

# Explore the Bible: November 3

*Commit • Acts 20:18-32*

*By Becky Brown*



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Paul's heartbeat was sharing the Gospel, making/baptizing/training disciples at every location, and launching church families. Paul knew the importance of returning to each site for another round of encouragement. Occasionally, Paul would have to employ a "tune up" session to combat the encroachment of false teachings. As the Holy Spirit inspired him, Paul also wrote letters to believers in churches throughout Asia and Europe. By the providence of God, these letters would become sacred scripture we now read in our New Testament.

Paul would spend three years ministering in Ephesus. Daily battle was waged against evil spirits and the occult. The "great (false!) goddess" Artemis was worshipped in shrines throughout the city and in a grand temple dedicated to her. Paul challenged false worship with Gospel truth. The revival in Ephesus caused a riot which threatened to ruin the work that had been accomplished.

In Acts 20:1, Paul and his ministry companions continued westward to Greece and Macedonia. Next, Paul's heart was leaning toward returning to Jerusalem to be there in time for

the Jewish festival of Pentecost. He sailed from Philippi to Miletus in Asia Minor. There, the disciples from Ephesus met Paul for a final goodbye. Miletus was about 40 miles southeast of Ephesus. They were definitely willing to make the journey. The scene is filled with mutual compassion-filled concern.

To this gathering of elders from Ephesus, Paul first reminded them of his time of service among them. Paul spoke tough and tender words with equal passion. He lived WITH them. He served the Lord with sincere humility. Their time was filled with and marked by tears and trials. Their main foe in many cases was local Jewish leaders. Paul initially spoke to the synagogue attenders. Shortly, many of them would fight him tooth and nail. He would then turn to the Gentiles and anyone else who would listen.

Paul's consistent message was repentance toward God by placing personal faith in Jesus Christ. The audience might change, but the message remained the same! Paul mentioned working and teaching from house to house. God used Paul to touch many lives. At this point, he tells them that his journey is toward Jerusalem. He expects bonds and afflictions to await him there. This reminds us of Luke's words recorded in Luke 9-19 where Jesus "set His face to go to Jerusalem" knowing the cross and the grave awaited Him. Paul's life mirrored the journey of Jesus. These listeners certainly made that connection.

Paul's life belonged to God. His life was surrendered to follow God no matter where He led or what happened to Paul's body. His soul was secure in Jesus. Paul told them this was the last time they would be together on this earth. This final goodbye would have to last until they met in heaven. The pathos and deep emotion of this moment always grabs my heart.

Paul reminds them also of some "house-keeping" things. He declares that he has done his best to be a faithful watchman

on the wall to prepare them for war against the enemy. He declared the counsel and purpose of God through his sermons. He reminds them that they are to shepherd their tender flocks of believers. The church was bought with the innocent shed blood of Jesus on Calvary.

Paul warned them once again that false teachers would attack with a vengeance, inside and outside the churches. He commended them to God. They could remain in no better hands. The final verses of Acts 20 roll just like a video as you read them with tears. Paul was committed to the Ephesians because Paul was committed to God.

In Acts 20:17 we see how much Paul loved these Ephesians. I have many missionary friends. The hardest thing on BOTH sides of the oceans that separate us from them are the goodbyes. Heaven looks better and better as we move toward our time there. There will be no (zero, nada, zilch) goodbyes in heaven. The beauty of eternity is marked by welcome home, beloved!

*Brown leads LittleBrownLight Ministries.*