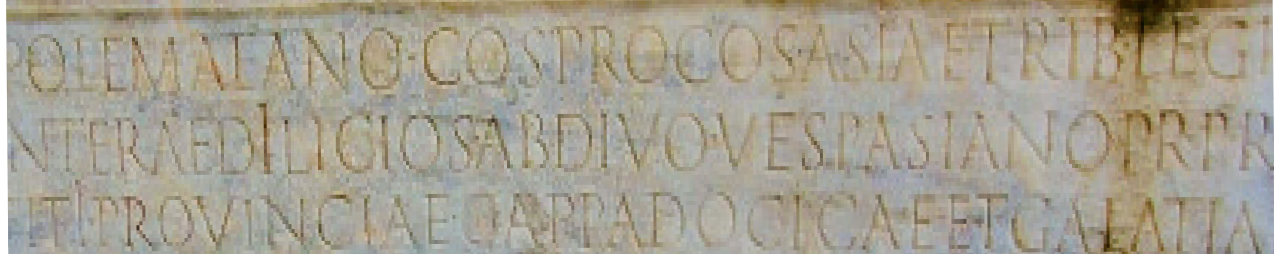




FOUNDATIONS

Lessons in Discipleship
from the New Testament Church



Study Guide



CENTER FOR
HOLY LANDS STUDIES

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Miletus The Faithful Leaders of the Church

Bible Text: Acts 20:13-38

*D*o you have goals that are important to you? It may be that some are short-term goals, while others can take time to develop. Long-term goals take years or even a lifetime to come to fruition and may even span beyond our lifetime.

Long-term goals require placing your hope in your work and efforts, and in investment in others, with faith that what was set in motion may have a fruitful result. These long-term efforts can be called generational goals. Though you may work hard in the process, you may never see the outcome of a generational goal. How do you feel about that?

When making the life-changing decision to follow Christ as Master, we as believers are introduced to generational goals. In fact, we are already ingrained in and blessed to be a part of them.

Matthew 24:14 tells us:

“The Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then the end will come.”

This “good news” that Matthew speaks of is the gospel message! It is the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for the salvation of humanity. When we come to a true understanding of what took place in the gospel, our response is to share it with the whole world, so they too will hear and know.

As individuals, we may not have the availability to reach the entire world in our lifetime. With the creation of social media where we have the potential to speak to millions at a moment’s notice. Individually, we may still lack the ability to minister to every demographic of population. Even Paul, the most influential person in the Church after Christ struggled with this reality.

The apostle Paul spent a large part of his life traveling thousands of miles across the lands of modern-day Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Italy, and other locations. He was very aware that he was only one man and could not achieve the spread of the gospel on his own. To this end, the New Testament infers that Paul needed to prioritize his goals.

This is not as easy as it sounds! Paul was called to set his priorities based on the command of Christ, knowing that he would not see the full outcome of his work. Paul understood that he was in partnership with Christ. He was aware that the importance of the message of the gospel superseded his own desires.

Paul's prioritization blessed and grew the Church.

Let's take a few minutes and look into Paul's dilemma regarding these goals and how it affected him and others while he was in the city of Mile-tus in Acts 20:13-38.



WATCH THE FAITHFUL LEADERS OF THE CHURCH VIDEO

Paul was like any one of us; he had a goal that was important to him. Paul wanted to be in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost. Pentecost was not only a Jewish holiday, it was one of the most important celebrations in the Jewish calendar. It also became a day of celebration for the Church. In Paul's life, this day served as the anniversary of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit about twenty years earlier. The celebration of this day represented and represents to all believers the gift that God had given and still does indwell His Spirit among us for the power of accomplishing His will here on earth.

In the same way that we desire to be present for anniversaries that are important to us and the people we care about, Paul desired to be there with the church on that day to celebrate. He wanted to be present in the place where the outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place. After all, it had been at least three years since Paul was last in Jerusalem, and three years since he had last seen some of his friends and mentors.

