



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V28 N39 September 27, 2026

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

FAITHFULNESS

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

*"Let love and faithfulness
never leave you; bind
them around your neck,
write them on the tablet
of your heart. Then you
will win favor and a good
name in the sight of God
and man."*

Proverbs 3:3-4



What are some
good strategies
for faithfulness?

UNHINDERED

"A Life Poured Out"

Acts 20:17-38

In the 1960s at Stanford University, clinical psychologist Walter Mischel conducted a number of experiments analyzing the responses of children related to delayed gratification. His research popularly became known as "The Marshmallow Test." A preschool-aged child was placed alone in a room and was presented with a "treat" of their choosing, often a marshmallow. The child was instructed to wait for an adult to return to the room before eating the treat. If they waited until the adult returned, they would get two marshmallows. If the child ate the treat prematurely or called for the adult to return, the child would only receive one marshmallow. Dr. Mischel was most interested in categorizing ways children handled temptation and values. Over the past 60 years similar studies have been conducted with many videos of children ([youtube.com/watch?v=2y-KhIWUgM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2y-KhIWUgM)) being captured displaying the human struggle of remaining faithful for a delayed reward. Some children were able to wait successfully upwards of 20 minutes for the adult to return. Others lasted less than a few minutes before caving.

Dr. Mischel pioneered work in self-control studies at Harvard, Stanford and Columbia Universities. His research was condensed in his popular 2014 book *The Marshmallow Test: Why Self Control is The Engine of Success*. He deduced that humans can defuse "hot" immediate temptations by shifting to "cool" thinking strategies that help delayed gratification. Dr. Mischel wrote, "The marshmallow experiments convinced me that if people can change how they mentally represent a stimulus, they can exert self-control and escape from being victims of the hot stimuli that have come to control their behavior. They can transform hot tempting stimuli, and they can cool their impact by cognitive reappraisal—at least sometimes, under some conditions" (Walter Mischel, *The Marshmallow Test*, 36).

In his book, Dr. Mischel also applied his research in self-control to relational psychology. Self-control is not limited to personal temptations but also includes how individuals

relate to others. We would call this kind of self-control "faithfulness." Faithfulness is self-control realized in relationships. In the "heat of the moment" we may be tempted to burst with anger upon those we love. We may be tempted to lose control by "cheating" with others, to the pain of those we have vowed fidelity. Faithfulness would be a more "cool" expression of relational stability. Faithfulness may produce greater reward than instant gratification.

Just as strategies are needed for avoiding temptation, so planning for relational integrity or faithfulness is strongly recommended. In his final address to the Ephesian elders, the Apostle Paul's suggests a number of faithfulness "hacks" or "strategies." First of all, Paul saw himself as a humble servant (Acts 20:18-19). Faithfulness to God and others includes the practice of humble service. Be faithful, serving the ones you love without demand for recognition.

Paul also saw faithfulness as all consuming. He stated, "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself" (Acts 20:24). Faithfulness is an audacious goal. To be faithful, we must aim high. To be "casually faithful" is an oxymoron. No one wants to be in a relationship with someone who is "faithfulish." Faithfulness is fierce and fastidious. Faithfulness envisioned as a large target will help us stay on track.

Finally, Paul understood his service of others as a guardianship. He stated in Acts 20:26 that he was "innocent of the blood." "Blood" is an allusion to the prophetic responsibility of being a "watchman." Ezekiel 3:17-21 uses this "blood" language as a charge by God to the prophet. God called upon Ezekiel to be a "watchman" who was to warn God's people to avoid sin and embrace righteousness. Failure to serve God's people with this ministry of warning would mean that the "death" of those who wandered away from God would be charged to the silent watchman. Paul was innocent of the blood of others because of his faithful service of teaching others the way of the Lord.

Faithfulness is more than marshmallows. Self-control and its corollary Faithfulness are the engines of relational and spiritual success.

