

Acts 20:17-38 (NIV)

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 and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. 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; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

²⁵ “Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. ²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God,^[a] which he bought with his own blood.^[b] ²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

³² “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”

³⁶ When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. ³⁷ They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. ³⁸ What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 20:28](#) Many manuscripts of the Lord
- b. [Acts 20:28](#) Or with the blood of his own Son.

Acts 20:17-38 (HCSB)

Farewell Address to the Ephesian Elders

¹⁷ Now from Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they came to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time— ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility, with tears, and with the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews— ²⁰ and that I did not shrink back from proclaiming to you anything that was profitable or from teaching it to you in public and from house to house. ²¹ I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus.

²² “And now I am on my way to Jerusalem, bound in my spirit,^[a] not knowing what I will encounter there, ²³ except that in town after town the Holy Spirit testifies to me that chains and afflictions are waiting for me. ²⁴ But I count my life of no value to myself, so that I may finish my course^[b] and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God’s grace.

²⁵ “And now I know that none of you will ever see my face again—everyone I went about preaching the kingdom to. ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent^[c] of everyone’s blood, ²⁷ for I did not shrink back from declaring to you the whole plan of God. ²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock that the Holy Spirit has appointed you to as overseers, to shepherd the church of God,^[d] which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ And men will rise up from your own number with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them. ³¹ Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears.

³² “And now^[e] I commit you to God and to the message of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all who are sanctified. ³³ I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands have provided for my needs and for those who were with me. ³⁵ In every way I’ve shown you that by laboring like this, it is necessary to help the weak and to keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus, for He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

³⁶ After he said this, he knelt down and prayed with all of them. ³⁷ There was a great deal of weeping by everyone. They embraced Paul and kissed him, ³⁸ grieving most of all over his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they escorted him to the ship.

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 20:22](#) Or *in the Spirit*
- b. [Acts 20:24](#) Other mss add *with joy*
- c. [Acts 20:26](#) Lit *clean*
- d. [Acts 20:28](#) Other mss read *church of the Lord*; other mss read *church of the Lord and God*
- e. [Acts 20:32](#) Other mss add *brothers*,

Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible¹

Acts 20:17-38

20:17 In this verse the leaders of the church in Ephesus are called **elders**, but they are referred to as "overseers" in [verse 28](#). These terms designate a functional and formal title of church leadership. The Ephesian church appears to have had a formal leadership structure.

20:18-35 This speech differs from Paul's others in Acts. It is the only one delivered to a group of believers, and it has several parallels with themes in the Pauline letters—reference to his serving the Lord, his persecution, his not shrinking from teaching, his ministry to both Jews and Greeks, the need for repentance, counting his **life** expendable, and finishing the course.

20:20 The mark of a truly faithful teacher of the gospel is that he or she does **not shrink back** from topics that, though unpopular or personally difficult, are **profitable** for disciples.

20:21 Paul's message to both **Jews and Greeks** called for **repentance** toward God for one's sins and **faith** in the Lord Jesus. This is an excellent summary of the mission of the church.

20:22-23 Paul was undaunted by the God-given knowledge that **chains and afflictions** awaited him. His persistence in teaching despite this is a model for all Christian disciples.

20:24 Paul put his trials in perspective by declaring that he counted his life of **no value**. What was important was that he would **finish** the **course** that had been set for him by the Lord Jesus, which involved testifying to the good news of **God's grace**.

20:25 Either Paul realized that things might go badly for him in Jerusalem, or he had no intention of returning to this part of the Mediterranean. His intention after visiting Jerusalem was to head to Rome and beyond. This is why he declared to the Ephesian elders that he would not see any of them again (cp. [v. 38](#)).

20:26-27 Paul declared that he was **innocent of everyone's blood** because he had declared the **whole plan of God** to them. This means he had been faithful to proclaim the plan of salvation, including the coming judgment. Thus no one could accuse him of failing to warn them.

20:28 Paul used the language of shepherding to describe the responsibility of the leaders of the Ephesian church. Here they are called **overseers** rather than elders (see note at [v. 17](#)), appointed by the Holy Spirit for their task. Reference here to redemption through the **blood** of Jesus is unique in Acts, but the language reflects Paul's statements elsewhere ([Rm 3:25](#); [5:9](#); [Eph 2:13](#)).

20:29-30 Paul clearly did not regard incorrect doctrine as unimportant. He called false teachers **savage wolves** because eternity hangs in the balance of rightly understanding the gospel.

20:31 Paul described his **three years** of active ministry in Ephesus as times of constant vigilance, **warning**, and deep concern. The events recorded in Acts fit this description well.

20:32 Paul committed the Ephesian Christians to God's **grace**, which strengthens disciples in their earthly tasks and provides eternal inheritance to the **sanctified**—those made holy by God.

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 20".

[20:33-35](#) Paul was never motivated by money or renown, as proven by his labors that **provided for** his own **needs** and those who accompanied him. Jesus' saying, **It is more blessed to give than to receive**, is found only here. It resembles some of Jesus' sayings elsewhere ([Lk 6:38](#)). Jesus obviously said much more than is recorded in the Gospels ([Jn 20:30-31](#); [21:25](#)).

boule

<i>Greek Pronunciation</i>	[boo LAY]
<i>HCSB Translation</i>	plan
<i>Uses in Acts</i>	7
<i>Uses in the NT</i>	12
<i>Focus passage</i>	Acts 20:27

The Greek noun *boule* can mean *counsel*, *will*, *plan*, or *purpose*. The related verb *boulomai* occurs 37 times in the NT (14 in Acts) and can mean *to will*, *purpose*, *plan*, or *come to a decision*. In Greek religion the term *boule* often referred to the *will* or *plan* of the gods.