As a pious (religious, devout) Jew, it must have pained Paul to miss many of the Jewish celebrations. These were celebrations that commanded Jews to go to Jerusalem to celebrate at the temple of God. It so happened that Paul had the possibility to travel to and be in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost with both his fellow Jews and the church. Paul seemingly added it to the top of his priority list. He made it his goal to be there!

Yet, even still, one of the beautiful aspects of the apostle Paul's ministry is that he could never be deterred from the true mission, the goal of spreading the gospel.

As we learned in our video, Paul was in a hurry by the time he reached Miletus in Acts 20. By all appearances, Paul did not have time to spare if he was to make it to Jerusalem by Pentecost.

Paul had already placed himself in jeopardy of making the journey by assumedly resting on the Sabbath, as it was and is in accordance with God's law. He could have used that time to travel. Instead, he was obedient to the law of God. Paul also had the choice to bypass meeting with the elders of the church from Ephesus, yet he did not. Instead, he ministered to them one last time. He helped give encouragement toward a firm and unwavering foundation for the church.

Paul put God's will and the lifelong goal bestowed upon him by Christ ahead of his own will. Paul was doing something that, at one point or another, every one of us has struggled with and will struggle with in the future. To make God's priorities our priorities, to make the goal of evangelism greater, to increase the foundation, and to be unwavering in our faith in Christ.

Paul did make it to Jerusalem. He cut it close, maybe too close for comfort. Yet, it did not come without cost. This is the cost of discipleship. It is the cost of choosing something that is greater than ourselves. It is driven out of love for God and His love for us.





DIG DEEPER

List a few short-and long-term goals. Where are they placed in relation to the command of Christ, “to make disciples”?

As described in the Miletus study video, Paul’s pause in Miletus likely resulted in four days’ waiting for the Ephesian elders to arrive. When they arrived, Paul wasted no time as he sat the men down to convey priceless words to them.

Paul’s purpose was to prepare these men for the days ahead. His purpose was to equip them for the church they were now leading. Paul desired that even if he missed his celebration in Jerusalem, he would know that his sacrifice was worth it. He was earnest in his desire that the church would be strengthened to survive long-term and survive without him. From this, we find the true priority list of Paul’s life goals.

Undoubtedly, prior to his conversion as a believer in Christ in Acts 9, Paul had goals of rising through the ranks of Jewish leadership. He was making a name for himself, creating a legacy. A legacy focused on himself departed when he was introduced to the purpose and hope of God’s kingdom. Almost two decades later, after his conversion, Paul once again took his personal hopes and pushed them aside to see the goals of Christ furthered and the expansion of the church for the love of Christ and for humanity.



DIG DEEPER

If you are a believer, your personal goals should also align with the greater purpose of bringing people into the kingdom of God. How is this reflected in your life and interactions with others?

After the meeting between Paul and the elders of the Ephesian church, it is noted in Acts 20:37 that their time with Paul ended with the men weeping. They knew it would be the last time that they would see each other. These were the final moments between Paul and a group of believers he had taught and mentored from spiritual infancy.

Paul was no longer able to rely on his own efforts to ensure that the gospel would continue to spread from the massive port city of Ephesus. Instead, he needed to entrust the elders of the church with the goals of Christ, though he would never see such growth with his own eyes. However, this was not the final time Paul interacted with the church, as noted later in the New Testament.

Paul interacted in a different way with a letter to Timothy, the Pastor of the Ephesus church. In this letter, we learn that Paul had never ceased praying for the church or its leaders. He had still given instruction and aid from afar. Paul continued to expand his energy and efforts to further the goal given to each of us in Matthew 28, that the world would know the gospel, even if he could not witness it personally.



DIG DEEPER

Are you willing to work toward a God-given goal that you know you will never see come to fullness in your lifetime?

By sacrificing his own goal to be sure to reach Jerusalem, Paul's influence in Miletus and his meeting with the Ephesian elders furthered the expansion of God's kingdom here on earth. Do we have the same faith and purpose as Paul, knowing that in our lives, it is primary that we are called first to make disciples of all nations?