Read Acts 20:17-38

17 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. 18 And when they came to him, he said to them:

"You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. 28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. 35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, 38 being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Place a box around each occurrence of the words "how I" in vv. 18-19.
- Underline each phrase in v. 21 that shows what Paul was testifying about.
- Draw a line connecting the phrase "And now, behold" to the same phrase in v. 25.
- Double underline each word showing what Paul anticipated when in Jerusalem according to v. 23.
- Place brackets around the phrase in v. 24 that defines the ministry that Paul received from Jesus.
- Circle each word Paul used to describe his communication in vv. 25-31.
- Underline "fierce wolves," "twisted things," and "draw away" in vv. 29-30.
- Place brackets around the phrase "it is more blessed to give than to receive" v. 35.
- Circle the phrase "not see his face again" in v. 38 and draw a line back to a similar phrase in v. 25.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. How did Paul describe his service in Asia (vv. 18-19)?
2. What was included in Paul's teaching ministry in Asia (vv. 20-21)?
3. What predictions did Paul make in vv. 22-25?
4. What conclusion did Paul make in vv. 26-27?
5. How were the elders of Ephesus described in v. 28 and what was their responsibility?
6. Describe the work of each member of the Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit) according to v. 27.
7. Where do enemies of God's flock come from (vv. 29-30) and what is to be done to combat them (v. 31)?
8. Explain how Paul can justify quoting a saying of Jesus (v. 35) not found in the four Gospels.
9. Describe the emotions shared in this final speech and appearance of Paul among the Ephesian leaders. What does this emotional expression say about Paul's reputation?
10. What life lessons do you take to heart from Paul's farewell address?



EXPLORE RESOURCES

Commentary On The Text

Well-known and well-loved professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, Howard Hendricks, often said, “Last words are lasting words.” Farewell speeches and deathbed utterances often carry more consequence and weight. To say “Goodbye” for the last time is always bittersweet. Final words are to be remembered.

The Apostle Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, invited leaders of the Ephesian church to meet him one last time in the nearby seaport of Miletus (Acts 20:16-17). He was on his hastily way to Jerusalem, attempting to get there before Pentecost. One commentator has added, “As well as avoiding delay in Ephesus, Paul may have asked the elders to come to Miletus because he was carrying a considerable sum of money, ‘the product of his collection for the saints in Jerusalem.’ Perhaps he felt safer in Miletus than in the great city of Ephesus” (David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar NT Commentary, 563).

He anticipated troubles there that would prevent him returning to Ephesus where he had ministered the longest in his missionary journeys. Paul’s final words to the flock of God that he shepherded so well were tinged with tears and grief. Paul’s final sermon to Ephesus shared his vision, his mission and his heart.

“This speech is significantly different than the mission speeches of Peter and Paul. It is the only extensive speech of Paul to Christians that Acts presents. It has elements resembling farewell speeches in the Old Testament and other ancient Jewish literature In Luke the Last Supper scene was expanded into a farewell speech by Jesus. The comparable farewell speech of Paul is placed not on the night before his death or at the end of Acts, but at Paul’s final parting with the leaders of the church where he last worked extensively, with the greatest success, for the speech concerns Paul’s legacy to his churches and the responsibility of those he leaves behind” (Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, vol. 2, 252).

Paul began his final discourse with a historical review of his life and ministry (Acts 20:18-21). Paul described his ministry as incarnational (“I lived among you” v. 18). Paul described his posture as that of a bond slave (“serving the Lord” v. 19). Paul recounted his attitude of humility and his frequent episodes of suffering at the hands of his plotting abusers. Paul spoke of his courage to speak publicly in hostile environments and frequently in private with those who needed encouragement and instruction (vv. 20, 27). Paul’s past history of faithfulness served as a testimony to God’s power and an inspiring example to follow.

Paul’s final words also included prophetic predictions regarding his final days of suffering (Acts 20:22-27). Paul felt led by the Holy Spirit to return to Jerusalem, even though he knew he would suffer there. Paul’s call to suffer in Jerusalem sounds very similar to

final days of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Paul anticipated that his life may be lost in this final journey. He did not consider his life to be precious but knew it was to be spent to the last “testifying to the gospel of the grace of God” (v. 24).

As the Holy Spirit called Paul to suffer in Jerusalem, so Paul reminded the Christian leaders in Ephesus that the Holy Spirit was now calling them to replace Paul to become “overseers” of the flock of God. Paul was ready to depart because his replacements, the leaders of the Ephesian church, had been fully equipped to shepherd the church of God. This shepherding would involve a call to action against fierce enemies from without and within (Acts 20:28-31). As Jesus called his disciples to “watch” and “pray” (Lk 21:34-36; 22:40-46) in his final hours, so Paul called upon the Ephesian leaders to be “alert” in the protection of the flock of God (v. 31) as he was soon to depart and not be able to protect anymore.

