

# Living the Story

## A Study through Scripture

### *Introduction:*

---

I find the section of *The Story* we are looking at today one of the most interesting parts of the book of Acts. Like 2 Timothy, it serves as a glimpse of the sort of things Paul was thinking as he prepares to journey on what he suspects will be his final trip. I think it is very similar to someone retiring from a profession that they have loved, perhaps a CEO of a company or a professional athlete. This is not just a next step in a progression; it is, in some ways, a final step. Life as you have known it for most of your life now changes.

What do you think in moments like these? There seems to be much more reflection of what *has* happened than there is looking forward to what is next. In some ways, the difficulty of this vantage point is that you are remembering things that cannot be changed. What you have sown is now to be reaped. You cannot change the past.

We often do not like to think about a summary of our lives. We all move at such a quick pace and there is so much to be done. Reflection on the past prevents us from moving forward. If the preacher asks us to think about our eulogies, he is accused of being emotionally manipulative. Don't make us sad, we say, keep us moving forward.

What is interesting to me is that Paul does not really seem sad here. The Ephesian elders are, but Paul sees clearly his purpose to travel to Rome. This is so true that he is willing to embrace the reality that this may be the last time these people see him. I think Paul knew the life he lived spoke for itself. There was no need to apologize or lament over missed opportunities. He had, as the saying goes, lived his life to the fullest. The barometer of his time with these people was not how much more time he would have with them, but how well they lived out the things he had spoken to them.

How about us? When our life transitions from one place to another (this could be a location where we live, a job, or perhaps even those steps closer to the end of our life), what is the legacy we have left?

### *Summary of the Text:*

---

The church in Ephesus may have been one of Paul's favorite churches. The letter he wrote to them seems to be one filled with more encouragement than those letters like Corinthians or Galatians, which are filled with rebukes and corrections. Paul also indicates an affinity for these people when he calls for the elders to come see him before he continues on his journey (v. 17). I get the sense Paul does not know exactly what will happen to him as he moves forward on his journey, but he realizes that it will not be good. In this, I think he also wants to do a little PR work. I don't mean this in a negative way, but more of a reminder to these people of how he lived among them so that when word gets back to him of some trouble Paul is facing, they have a good sense of who he is. I can imagine in later years, when the Ephesians hear of Paul's arrest and the accusations against him, they could not help but think: those claims do not match up with the Paul we saw.

Notice the things Paul chooses to mention to these elders: he was a man of service, he was humble, and he did all of this in the midst of hardships (v. 19). He preached things that were helpful and did so in a very public way. No back room deals here (v. 20).

---

### LESSON #33

**Date:** 05/04/2013

**Text:** Acts 20.17-24

**The Story:** Chapter 30

**The Big Picture:** When our life is said and done, will we more have been said than done?

**Materials Needed:** none

Paul does not hold back from these people the hardships that he assumes he is going to face. He is going to Jerusalem and ultimately wants to go to Rome (Acts 19.21). He knows doing so may be a threat to his life (v. 24), but there is a bigger purpose in his life than avoid persecution and hardships. His desire and the thing that drives everything he does is to continue to share the good news of God's grace. This would be Paul's sentence about the secret of life we discussed last week.

Paul will go on to encourage the elders of the church here to remain faithful and more important, diligent for those who may distract people from the truth. So even as he leaves for good, he continues to strive to encourage a lead these people.

---

*Preparing for the Group Time:*

---

I do not think you can read this passage and not think about the ways our lives will be viewed when we are gone, however that "goneness" may come about. For you as a group leader, that is especially true. What legacy do you leave for those who are a part of your group? In what ways will your group continue to demonstrate your influence even after you no longer lead or are a part of the group?

Spend some time this week reflecting on the ways you leave a legacy for others.

## Living the Story

Lesson #33  
Text: Acts 20.17-24

### *Lesson Outline:*

---

Last week we defined the secret of life in one sentence. This week, we are going to narrow it down even further. If you were to summarize your life in a word, what would that word be? (Depending on the make up of your group, you might even ask something along the lines of: Your family is too cheap to pay for more than one word on your tombstone. How would you want to be described in one word?)

Read Acts 20.17-24.

Ask the discussion questions.

Close with a time of prayer.

### *Discussion Questions:*

---

If you knew tonight was the last time you would see the people of this group, how do you think you would react? What would you want to say to these people?

How does your responses compare to Paul's actions and comments in Acts 20?

In what way would knowing you were about to face "hardships" change what you would want to say?

The elders at Ephesus were obviously important to Paul—important enough to bring them to him for these final words. Besides your family, who would you want to call together for a final party if you knew you would not see that group of people again? Why those people? What about that group is significant?

Paul tells the elders to remember how he lived among them. How easy is that for you to do for others? If it is difficult, why is that the case?

In what ways would you like to change the legacy you leave for others, that is, how would you like for that group of significant people to remember you in ways that may not currently do so? What steps can you take to go about doing this?

How can this group help one another live lives that testify to the good news of God's grace?

### *Living the Story:*

---

We need to not miss the overarching purpose Paul had: to testify to the good news of God's grace. The last question of the discussion is also your challenge for this week. You as a group need to help one another live lives that point to the good news of God's grace. This can be both a better realization of moments in your life that are actually God's grace at work, as well as better communicating God's grace to others. Spend a few minutes thinking of ways you can help one another and then follow through on those things this week.

### *Next Week:*

---

Next week's text is another compilation of texts and can be found in *The Story* chapter 30.