

The Holy Spirit

Pastor Ken

January 11, 2026

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."
(Acts 20-NIV)*

This past week, I took someone home in Bethel's truck a white, dirty Ford 150, after cooking at the Tribe of Levi and providing a Bible study. Hurray for the Tribe of Levi. As I drove away from their house, the church's Ford F-150 started dragging. Now, I thought at first it is just old. It has over 250,000 miles on her engine, she is just tired. This truck has been used for Convoy of Hope hauling crushed up boxes. She has hauled branches and trees from storm damage. She has hauled youth as they put out cones for youth events.

As you can see from Mrs. F-150's age, she is ready for the drinking and drooling at the nursing home. I think she is going to rust out before the engine gives out!

After driving a couple of miles, I was wondering if I would have to pull over and abandon ship. Maybe, call Danice for a ride. Then it occurred to me, I forgot to release the emergency break. What? Elementary driving 101. Release the emergency break!

Some of you need to release the emergency break in your faith. You are dragging. You are working against the break. You could be cruising down the Christian life, free as bird. Let the break go! Do it now!

Release the hurt.

Release the addictions.

Release the fear of sharing your faith.

Release the sinfulness.

Release the sloppy attendance and giving patterns.

We are moving into the final third of the book of Acts-chapters 20-28. The story of Acts has moved from the Holy Spirit's activity to Peter and Paul's activity and now finally the focus will shift to Paul alone who has one mission in the final 8 chapters- take the gospel to Rome.

These chapters record Luke's biography of Paul's journey to Jerusalem, his arrest there and then his voyage to Rome.

Chapter 20 describes Paul's farewell journey-vs 1-5, (overland instead of by sea because of a plot to kill him), his farewell church service-vs 6-12, and then his farewell message to the Ephesians elders, vs 13-38.

At the start of Acts 20:1, we read...*When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia.*

As Paul ends his 3 years in Ephesus, a revolt or riot breaks out in Acts 19. The impact of the message of Jesus has so changed the human hearts of the Greeks, Romans, and Jews that they began to discard their idols. They toss out their occult smelling salts. They cast out their demonic books. Did you get that, cast out demonic books. Ha, Ha! They did not just discard them; they torched them. Dungeons and dragon games went up in smoke. Harry Potter movies burned to the ground. Witch crafts scrolls, and demon spells got smoked. They drifted off as ash into the wind.

Christians began to realize that faith in Jesus and magic spells, witchcraft, occult practices were not only sinful. They were life threatening. Many Christians who secretly hung on to old superstitions, practices of tarot cards, ouija boards, seances made immediate decisions to cut ties, cast-out and burn up the evil connections. One night a bonfire bigger than what Texas AM, could produce started lighting up the sky. Ephesians started throwing in magic scrolls, occult paraphernalia, their once prize expensive idols. The value of the occult material was in the millions.

¹⁷ The story of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Greeks alike. A solemn fear descended on the city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored. ¹⁸ Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices.

¹⁹ A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars. (Acts 19-NLT)

Why did this happen?

When Christianity came to Ephesus, modern day Turkey – it was the first century period known as the Greco-Roman period of time (for you history majors). When it comes to Ephesus, for that matter to any city - or any individual's heart or home, when the light of Jesus Christ is turned on, it confronts the darkness that it touches.

The light and life Jesus Christ confronts darkness!

As in Ephesus, and here today, if the response is with repentance and humility there is salvation and revival. If the response is hostility, and not humility this leads to confusion and revolt. The evil one incites hostility, revolt, and all manner of evil activities to keep the Ephesians enslaved in darkness keeping them from the salvation offered by Jesus Christ.

³² The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. (Acts 19-NIV)

When you look at the revolt part of chapter 19, you can see there is confusion. Chaos. Carnality. If you look in the chapter you see the word confusion several times. *Vs 29, the whole city was in an uproar*, the word is confusion. Why was there an uproar or confusion?

Ephesians were turning to Christ in such large numbers; the economy was on the edge of collapsing. (Acts 19:24-27)

The Ephesians are gathering as a mob. They are about to do some real damage to the city. Satan is the author of confusion. Some of you are struggling in life because of confusion. Lack decisiveness in decisions.

You frequently cave into temptation when you could resist. Much of this is because Satan is attempting to smother and draw you in confusion. God is not the author of confusion. *For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. (1 Corinthians 14:33a-ESV)*

Now, listen, I want to teach you something. There are worship practices that we adhere to at Bethel, because of this verse. We will often provide opportunities for God to move by the Holy Spirit in the activation of gifts- prophesy, tongues and interpretation, maybe words of knowledge, but we often slot them into a part of the service where we can make sure, even the on-line community can hear what is going on. To do anything else, is to lead to or cause confusion.

And God is not the author of confusion.

The Ephesians' reaction to truth was stirring up trouble in the city. Let's read right out of the Bible.

²⁴ A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. ²⁵ He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: "You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. ²⁶ And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. (Acts 19-NIV)

Look at what happens here. A mob is formed. They seize some of Paul's disciples and traveling team and threatens to imprison or even kill them. The crowd starts yelling at the top of their voices.

