

# **Running the Race: Lessons from Paul's Third Missionary Journey**

Paul's journey through Acts 20 offers powerful insights into what it means to live a life fully surrendered to God's calling. After facing an uproar in Ephesus where his preaching threatened the profitable worship of the false god Artemis, Paul continues his mission with unwavering determination and grace.

## **What Does It Mean to Be an Encourager in Difficult Times?**

Even after facing potential death in Ephesus, Paul's first action was to encourage his disciples before departing. This wasn't just a casual goodbye - Paul made it a priority to speak words of encouragement despite having just escaped a life-threatening situation.

Paul's example shows us that being an encourager isn't dependent on our circumstances. When people wanted him out of their city and threatened his life, he didn't flee in fear. Instead, he stopped to build up others on his way out. This demonstrates that encouragement flows from a heart filled with the Holy Spirit, not from comfortable circumstances.

## **How Do We Balance Boldness with Wisdom?**

Paul wasn't reckless in his ministry approach. When he learned of a plot against him while planning to sail to Syria, he chose to travel by land through Macedonia instead. This decision reveals an important principle: being bold for the gospel doesn't mean being foolish.

There's a difference between Spirit-led courage and flesh-driven recklessness. Paul understood that getting himself killed unnecessarily would end his mission prematurely. True boldness operates within godly wisdom, recognizing that our lives have purpose beyond the immediate moment.

## **Why Does Status Not Matter in God's Kingdom?**

Among Paul's traveling companions were Aristarchus, whose name indicates wealth and high social standing, and Secundus, whose name literally means "number two" - a designation often given to slaves. These men from completely different backgrounds traveled together as equals in ministry.

This partnership illustrates a fundamental kingdom principle: your past status, wealth, or social position means nothing in God's eyes. Whether you come from riches or poverty, freedom or slavery, all believers stand on equal ground before Christ. The gospel breaks down every barrier that society tries to erect.

## **What Can We Learn from Eutychus Falling Asleep?**

The story of young Eutychus falling from a window during Paul's lengthy sermon often gets reduced to a humorous tale about boring preaching. However, the context reveals something much deeper. The upper room was packed with people and oil lamps, creating a hot, oxygen-depleted environment that naturally induced drowsiness.

When Eutychus fell and died, Paul didn't panic or end the service. He went down, embraced the young man, declared him alive, and then returned upstairs to continue teaching until daylight. The congregation simply took the boy home alive and continued with their gathering.

This response reveals how naturally Paul operated in spiritual gifts. Raising someone from the dead wasn't a spectacle that stopped everything - it was simply part of walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. This challenges us to consider how we might operate more naturally in our own spiritual gifts.

## **How Important Is Both Community and Solitude?**

While Paul typically traveled with companions, the text specifically mentions that he chose to walk alone to Assos while his team took the ship. This detail highlights Paul's understanding that effective ministry requires both community and solitude.

Like Jesus, who regularly withdrew from crowds to pray alone, Paul recognized the need for personal time with God. You cannot pour out what you haven't received, and you cannot receive without creating space for God to fill you. Healthy ministry maintains this balance between serving others and being refreshed by God.

## **What Does It Mean to Withhold Nothing from Others?**

Paul boldly declared to the Ephesian elders that he had "not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful" and had "declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance." He withheld nothing of God's truth, regardless of his audience's background or potential response.

This comprehensive approach to sharing the gospel challenges our tendency to tailor our message based on who we think will be receptive. Paul preached the full counsel of God to everyone - Jews, Greeks, wealthy, poor, educated, and simple. The gospel is for all people, and we shouldn't withhold it from anyone based on our assumptions about their receptiveness.

## **How Does God Use Our Past for Good?**

Paul's radical transformation from Christian persecutor to gospel preacher demonstrates how God redeems our past for His purposes. The same zealous character that once drove Paul to hunt down Christians became the driving force behind his missionary journeys.

Your past doesn't disqualify you from God's calling - it often becomes the very thing He uses to reach others. The experiences you think make you unsuitable for ministry may actually be the exact qualifications God wants to use. Don't let shame about your past prevent you from running the race God has set before you.

## **What Does It Mean to Consider Your Life Worth Nothing?**

Paul's declaration that he considered his life "worth nothing" wasn't about having low self-esteem. Rather, it reflected his complete surrender to God's purposes. His only aim was to "finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me."

This perspective enabled Paul to face imprisonment and hardship without fear. When your life is fully surrendered to God's purposes, temporary suffering loses its power to derail you. The race becomes more important than personal comfort or safety.

## **Why Must We Guard Against False Teaching?**

Paul warned the Ephesian elders that "savage wolves" would come among them, and even more dangerously, that some from within their own ranks would "arise and distort the truth." This warning emphasizes the constant need for vigilance in protecting sound doctrine.

External threats to the church are often easier to identify and address than internal ones. When division comes from within the body, it can be particularly devastating. This is why personal Bible study, prayer, and maintaining close community with other believers is so crucial - it helps us recognize and resist deception.

## **How Do We Demonstrate Integrity in Ministry?**

Paul could confidently point to his lifestyle as an example because he had lived with complete integrity among the Ephesians for three years. He supported himself and his companions through tent-making rather than becoming a financial burden on the churches.

His declaration that he had "not coveted anyone's silver or gold" and had worked to "help the weak" demonstrated that his motives were pure. True ministry flows from a heart that gives rather than takes, serves rather than seeks to be served.

## **Life Application**

This week, examine your own race. Are you running with the same determination and integrity that Paul demonstrated? Consider how God might want to use your past experiences - even the difficult ones - for His glory and others' benefit.

Challenge yourself to be an encourager like Paul, speaking words of life to others regardless of your circumstances. Look for opportunities to share the gospel without withholding truth based on your assumptions about people's receptiveness.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I operating in my spiritual gifts as naturally as Paul did, or do I hold back out of fear or doubt?
- Do I maintain a healthy balance between community and solitude in my spiritual life?
- Am I running my race with eternity in view, or am I too focused on temporary comfort and safety?
- How can I use my unique background and experiences to reach others who might relate to my story?

Remember that your race is unique to you, but the same Holy Spirit who empowered Paul is available to guide and strengthen you as you run toward the finish line.