

## "CROSSING THE FINISH LINE OF FAITH" ACTS 20:17-24

### **This Week's Core Competency**

**Giving Away My Life** – I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes. Romans 12:1, *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Paul told the Ephesian elders, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (Ac 20:24). He didn't tell them that to impress them. He told them that to inspire them to follow his example—to, like him, give away their lives to fulfill God's purposes. In another place he told saints at Philippi, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (1:5). In the elders' case, he told them in so many words, "Your attitude should be the same as my attitude." This is what Paul did; he taught by example. He actually came right out and boldly told the Corinthians, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (11:1). It seems to me that, more often than not, when Paul refers to himself in his letters to the churches, he intends for his readers to follow his example.

Here are a few examples of what makes me think so. Writing to Timothy in chapter one of his first letter, Paul says, "So do not be ashamed to

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*Follow my example, as I follow  
the example of Christ.*

– the apostle Paul

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testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner" (v. 8), and then a few verses later he says, "I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day" (v. 12). In chapter three he tells his protege, "You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, suffering—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecution I endured," and then with his next breath tells him, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those [himself included] from whom you learned it" (v. 14). In the very next chapter, he commands him, "But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry" (v.5), and then he quickly adds, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (vv. 7-8). Writing to Titus in chapter two, he gives his son in the faith this charge: "Encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned [like I have], so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us" (vv. 6-8).

cont. pg. 2

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Writing to the church at Philippi, in the third chapter Paul tells his readers, "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things" (vv. 14-15), and then almost immediately he says, "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you" (v. 17). Writing to the church at Thessalonica, in the third chapter the apostle states in no uncertain terms, "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this . . . in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow" (vv. 7-9).

Can there be any doubt that when Paul tells the leaders of the church at Ephesus, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace," that he intended they—and we—follow his example?

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

*13 We went on ahead [from Troas] to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. 14 When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. 15 The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Kios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus. 16 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.*

### Acts 20:17-24

*17 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. 19 I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews.*

*20 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.*

*22 "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, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Circle "we" in v. 13.
- \* Bracket the place names e.g., "Assos," "Mitylene," etc. in vv. 13-16.
- \* Circle the pronouns "we" and "us" in vv. 13-16.
- \* Box "for" indicating *reason* in v. 16.
- \* Put parentheses around "day of Pentecost" in v. 16.

- \* Circle "elders" in v. 17.
- \* Underline the pronoun "I" in vv. 18-24.
- \* Circle "compelled" in v. 22.
- \* Box "however" indicating *contrast* in v. 24.
- \* Highlight v. 24.
- \* Bracket "of God's grace" in v. 24.

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## day 2

**EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. After reading Acts 20:13-16, put Paul's meeting with the Ephesian elders in its historical context.
2. Paul recounts his *past* ministry in Ephesus in verses 17-21. Explain why and what makes you think so.
3. The apostle refers to being "severely tested by the plots of the Jews." What is he talking about? (See chap 19.)
4. How might the elders learn from Paul's past experience?
5. Put what Paul declared to Jews and Greeks in your own words (cf., v. 24).
6. Paul reveals his plan to go to Jerusalem in verses 22-24. Explain *why* and what makes you think so.
7. How can the Spirit *compel* Paul to go to Jerusalem and at the same time *warn* him about what will happen when he gets there? It sounds like the Spirit is sending him a mixed message. What do you think?
8. Explain the *contrast* introduced in verse 24.
9. Explain what "of God's grace" means in the expression "the gospel of God's grace."
10. **Discussion:** Answer one of the *living* questions on page 5.

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## day 3

# EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Acts 20:17-24 contains the first part of Paul's message to the elders of the church at Ephesus—the part about him. The part about them follows in verses 25-35. Rather than go to Ephesus himself, the apostle asked the leaders to meet him in Miletus during a stopover on his way to Jerusalem. He did this for two reasons. First, he didn't want to take the time to go to Ephesus himself seeing he wanted to reach Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost. He had just a month or so to complete a 610-mile voyage and knew, given his close ties to people in the church and in the community, that visiting there would most likely foil his plans. Second, he wanted to see them for last time and to exhort them to do the work God had given them to do—just as he had done and was doing the work God had given him to do. According to one commentator, his words are reminiscent of Jesus' last words to the disciples. "In his journey to Jerusalem and Rome, Paul mirrors Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and the way he prepared the disciples for his absence in Luke 9-19. Paul likewise is preparing the churches for his absence. What he says to the community of Ephesus could be said to any of the communities to which he has a ministry. Indeed, this is how the passage functions in Acts. It tells churches how to carry on now that they will minister without figures such as Paul present" (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 623). Another commentator concurs, saying the speech "has elements resembling farewell speeches in the Old Testament and other ancient Jewish literature: the speaker, anticipating his death, calls together a circle of associates, points out the exemplary character of his past life, gives exhortations to those who will be left behind, and prophesies the future" (Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2:252).

