

THE BIG IDEA: It's easier to go when you know.

The Take-Off

This morning, as we wrap up Acts 20, I'm gonna give you the Big Idea right up front: **it's easier to go when you know.** There's no telling WHAT went through your mind when I said that, so let's see if we can't clear it up a bit.

No, we're not talking about going to the bathroom, although it is A LOT easier to go there when you know where it is. Nothing worse than wandering around trying to hold it while trying to find a restroom!

So, what do we mean by "go?" Simply this, that there will be times that we have to go - to leave, to say good-bye - and those times are always emotional and hard, and yet they are easier when you know some things.

Now, I'm not leaving, and neither are you. But in Acts 20, Paul is beginning a farewell tour of sorts, and he's going to share with some leaders some things that he knows, and those things make the good-bye a little less painful.

Making sense? It's easier to go when you know.

Let me just use one more example and then we'll jump into the text: when great leaders give farewell addresses or when people share what could be final instructions with others that they care about, there is usually very little guessing going on.

They don't say things like "I think" or "I guess."

They use words like "You know" or "I know" or "I have no doubt."

Leaving is not the time that we want to be wishy-washy.

We don't squander final moments with a bunch of worthless fluff. We spend those moments saying things that matter.

This scene from "Forrest Gump" shows that perfectly.

Final moments are sacred, and we would be wise to lean in a little closer to hear what is shared in them.

In Acts 20:17, Paul called the elders of the Ephesian church together for a final moments and shared with them 4 things that he knew.

Let's lean in and listen and learn from their sacred moment together.

1. Paul knew how to live (vv. 18-19)

- a. He lived with integrity
 - i) Unlike so many today, Paul lived an open book in front of these men.
 - ii) He reminded these leaders that they knew how he had lived "the whole time" he had been with them
 - iii) Over the last couple of weeks, there has been some devastating news about church leaders that so many in our area know, and if we're honest, that news has made us wonder if, in fact, we really did know them
 - iv) The men Paul is talking to here never had to wonder that
- b. He lived with humility
 - i) We know this from what he wrote in Philippians 2:1-5
 - ii) It's tempting to think Paul simply wrote those, but 1 Corinthians 11:1 says he was doing this first
- c. He lived with pain
 - i) Paul mentions living humbly, and if you've ever asked the Lord to humble you, you know that the circumstances that he uses to answer that prayer hurt
 - ii) 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 is his testimony and quite possibly God's program for developing humble leaders
- d. He lived with persecution
 - i) Paul said that he survived plots from religious leaders
 - ii) Paul was one of them, and so his own turned against them
 - iii) This means that Paul knew what betrayal was like
 - iv) He was honest about it (remember, he had integrity) and admitted that this was a "severe test"
 - v) What was tested? His integrity and humility.
 - vi) Believe me, the minute you step out and live with integrity and humility, you can expect to be severely tested - often by the most religious around you

2. Paul knew how to preach (vv. 20-21)

- a. He preached boldly
 - i) "I have not hesitated to preach anything"
 - ii) Hesitation can reveal a lack of desire - like when Wendy asked me if I wanted to go shopping with her

- b. He preached practically
 - i) “Anything that would be helpful to you”
 - ii) Paul wasn’t one of those preachers who liked to hear himself talk
 - iii) He preached on Sunday what would be lived on Monday
- c. He preached publicly (temples and synagogues - we’ve seen this throughout Acts)
- d. He preached privately (“house to house”)
- e. He preached consistently
 - i) Same message of repentance and faith in Jesus no matter who was in the crowd
 - ii) We’ve seen that Paul used different methods to help communicate the message, but Paul was not seeker-sensitive nearly as much as he was Savior-sensitive
 - iii) To the Jews or Gentiles, the religious or non-religious, the church or unchurched, Paul’s message was always JESUS

3. Paul knew how to **follow** (vv. 22-24)

- a. First, and most importantly, he was led by the Spirit
 - i) “compelled” is what happens after Mexican
 - ii) You cannot stop it, and if you tried, you’d hurt yourself
 - iii) We share what we’re full of!
- b. He was led into danger
 - i) In how many cities would Paul face hardships? Every!
 - ii) And who led him to those cities? The Spirit.
 - iii) This is a hard concept to grasp, but Jesus experienced it, too.
 - iv) Matthew 4:1 - the Spirit led Jesus into a 40 day fight with Satan
 - v) If we’re only willing to be “good time” Christians, then we don’t know how to follow. Paul did.
- c. He was led with a purpose
 - i) What was the purpose of Paul’s life? To finish the task!!
 - ii) What was the task? Pointing people to a gospel of grace.
 - iii) Not an easy gospel, but a saving gospel.

4. Paul knew how to **leave** (vv. 25-32)

- a. He left with a clear conscience (vv. 25-27)
 - i) Paul left knowing he had done what he was sent to do
 - ii) It’s hard to leave when things are undone, isn’t it?
 - iii) It leads to regret, sorrow, guilt
 - iv) How many of us will cry when we stand before Jesus and hear men scream at us for not sharing the gospel?
 - v) Paul was able to stand tall because it just feels good to finish. God helps us do that because he is a finishing God (Philippians 1:6)
- b. He left with a clear warning (vv. 28-31)
 - i) Guard yourselves
 - ii) Guard the flock (the church)
 - a) not just any flock, but one bought with Jesus’ own blood
 - b) this warning is serious
 - c) guard the flock from outside attacks (wolves)
 - d) guard the flock from internal attacks (your own will distort - this is harder and more damaging)
 - iii) The clear warning? Verse 31 - “So man up!! Bear the burden of being a leader!” (My translation)
- c. He left with a clear blessing (vv. 32-35)
 - i) He put them in the hands of God (“commit you to God”)
 - ii) He pointed them to the grace of God (it builds us and enriches us!)
 - iii) He reminded them to serve the people of God (give more than you take)

The Landing

Remember our Big Idea? It’s easier to **go** when you **know**.

Let me give us 2 practical ways to live this idea out.

1. Pray for your leaders.
 - All of us can take away some good things from this passage
 - Even if you're not a follower of Jesus, there are great life principles in here
 - But don't forget who this was spoken to: the elders of the Ephesian church
 - Don't think for a minute that the elders here at The Gathering are sitting around popping chips and sodas and getting drunk on power
 - Your elders are called to live out what we just read
 - We have the burden of caring for a body that Jesus died for
 - Now that's pressure!
 - The only real qualification for being an elder is a simple question: Will you give your life for the people Jesus died for?
2. Know that good-byes are inevitable. They will come, one way or the other, and our job is to live in such a way that we are ready for them.
 - Know what you know so you can say it when it's time
 - Live with good-bye in mind
 - 2 Peter 1:15
 - When I told my mother Happy Thanksgiving in the fall of 2005, I had no idea it was the last time I'd talk with her
 - Would I have said something different if I had known? Yes. Did I have regrets? No, because I'd said those things many, many times.

The one sure fire way to make sure that your farewell address is remembered is to know these things.

To live, to preach, to follow, to leave in such a way that the people we love most never forget what mattered most.

We'll all have to go at sometime, and it's easier to go when you know that you've done just that.