Finally, Paul encouraged the believers to trust in God and his provision (vv. 32-35). Paul gave a benediction of to those assembled, promising them “an inheritance” from God. Paul’s example of industry and generosity would remind those replacing him that God would take care of them as God took care of him. Paul encouraged his protégés to work hard and help the weak following Jesus’ own teaching “It is more blessed to give than receive” (v. 35). This saying of Jesus is not found in written in the Gospels of the New Testament. Jesus spoke these words, but the Gospel writers did not write down this saying specifically. “The author of the Fourth Gospel tells us that there was a vast amount of material that he could not include in his work (Jn 20:30; 21:25). Each Gospel author had the goal of providing certain information to the church and painting a portrait of Jesus from a particular angle; what did not fit into this plan had to be dropped. Scrolls only came in limited sizes. The fact that such material was not included in this or that Gospel, however, does not mean that the stories or sayings were not genuine or were immediately forgotten. Many of them circulated in the oral tradition of the church for the first generation or two as the eyewitnesses and their first hearers told stories about Jesus” (Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, 535).

Paul finished his farewell speech anticlimactically by kneeling down and praying with them all (v. 36). The emotions, tears and affectionate kisses of his Ephesian flock demonstrated that Paul was more than an orator. He was a shepherding pastor who had earned the affections of his adoring sheep. Paul’s life is a stirring example of devotion, integrity and passion for the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ and the building of God’s church. Like the Ephesian elders, we would do well to follow Paul’s example of ministry and accept his charge of carrying the work of building and protecting the church of God.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 17 **Miletus** "In spite of his natural desire to see Ephesus again, Paul had decided that this was out of the question if he was to be sure of reaching Jerusalem in time for Pentecost (which in A.D. 57 fell on May 29); he therefore chose a ship which was to make the straight run from Chios to Samos. But the ship was due to spend several days in harbor at Miletus; this gave him an opportunity to see some of his Ephesian friends" (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 387).

v. 18 **lived** "Paul will open and close the speech in the same manner, declaring the faithfulness of his ministry to them (1 Thess. 1:5c). He has been a model for them. The Ephesians both remember and know that Paul's life has been an example. This is how a minister should serve the Lord. He notes that from his first day in Asia, he served the Lord with all humility, tears, and trials arising from the plots of the Jews (serving the Lord: Rom. 12:11, 16; 14:18; 16:18; Acts 19:9; 2 Cor. 7:6; 10:1; 11:7; 12:21; Phil. 2:3, 8; 3:21; 4:12; 1 Thess. 2:6)" (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 626).

v. 18 **serving** "All the persecution Paul experienced (Acts 19:9; 20:3; 1 Thess. 2:14-15; 2 Cor. 2:4; Phil. 3:18) [was] as the Lord's bond servant (δουλεύων, *douleumōn*). Paul often refers to himself as a bond servant in his letters (Rom. 1:1). Paul has already warned a church that tribulation accompanies believing in Jesus (Acts 14:22). He has risked much for them but has simply been carrying out his duty before the Lord he serves. Paul's primary obligation is to the Lord. So his message also is faithful, as he did not shrink from declaring to them what is profitable, both in public and from house to house" (Bock, 627).

v. 26 **blood** "Paul's work in Ephesus, then, is complete. He emphasizes that he has done his part faithfully, so that if anybody falls away, he will not be to blame. He boldly claims that no man's blood can be laid on him; for the metaphor see Ezek. 18:13; 33:1-6. The language of guilt for causing a person's death is here applied to the spiritual responsibility of the pastor for faithful presentation of the message that brings life. As the watchman who warns people faithfully of the coming of an enemy is not guilty if they choose to ignore the warning" (I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 351).

v. 27 **whole counsel** "This last expression, which can also be rendered 'the whole purpose of God' (NRSV) or 'the whole counsel of God' (KJV, ESV), recognizes the 'world-embracing dimensions' of the gospel. However, its use in parallel with 'the kingdom' (v. 25) suggests that it refers more precisely to the whole plan of God for humanity and the created order

revealed in the Scriptures and fulfilled in Jesus Christ (cf. Lk. 24:25-27, 44-49). Such an understanding of the term is consistent with the scriptural framework and foundation of Paul's gospel presentation in 13:16-41, which parallels the outlines of Peter's preaching in many respects (2:15-39; 3:13-26). Paul gave them a comprehensive view of the will of God, which included the promise of salvation for people of every race, together with an appeal for individuals to repent and believe the gospel promises" (Peterson, 567).