In the Greek OT, *boule* normally refers to human *plans* or desires that may or may not occur, and is often advice given to royalty ([2Sam 15:31,34](#); [16:20,23](#); [1Ki 12:8](#); [2Ch 22:5](#)). But it can also refer to God's *purpose* that cannot be thwarted ([Job 12:13](#); [Ps 33:11](#); [Pr 19:21](#); [Isa 19:17](#); [46:10](#); [Jer 50:45](#); see [Pr 21:30](#)) and that guides His people ([Ps 73:24](#)).

The NT usage of *boule* is very similar to that of the Greek OT. Humans may or may not see their *plans* realized ([Lk 7:30](#); [23:51](#); [Ac 5:38](#); [27:12,42](#)), but God's *plans* and *purposes* will not fail ([Ac 2:23](#); [4:28](#); [13:36](#); [Eph 1:11](#); [Heb 6:17](#)).

NLT Life Application Study Bible²

Acts 20:17-38

20:18-21 The way of the believer is not an easy road; being a Christian does not solve or remove all problems. Paul served humbly and "with many tears," but he never quit, never gave up. The message of salvation was so important that he never missed an opportunity to share it. And although he preached his message in different ways to fit different audiences, the message remained the same: Repent and turn to Christ by faith. The Christian life will have its rough times, tears, and sorrows, as well as joys, but we should always be ready to tell others what good things God has done for us. His blessings far outweigh life's difficulties.

20:23 The Holy Spirit showed Paul that he would be imprisoned and experience suffering. Even knowing this, Paul did not shrink from fulfilling his mission. His strong character was a good example to the Ephesian elders, some of whom would also suffer for Christ.

20:24 We often feel that life is a failure unless we're getting a lot out of it: recognition, fun, money, success. But Paul considered life worth *nothing* unless he used it for God's work. What he put *into* life was far more important than what he got out. Which is more important to you—what you get out of life, or what you put into it?

20:24 Single-mindedness is a quality needed by anyone who wishes to do God's work. Paul was a single-minded person, and the most important goal of his life was to tell others about Christ ([Philippians 3:7-13](#)). It is no wonder that Paul was the greatest missionary who ever lived. God is looking for more men and women who will focus on that one great task God has given them to do.

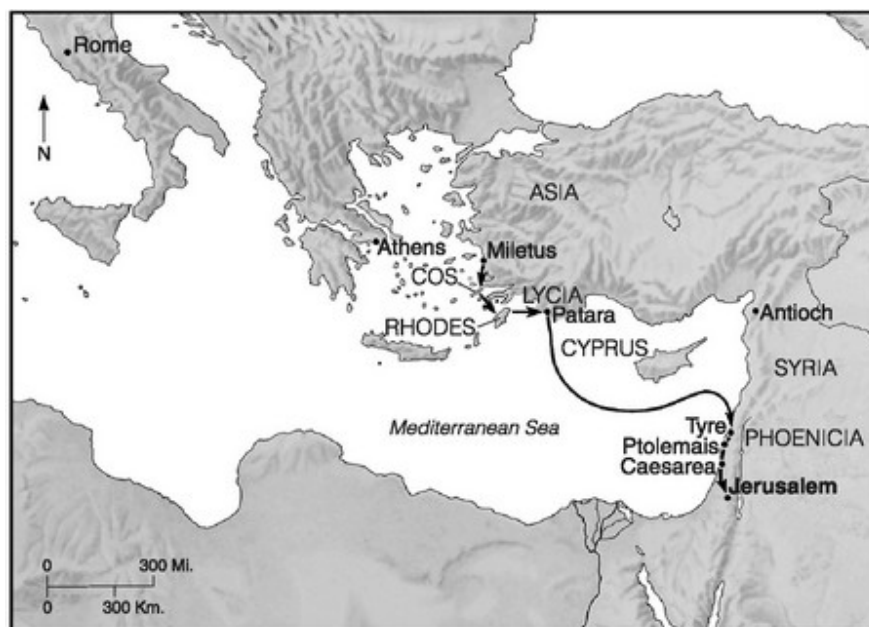
20:31, 36-38 Paul's relationship with these believers is a beautiful example of Christian fellowship. He had cared for them and loved them, even cried over their needs. They responded with love and care for him and sorrow over his leaving. They had prayed together and comforted one another. Like Paul, you can build strong relationships with other Christians by sharing, caring, sorrowing, rejoicing, and praying with them. You will gather others around you only by giving yourself away to them.

2. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1873-1874.



Paul Travels From Troas to Miletus

From Troas, Paul traveled overland to Assos, then boarded a ship to Mitylene and Samos on its way to Miletus. He summoned the elders of the Ephesian church to say farewell to them, because he knew he would probably not see them again.



Paul Returns to Jerusalem

The ship sailed from Miletus to Cos, Rhodes, and Patara. Paul and his companions then boarded a cargo ship bound for Phoenicia. They passed Cyprus and landed at Tyre, then Ptolemais, and finally Caesarea, where Paul disembarked and returned by land to Jerusalem.

[20:33](#) Paul was satisfied with whatever he had, wherever he was, as long as he could do God's work. Examine your attitudes toward wealth and comfort. If you focus more on what you don't have than on what you do have, it's time to reexamine your priorities and put God's work back in first place.

[20:34](#) Paul was a tentmaker, and he supported himself with this trade. Paul did not work to become rich but to be free from being dependent on anyone. He supported himself as well as others who traveled with him (he mentions this in some of his letters; see [Philippians 4:11-13](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:9](#)).

[20:35](#) These words of Jesus are not recorded in the Gospels. Obviously, not all of Jesus' words were written down ([John 21:25](#)); this saying may have been passed on orally through the apostles.