because Christians are viewed as privileged and as oppressors. You know, think about this. We hear about phobias as they relate to hatred of other groups. But have you ever, ever heard someone use the term Christophobia? No. The reality is Christians are the most persecuted people in the world.

In fact, I was reading this article just yesterday. Several Christian ministries, including the Accord Network, Samaritan's Purse, Christian Legal Society, and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention are concerned about a proposal from the Department of State to limit the employment decisions of those accepting foreign assistance. This proposal requires recipients and sub-recipients of foreign assistance funds to not discriminate against end users or potential beneficiaries. And the Christian ministries, of course, they agree they shouldn't discriminate against the people who are receiving their help and their aid, but they also have concerns about the slippery slope that these rules that govern employment decisions of those ministries.

According to the ministries the rules would not allow them to consider sexual orientation or gender identity or expression in the hiring process to remain eligible for foreign aid funding. The ERLC says hiring staff members that reflect the religious beliefs of an organization is a long-standing pillar of religious liberty protections. The president of Samaritan's Purse, Franklin Graham, he said

These proposed State Department regulations could be used to force faith-based organizations such as Samaritan's Purse to hire staff who disagree with our core biblical beliefs about God's design for marriage, sexuality, and gender in order to be eligible for government grants. Samaritan's Purse is a Christian organization, and we would not compromise on the fundamental principle of hiring like-minded Christians who share our calling and our stand on the authority of God's word and our statement of faith. Faith-based ministries play a key role in foreign aid from the United States. Religious groups make up 50 of the largest foreign assistant grant recipients and receive \$613 million in funding last year. The groups provide water, sanitation, hygiene products, refugee support, counter trafficking efforts, health care, and justice system support in over 100 countries around the world. The faith-based groups have simply asked the Department of State to make some changes to its proposed rules regarding nondiscrimination, including a categorical exemption for religious organizations. Several Christian ministries have filed an official comment about the proposed changes. They're urging supporters to sign an open letter to the State Department opposing these changes.

When it comes down to it, there is only one religious group that people can post hate speech about and get away with it on social media and on big tech without getting any concerns of getting strikes or suspensions or being kicked off the platform. So we know we can expect persecution in our own life as we're serving the Lord, as we're standing on biblical principles. So we need to develop a boldness.

We need to make sure that we're standing courageously without being ashamed. And we can pray that God would give us that courage and that boldness to fully embrace God's will in our lives, even knowing that we're going to be facing increasing attacks in our country and our culture. So the last thing to live out your purpose, you've got to commit to staying faithful to the end. And...

Verse 24 of Acts 20 begins this way, it says, *however, Paul says, I consider my life worth nothing to me. My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task that the Lord Jesus has given me, the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace. Now I know that none of you among whom I've gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you, for I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God."*

Paul considered his life worth nothing to him. His life was not for him to do whatever he wanted to do with it. His life was not for himself. His life was for Jesus Christ. He's given his whole life to the Lord, and God used it fully. Paul wanted to finish the course of his life with joy, with faithfulness and running toward the end to finish the Christian race. And that's exactly what he did. He knew that whatever happened, he would not be able to visit the church in Ephesus again.

In his book, *A Severe Mercy*, Sheldon Van Auken tells this story of his last meeting with C.S. Lewis, who had become a friend to him. These two men ate lunch together and when they'd finished, Lewis said to him, we'll certainly meet again here or there. Then he added, I shan't say goodbye, we'll meet again. And with that,

they shook hands, they parted ways, and from across the street above the noise of the traffic, Lewis shouted, besides, Christians never say goodbye. I like to say when I say goodbye to people, I'll say, "here, there or in the air," we're going to meet again. The word *goodbye* is actually a contraction of the phrase, "God be with you." Saying goodbye is important because it's one way of reminding each other that we want God to watch over us and keep our love for each other alive right now and continuing until the day we see each other again. Paul says he's free from others' blood because

If anyone was unsaved, that was on them, because he had faithfully shared the good news with them. He fully proclaimed the counsel of the word of God. He warned everyone, he told everyone what they needed to know in order to be saved. And we should be able to say the very same thing. What does it mean to run our race faithfully and to finish well? It means to do what God made you to do, and not derail, not get off track, not stop before you're through.

Do you remember back in the 90s the frozen pizza company that had the advertising campaign with a lot of funny commercials where somebody was about to die in some unique way. One of them was dying in front of a firing squad, another was about to walk the plank, a teenager had a party while his parents were away for the weekend. And in each of the commercials they were asked this question what do you want on your tombstone? and then the answer was always like pepperoni and cheese or some other pizza topping it was a risky ad because we don't really like to hear about death but the company was trying to be funny with

their name tombstone pizza but on a serious note what do you want on your tombstone?

I was looking at what some well-known people had on their tombstone. You remember Mel Blanc, he was known as the man of a thousand voices and he voiced so many cartoon characters, Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, Barney Rubble, Captain Caveman, and on his tombstone, you can guess what it says, "that's all folks," Porky Pig, his catchphrase at the end of every Looney Tunes show.

Another one, Frank Sinatra, his tombstone is inscribed with the title of his 1964 hit, "The Best is Yet to Come". It was the last song O'Blue Eyes sang in public before his death. And for Christians, that is true. The best is yet to come.

But Ruth Bell Graham, who is the wife of Billy Graham, died in 2007 and had this on her tombstone. "End of construction. - Thank you for your patience." She didn't pick a favorite Bible verse or some lofty quote from a famous leader like her husband. She humbled herself and she admitted that her life was a work in progress until she died. So whatever it is today that you decide you want on your tombstone, you're writing that story today with your life. And I want to encourage you to live your life today like you want to be remembered in the future. Commit to staying faithful to God's purpose and to seek accountability and the support that you need in order to finish well. And I'm just going to say to you as I say goodbye, what it means today is God be with you.