The first part of the message contains Paul's testimony regarding his *past* ministry in Ephesus and his *future* ministry in Jerusalem. In verses 17-21 he recounts how he served the Lord with "great humility and tears," how he persevered in the face of Jewish opposition, and how he faithfully declared the truth to Jews and Greeks alike when he was with them. (Luke's account of the apostle's ministry in Ephesus from Sept. A.D. 53 to May A.D. 56 is contained in Acts 19.) Paul wasn't bragging; he was giving them an *example* to follow. "Commentators

sometimes remark that Paul appears to have been on the defensive in his Miletus address. Such was not the case. Paul was not defending his ministry. He was presenting it as an example for the Ephesian leaders to emulate. It is a worthy example for every servant of the Lord: a ministry marked by humility, openness, and inclusiveness and rooted in the gospel" (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 425). The exemplary nature of Paul's devotion is confirmed by his rhetoric: "through the rhetorical fullness of the word pairs: 'to announce and to teach'; 'publicly and in homes'; 'both to Jews and to Greeks'; 'repentance and faith'" (254). Later in his message to them when he warns them of the coming dangers they will face, he tells them, "So be on your guard. Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears" (v. 31). Thereby implying, you do the same.

In verses 22-24 he reveals his plan to visit Jerusalem. He confesses he doesn't know what will ultimately happen when he gets there, but he knows "prison and hardships" lay in store. He doesn't have a martyr complex; he is merely determined to complete the task the Lord has given him regardless of the cost. Paul knows "the *main thing* is to keep the *main thing* the *main thing*." Listen to his words, "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (v. 24). The idiom "Do as I say, not as I do" (cf. Ro 12:1) does not apply to Paul. Somewhat ironically, all the while he is following the Spirit, the Spirit is warning him that prison and hardships await him. But that doesn't mean that the Spirit is sending him a mixed message or trying to dissuade him. The Spirit's warnings serve to prepare the apostle for what awaits him in Jerusalem and to assure him that whatever may happen, God is in control. Again, the apostle is giving leaders an example to follow.

In a nutshell, we human beings learn by example. Speaking personally, I learned to love my son from my father, Nelson; I learned to follow Jesus from my high school Sunday school teacher, Ray Snell; I learned to be a student from my college roommate, Richard Ostella; I learned to be faithful to God from my wife, Ruth; I learned to value learning from my

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mentor, Buel Eldridge; I learned to shepherd from my pastor, Neil Ashcraft; I learned to preach the Word from my teacher, J. Dwight Pentecost; I learned to interpret the Word from my friend, Elliott Johnson. My list of names goes on and on. You could no doubt make your own list of names—people from whom you've learned by following their example. Paul expected the

Ephesian elders to learn to shepherd and to oversee the church of God from his example (v. 28). He wanted them to serve with humility and compassion, perseverance and faithfulness like he did. What's more, he wanted them to finish their course and complete the task that God had given them like he did.

## *The Message of the Passage*

*Follow Paul's example of dogged devotion to your mission as a Christian and your ministry as a leader to testify to the gospel of God's grace.*

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 "living questions" to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

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# notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 13 **We** Cf., 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16. Use of the 1st person pl. pronoun in these sections indicates that Luke is present. One author writes on Acts 20:5, 13, "Here the 'we' section resumes. They are in Troas for a week. This site is located along the rugged eastern Aegean coast about 150 miles north and slightly west of Ephesus. The writer of the 'we' source, probably Luke (Fitzmeyer 1998:665), apparently joins Paul in Philippi and goes on to Troas. There Paul observes the Feast of Unleavened Bread as he continues to keep Jewish feasts. The season here is the spring, and there are seven weeks remaining until the arrival in Jerusalem in 21:17 (note also 20:16, which places the arrival by Pentecost) . . . Paul's coworkers, including the writer of the 'we' source, head for Assos by boat" (Bock, 619, 21).

v. 13 **Assos** A costal town about 24 miles across the peninsula from Troas. "No reason is given for his choosing a route by land, but previously such separation and Pauline travel by land were for safety reasons (20:3). Witherington (1998: 608) and Polhill (1992: 420) suggest that this plan allows him a little more time to stay in Troas in order to see how the boy is doing and to address the believers. A boat ride is long and potentially dangerous, given its route around Cape Lectum (see Bruce 1990: 427 on the ship route). We do not know, however, why the different route is taken" (621).

v. 14 **Mitylene** The most important city on the island of Lesbos in the Aegean Sea.

v. 15 **Kios** (Chios) An island off the west coast of Asia Minor with a city by the same name

v. 15 **Samos** Another island in the Aegean across the bay from Ephesus. "These short one-day trips from port to port are typical of ancient sea trips. They proceed carefully because of the combination of winds and rocky coasts tricky to navigate" (621; cf., Polhill, 420).

