

Living Your Life for Maximum Impact (Part 4)

Acts 20:17-35

Introduction:

1. How many of you have a DVR on your television? People are acting, or players are running around in a game, and you can simply hit “pause” and everything stops. You can also push “rewind,” go back, and play it over again.
2. Have you noticed that real life isn’t this way? There is no “pause” or “rewind.” Life just keeps moving forward, hour by hour, and day by day. Unfortunately, we don’t get any “do-overs” or replays, do we? Once a day is gone, there is no way to get it back.
3. Because of this truth, we must live our lives in a way that will result in having a maximum spiritual impact on those around us. We only get one life to live on earth.
4. The apostle Paul had spent almost three years of his life in the city of Ephesus. There, he established a local church and won many people to Christ. These people were dear to his heart.
5. So, on his way to Jerusalem, Paul stopped at Miletus and sent a message for the Ephesian elders (pastors) to meet him there. vs. 17
6. Paul knew that this probably would be the last time he would ever see these men (vs. 25, 37-38). What would be Paul’s last words? What would they consist of? This text is an absolute gem because it reveals Paul’s final words of instruction to a group of people he loved dearly.
7. Paul had lived among these people for three years. His life was an open book (vs. 18). He was able to look back and review the godly pattern that he had set. Paul had lived his life for maximum impact (with no regrets), and this text shows us how he did it.
8. How can you live your life for maximum spiritual impact?

First, serve the Lord with humility. vs. 19

Second, show what you know about the Lord. vs. 20-21

Third, live a life of sacrifice. vs. 22-24

Fourth, rise above people problems. vs. 25-31

1. Does anybody in here know what I mean by the term “people problems?” Do you know what kind of problems these are? Problems with people!
2. We have people problems everywhere we go in life. Paul had people problems, Peter had people problems, and Jesus Christ himself had people problems.
3. If you want your life to have maximum impact, you must learn how to navigate successfully through people problems, especially as they pertain to your church and spiritual life. Why do I say this?

- I say this because we readily recognize that we have people problems everywhere we go, but somehow we naively think that church should be the one place where we don't encounter these types of issues. After all, we're all Christians!
 - Of course, this is not realistic thinking, so when people problems do arise, they can many times take the unsuspecting believer and blow him out of the water.
 - There are many believers that have been sidelined in the Christian race because they were hurt, or embittered, or deceived by another person in church! Their life lost impact for Christ because they were not able to rise above people problems.
4. Here in our text, Paul takes a group of leaders from the church at Ephesus and he shares with them final words of instruction, warning, and guidance (vs. 25). Paul dearly loved these people, as he had probably led many of them to Christ. vs. 36-38
5. Paul had invested time and energy into discipling these people (vs. 26-27) and he wanted them to use their lives for maximum impact. Because of this, Paul took some time to talk to them about this issue of people problems in the church. vs. 29-30
- Notice, Paul does not infer that there **could** be potential problems in the church. He very explicitly declares that there **would** be problems. "*For I know this...*"
 - Let this be a lesson: Any church that is genuinely attempting to teach the Bible and preach Jesus Christ will experience problems. It is inevitable. And the problems will involve people. Paul said, "*For I know this...*"
6. Paul warned these believers to expect people problems from two sources:

Wolves from the outside – vs. 29

- The word "*grievous*" means "cruel and destructive," and the word "*wolves*" indicates that he is referring to lost, unsaved people who are of sordid character.
- Do you remember when Jesus warned His disciples of wolves in sheep's clothing?
- This is exactly what happened in the churches of Galatia. Paul called them who came into the church to bring people into bondage "*false brethren*." Galatians 2:4
- Notice how Peter warned the little flock of believing Israel of the same thing. "*...there shall be false teachers among you...*" **2 Peter 2:1**
- The attack could come from sheep-stealing ministers in other churches, cults, immoral people, theological liberals who would deny the sufficiency of Christ, or corrupt government officials who oppose Christ's work (1 Timothy 2:1-3). You could be attacked personally by lost family members, lost co-workers, etc. Paul encountered many of these wolves.
- Through the years I have encountered this from time to time. A person from the outside will start coming to church and make a big splash about how "spiritual" he is, then he begins to propagate false doctrine.

- We've had false teachers and false religions put their literature all over the cars in our parking lot while our people are in church.
- Paul warned that these wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock. This kind of people isn't concerned about the health and well-being of the flock (the church), but rather, they are concerned with their own self-promotion and their own agenda.
- As a member of a local church, you may encounter people like this. In fact, you may think a person is very sweet and sincere, and find out later that he or she is a wolf in sheep's clothing. You cannot allow this to destroy you in your Christian walk. You must keep your eyes on Christ and rise above this.

Troublemakers from the inside - vs. 30

- Here is where it gets a bit more sticky and complex. Paul said, "*Also of your own selves shall men arise...*" Paul basically is warning them that the trouble could originate from the inner core group of the church.
- Problems can occur from within the church and can come from the most unlikely sources. They can come from the leadership in the church and be initiated from people who were viewed as pillars of the church.
- Notice they speak "*perverse things*." This word "*perverse*" means "distort; misinterpret; corrupt." In other words, they twist words and distort stories to make themselves look good and others look bad. Just like the wolves we looked at, they have their own agenda.
- Notice their goal is to "*draw away disciples after them*." If they are discontent in the church or are out of sorts, they are not satisfied to simply spare the flock and quietly leave. They want disciples (followers) who will pledge allegiance to them and their cause. Paul knew this would happen, and people have not changed in 2,000 years.
- Wolves from the outside are easier to detect. Troublemakers on the inside are more suave. They are familiar with the flock and can use their relationships with people to their own advantage and for their own cause.
- They camouflage themselves and endeavor to appear loving while cutting others up with their words. They slice and dice up others with honey flowing out of their mouths at the same time. They know the Christian lingo, so they can partake in "spiritual slander." This is an art many people have mastered.
- They appear concerned about the well-being of the church, while publicly voicing their grievances and seeking to divide people. "*A whisperer separateth chief friends.*" **Proverbs 16:28**
- They present themselves as martyrs, complaining about how they have been mistreated by others. Their goal is to cause division, discord, and disharmony among the flock.
- Remember, we are talking about how our lives can have maximum impact for Christ. There are many believers who have lost their testimony, quit going to church, or have become spiritually sidelined due to troublemakers who draw them into their issues.

- Many people have become disillusioned and quit in their Christian service because they could not successfully navigate through people problems within the church. This is sad.
 - When men arise within the church, speaking perverse things, what should you do? How should you handle this? Titus 3:10-11 (*“heretick”* – one who makes a choice; causes division, discord, and disharmony)
 - Paul says this person should be admonished at least twice, but then rejected. Why? Because he is subverted (warped; twisted) and is sinning, condemning himself.
 - You have to take a stand when others come to you with gossip and slander and are trying to cause division. If you don’t, you can end up being destroyed.
7. For the wolves from the outside and troublemakers from the inside, the goal is the same – to divide and break up the church and render it most ineffective in the work of the Lord.
 8. They are not concerned with the health and well-being of the church. They are consumed with their own issues. If they could draw away people and divide the church, it would delight them.
 9. Paul told these believers to *“watch.”* This means to be on guard and be alert for these people problems, and don’t allow them to blow you out of the water. vs. 31
 10. Satan would love to cause you to lose your impact for Christ due to people problems. We must rise above people problems, keep our eyes on Jesus, and keep growing in our Christian walk. vs. 32