

# Before I Let Go:

## Leading Well and Letting Go: Lessons in Ministry Faithfulness

### Acts 20:17–38

Focus: As Paul says farewell to the Ephesian elders, he models leadership marked by humility, integrity, and emotional investment. This study explores what it means to finish well, release well, and love well in ministry leadership.

## I. Why This Study?

### A. Objective:

1. To explore how Acts 20:17–38 illustrates the emotional and spiritual depth of faithful leadership.
2. To examine the character and practices that mark healthy ministry transitions.
3. To learn how to lead, release, and love with gospel-centered integrity.

### B. Relevance:

1. Ministry leaders often struggle with letting go—of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, or \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Paul’s farewell speech offers \_\_\_\_\_ for finishing well and transitioning with \_\_\_\_\_.
3. This passage affirms the value of \_\_\_\_\_ engagement and \_\_\_\_\_ responsibility in leadership.

## II. Context of Acts 20:17–38

### A. The Background of Paul’s Farewell to the Ephesian Elders:

1. Paul is en route to Jerusalem, aware that \_\_\_\_\_ awaits him (v. 22–23).
2. He summons the elders from Ephesus to meet him in Miletus (v. 17).
3. Paul reminds them of his \_\_\_\_\_ service, teaching, and faithfulness despite trials (vv. 18–21).
4. He declares his readiness to \_\_\_\_\_ and even \_\_\_\_\_ for the gospel (v. 24).
5. Paul affirms his \_\_\_\_\_ by having faithfully declared the whole counsel of God (v. 26–27).

6. He warns them to guard the flock against \_\_\_\_\_ teachers (vv. 28–30).
7. Paul entrusts them to God’s \_\_\_\_\_ and reminds them of his example of hard work and generosity (vv. 31–35).
8. The elders \_\_\_\_\_, embrace Paul, and grieve that they will see him no more (vv. 36–38).

**B. Historical Insight:**

1. Ephesus was a major city of commerce, culture, and idolatry. Paul had spent three years there, \_\_\_\_\_ relationships.
2. The elders represented the \_\_\_\_\_ leadership of the church Paul had planted.
3. Miletus was a port city south of Ephesus—Paul likely chose it for a quicker passage and to avoid delays.

**C. Key Takeaway:**

1. Faithful leadership is not measured only by what we build, but also by how we let go—with \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and trust in God’s sustaining grace.

### III. What Happens When I Lead and Let Go Faithfully?

**A. 1. Leadership Is Grounded in Humility and Integrity (vv. 17–21)**

1. Key Verses:

*“You know how I lived the whole time I was with you... I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing...” (vv. 18–19)*

2. Key Lessons:

a) *Paul begins his farewell not with accomplishments but with his*

\_\_\_\_\_.

b) *He reminds them that leadership is not about \_\_\_\_\_ but service, not \_\_\_\_\_ but endurance.*

c) *Rev. Dr. Renita Weems notes: “The most credible sermons are the ones preached through tears, through lived faithfulness, not just words.”*

*(Listening for God)*

## **B. 2. Legacy Is Built Through Courage and Clarity (vv. 22–27)**

### 1. Key Verses:

*“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me... if only I may finish the race and complete the task...” (v. 24)*

### 2. Key Lessons:

- a) *Paul models a willingness to suffer for the sake of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of mission.*
- b) *He doesn’t shrink back from proclaiming “the whole will of God.”*
- c) *Dr. Luke Powery writes: “The gospel demands courage—to say what must be said and go where one must go, regardless of cost.” (Spirit Speech)*

## **C. 3. Letting Go Means Entrusting Others to God’s Care (vv. 28–32)**

### 1. Key Verses:

*“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock... I commit you to God and to the word of his grace...” (vv. 28, 32)*

### 2. Key Lessons:

- a) *Leadership is \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_—we care, but God keeps.*
- b) *Paul entrusts the Ephesian elders to the Word, not to a method or a man.*
- c) *Dr. Barbara Holmes writes: “The most faithful act of leadership is relinquishment—to trust the Spirit to carry what our hands can no longer hold.” (Joy Unspeakable)*

## **D. 4. Generosity and Example Matter More Than Titles (vv. 33–35)**

### 1. Key Verses:

*“You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs... remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (vv. 34–35)*

### 2. Key Lessons:

- a) *Paul closes not with doctrine, but with \_\_\_\_\_ —his own life as the teaching.*
- b) *Leadership is most lasting when it's marked by \_\_\_\_\_, not position.*
- c) *Rev. Dr. Marvin McMickle says: "Preachers must be practitioners. Generosity is not just financial—it is a posture of leadership." (Where Have All the Prophets Gone?)*

#### **IV. Scholars' and Theological Insights on Leading and Letting Go**

- A. Augustine (Early Church Father): "Trust the past to God's mercy, the present to God's love, and the future to God's providence."
- B. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "Leadership is not about the demand for loyalty but the willingness to carry suffering."
- C. Rev. Dr. Renita Weems: "Letting go is a sacred act when it makes space for what God is doing next."
- D. Dr. Luke Powery: "Prophetic witness means learning how to speak and how to stop—how to step back and let God carry the Word forward."
- E. Rev. Dr. Marvin McMickle: "Ministry is not about holding the mic but handing off the mantle."

#### **V. Prayer Focus**

1. Pray for humility and integrity in leadership.
2. Ask God to give you discernment for when it's time to release, delegate, or step aside.
3. Pray for the courage to lead emotionally, not just organizationally.
4. Seek grace to entrust people and ministries to God's care.

#### **VI. Key Takeaway**

To lead well is to live with integrity, love with vulnerability, and let go with trust. Faithful ministry is measured not only by how we serve, but by how we release.

## **VII. Discussion and Reflection Questions**

1. What qualities of Paul's leadership stand out to you in this farewell address?
2. Have you ever experienced the difficulty of letting go in ministry or leadership? What did you learn?
3. How does Paul's emotional connection to the Ephesian elders challenge the idea that leadership must be detached?
4. What does it look like to "entrust" someone or something to God in your context?
5. How can churches better prepare leaders to finish well and release roles with grace?