v. 15 **Miletus** A seaport about 30 miles south of Ephesus, perhaps 45 miles via the main coastal road. "Saving time would not likely have been the primary factor in Paul's avoiding Ephesus. It may be that it was not safe for him to go to Ephesus at this time (cf. 2 Cor 1:8-11). It also may be that he was tied to his ship's schedule, with Miletus, not Ephesus, as the port of call. Or it may be that Paul simply thought that if he visited Ephesus there would be no way to tear himself away quickly from the Christians there" (Polhill, 421).

v. 16 **day of Pentecost** Fifty days after Passover (cf., v. 6). Paul had a month or so to make it to Jerusalem for Pentecost. (cf. vv. 6, 13-15).

v. 17 **elders** See v. 28. "These elders would be responsible for shepherding the church and guiding it, as Paul's speech itself indicates" (Bock, 626). Paul's message contains forms of the three Gk words used of church leaders in the first century: *presbuteros* (elder; cf., Ac 14:23; Tit 1:5; Jas 5:14); *episkopos* (bishop, overseer, cf., Php 1:1; 1Ti 3:2; Tit 1:7); and *poimaino* (to shepherd, feed).

v. 18 **arrived** Paul's ship must have spent a few days in Miletus or he must have changed ships there. It would have taken that long for the elders to get Paul's message and make their way from Ephesus. They probably arrived on Paul's third day there.

v. 18 **said** "This speech is quite distinctive among all the speeches reported in Acts. It is the only Pauline speech delivered to Christians which Luke has recorded, and we should not be surprised to discover how rich it is in parallels to the Pauline Epistles" (F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, NICNT, 412).

v. 19 **tested** Cf., "with tears and with trials that happened to me" (ESV, the NET Bible). "Trials' (*peirasmon*) is a summary term for all the persecution Paul experienced (Acts 19:9; 20:3; 1 Thess. 2:14-15; 2 Cor. 2:4; Phil. 3:18) as the Lord's bond servant (*douleumon*)" (Bock, 627).

v. 20 **hesitated** Cf., "did not shrink from declaring to you" (ESV). "This verb 'to shrink back' reappears in 20:27, where Paul does not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God (Rengstorf, *TDNT* 7:598). He speaks about both encouraging and challenging things. Paul covers the full scope of what the gospel means" (627).

v. 21 **repentance** "Testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (NASB). "Repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ (v. 21) is a beautifully balanced way of expressing what is essential to justification (cf. 26:20-23; Rom. 10:9- 10; 2 Cor. 5:20-6:2). One must change his or her mind Godward and place trust in the Lord Jesus Christ" (Thomas Constable, "Dr. Constable's Notes on Acts," [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com)).

v. 22 **compelled** Paul wasn't disobedient. He felt constrained by the task he had been given to go to Jerusalem (cf. 19:21) even though he had been warned of the trouble that lay in store for him there (v. 23).

v. 24 **race** Paul defines the meaning of his metaphor in the same verse, i.e., "complete the task."

v. 24 **of God's grace** I.e., a genitive of *description*, the gospel about God's grace, or a genitive of *apposition*, the gospel, i.e., God's grace.

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## Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Special Note to Parents: During the month of May, kids' teaching will not align with adult teaching. The Family Scrolls will follow the texts that kids are learning on Sunday morning. During His earthly ministry Jesus often used parables to illustrate principles. Parables are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. Jesus used these stories to help explain spiritual truths so that His listeners would understand the things of God. Our story next week is from Luke 10:25-37. Jesus used the Parable of the Good Samaritan to teach us how to love each other. Recently a friend told me a story of her two preteen girls. One week, her oldest daughter had several tests and a softball tournament. It was a busy week and she was falling behind in her chores. Her mother asked the younger sister if she wouldn't mind doing the dishes in her sister's place that night so she could study. Without hesitation the younger sister got up and cleaned the kitchen. She also did her sister's laundry that night, fed the dog for her and put away her sister's clothes! Now, that's going above and beyond. It's what the Samaritan did for the wounded traveler. He didn't expect anything in return. He just saw a need and showed mercy. I want to live like that. Let's look for ways this week to be good neighbors to those who need mercy.

### What Does The Bible Say

**Read:** Read Luke 10:25-37

1. What was the expert in the law's first question?
2. What was Jesus' response?
3. According to verse 37, who was the good neighbor?

### What Do You Think

1. Why do you think the first two men didn't stop to help the wounded traveler?
2. Why do you think the Samaritan stopped to help?
3. Can you think of a time when you went out of your way to help someone in need? If so, what did you do?

### What R U Going To Do

Make the Bible come alive by acting out Bible stories together. The Good Samaritan is a perfect story to reenact. Assign parts and have fun. Talk about how it felt to be each character. Would you have done the same thing if you were in his/her place?

## MEMORY TIME

### Core Comp

Love - Giving away lots of love and forgiveness even when others don't deserve it

### Memory Verse

Lk 10:27 - *He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

## KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC \_\_\_\_ and Verse \_\_\_\_\_. Family completed **Say** \_\_\_\_\_ **Think** \_\_\_\_\_ **Do** \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.  
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

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**Wendy Hollabaugh** (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you *Belong, Become, and go Beyond* as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).