v. 28 **care** "Like Acts 20:17, 28, so also Tit 1:5-7 and 1 Pet 5:1-2 identify overseers with elders and shepherds. (Only in the second century do overseers as bishops become distinct from elders.) Greek commonly used the term translated overseer (episkopos) for all sorts of oversight. ... As rulers of sheep, shepherds (Acts 20:28) naturally provided a natural figurative image for rulers. Homer used it for both Greek and Trojan leaders and their allies, especially for Agamemnon. The image ideally implies leaders who care for and protect their people. Dio pointed out that Homer calls a king a 'shepherd' (Or. 4.43), because he should protect and nurture the sheep, not exploit them (Or. 4.44). In Jewish tradition, Israel was God's flock. The OT sometimes calls Israel's leaders shepherds" (Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary, 504).

v. 28 **obtained** "The specifically covenantal language employed in 20:28 reminds us of Luke's record of Jesus' last meal with his disciples 'wherein he grounds the 'new covenant' in his own death (Luke 22:19-20). In Acts 20, as in Jesus' discourse in the Upper Room, the shedding of the Messiah's blood is the means by which the New Covenant is inaugurated and Messiah's people are sanctified for their share with him in his eternal inheritance. This is the heart of 'the message of his grace' (v. 32), which is able to sustain the church in the face of persecution and false teaching. In other words, Jesus' atoning work in Luke 22 and Acts 20 is not simply the basis for the proclamation of forgiveness but also for the forming and maintaining of the eschatological people of God" (Peterson, 570).

v. 37 **embraced** "Their embracing is described literally as 'falling upon his neck' in language reminiscent of the patriarchal narratives. All the Greek tenses are imperfect, which would indicate that their parting was lengthy. Their sorrow was greatest over Paul's statement that they would not see him again (v. 38; cf. v. 25). Then they 'sent him forth' (*propempōn*) to the ship. *Propempō* is used of accompanying or escorting people to their point of departure and often has the additional nuance of giving them food and provisions for their journey" (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary, 430).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THIS PASSAGE

Protect God's people from deception and division through faithful observance of the whole counsel of God's word and by following the example of faithful servants like the Apostle Paul.



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What does this passage lead me to do?



PARENT CONNECTION

With five kids, we've had a lot of personality in our home. One of my kids is "the boss." This child is fiercely independent, likes to be in control and refuses help with almost every task to the point my husband and I teasingly call out, "Me do!" like they did as a toddler. One of my other kids is far more laid back and is content to let others take the reins. Where does your child fall on the scale? Are they a leader or a follower? Does your child have to be the boss or are they content with being told what to do? Do they want to take control of every situation, project, or task, or are they a little more laid back and willing to follow through with assigned tasks? The trick to cultivating either swing of this personality pendulum is helping them learn to do both. A good leader needs to learn how to take direction, and a good follower needs to learn when to step up and lead. In both cases, we point them to Jesus. We want to encourage our kids to flourish in their God-given personalities. In every situation they should follow Jesus and lead others to Him. It's a tricky balance that all boils down to one thing—surrender. How do they learn surrender? By watching you. When you pray, share a struggle, seek God's Word, invite a friend to church, or serve the body of Christ, you're teaching them how to lead, follow and ultimately surrender to the One in charge. Continue modeling for your kids a heart molded by Christ. We're praying for you!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Acts 20:17-38

1. What did Paul preach to the Jews and Gentiles?
2. What does the Holy Spirit say awaits Paul in every city?
3. What warning did Paul give the elders in verses 28-30?

What Do You Think?

Why do the people need to be alert? Why do we need to be alert today?

What Do You Do?

Paul lived as a model for the people to follow. Play Follow the Leader with your family this week. How well do you follow directions?

CORE COMPETENCY: Spiritual Gifts

I use the special abilities God has given me to help with His work.

MEMORY VERSE: Lamentations 3:22-23

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

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.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

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.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

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.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

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.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with 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.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

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.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

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.

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.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A. University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have five children: Elijah, Levi, Bo, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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OUR MISSION
Making God known by making disciples who are changed by God to change their world.