²⁸ When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"²⁹ Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. (Acts 19-NIV)

For two solid hours the crowd shouted, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Ok, why are they doing this for two solid hours?

Because they are trying to drown out the truth. They are trying to cancel the opposing views from what they have. Again, back to the Bible, ³⁴ *But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19-NIV)*

Listen friends, "cancel culture" is nothing new. This is the first century. This is the Ephesians 2.0 form of cancel culture. They are just yelling great is Artemis, Dianna of the Ephesians for two hours to drown out the good news of the gospel. When you look at the motivation behind this, you discover it is about the money. Not religion. Not gods. Not spirituality. Not morality.

Always follow the money trail. The silversmith is seeing how the gospel is destroying his business. And he would rather lead a revolt than to allow his financial empire that is enslaving the Ephesians with idolatry to suffer. Satan knows how powerful the purse is, and people will kill to keep the money rolling in.

If the Jesus Christ grows the church in Ephesus, the money is going to disappear. Follow the money. And this same truth is happening in our world today. Follow the money. Look at the riots. Listen to the rhetoric.

The riot in Ephesus showed that Paul's continual stay there would create more problems for the young church.

As you read through the opening verses of Acts 20, Paul is once again checking in on the churches he has planted and how they are doing. Paul is going to meet Titus in Troas and get a report of the problems going on in Corinth.

Paul is once again planning to return to some of the churches and encourage and strengthen the believers so that they might stand strong as an effective witness in a time of hardship persecution.

In fact, Paul has to change his plans and instead of sailing with his friends, he travels overland because there was a plot to kill him. The assassination plot was discovered as Paul and the others were about to sail from Greece to Syria.

A ship carrying pilgrims to Jerusalem for the Passover could have easily been pirated and provided an ideal opportunity to get rid of Paul-public enemy number 1 for Rome. He could have simply been tossed overboard.

Discovering the plans Paul gave up his desire to get to Jerusalem by the Passover. Paul did not board the ship, but taking Luke with him traveled overland to Philippi. The other men serving as decoys, stayed on board and provided an idea rouse. The assassin's thought that Paul was on board the ship and when they discovered otherwise, once again God had protected Paul so he could finish his race.

Remember that phrase, **finish the race**, we will talk about it at the end. Paul would be no help to anyone if he were dead before God was done with him.

As with Paul's life, God is in charge of every detail of your life.

Every detail in your life has value to God. (Acts 20:1-6)

*¹ When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia. ² He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, ³ where he stayed three months. Because some Jews had **plotted** against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. (Acts 20-NIV) ⁴ He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia.⁵ These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. ⁶ But we sailed from*

Philippi after the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

Again, God cares about all of the details of your life. Let me remind of the words of Jesus. He pays even greater attention to you, down to the last detail—even numbering the hairs on your head! (Matt 10-MSG)

God cares about every detail of your life. Even the mistakes and sins you commit, God will redeem. My favorite verse making this point is found in *Revelation 2:17b (NIV)*, *I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.*

A name only God knows and a name only God gives.

God has a name for you that is only worthy of heaven. The name you have been using on earth is not worthy of heaven. When God tells us he will make all things new, he really means it. All the way down to your new name. Maybe your name is plain-Mary or John. Or you spent your life trying to make a name for yourself. Maybe your name is not as royal as mine, Kenneth Edward Squires, Jr. Or perhaps the meaning of your name doesn't carry much significance. My name means handsome.

The only name that matters is the one, God has reserved for you, because to God, every detail of this life and the next, really matters. Maybe your name is associated with your past sins or pain. Divorced. Crippled. Incarcerated. Child abuser. Loser. Failure. Fired. Kick out. Gambler. Arsonist. Adulterer.

**You know how a name can hurt;
God wants you to know how a name can heal.**

Especially when it comes from the lips of Christ himself. *I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. (Revelation 2:17b-NIV)*

Many of you have thought the name you get on earth will be enough for heaven. Not so. Your future with Christ is so promising, and so pure that only a new name will do. Your future with our Great merciful and forgiving God is so redeeming and righteous that only a new name will do.

So, God has one reserved, just for you. There is more to this life than you had ever hoped for. There is more to your story than what is now being written. There is more to your song than what you will sing.

A good author saves the best for last.

A great composer keeps his finest score and sound for the end.

A great coach keeps one play, unused for just the right moment to save the game.

And God who is the author of every detail of your life and the composer of a song that reminds us, this life cannot keep us from an amazing future, God has done the same for you.,

The best is yet to come.

Don't give up and miss the ending.

You will want to be there when God whispers your name.

God is not only with you in every detail of your life, but he is also with you in every season of your life and will bring meaning to that season. *There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.* (Ecclesiastes 3:1-NIV) God does this by describing some of the most common seasons in Ecclesiastes 3:2-8, we see no less than fourteen familiar cross sections of life:

- ² *a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,*
- ³ *a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,*
- ⁴ *a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance, (Ecclesiastes 3:2-4-NIV)*
- ⁵ *a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,*
- ⁶ *a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,*
- ⁷ *a time to tear and a time to mend,*

*a time to be silent and a time to speak,
8 a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace. (Eccl 3:2-8)*

When you look over the lengthy list of opposites, perhaps you have experienced many of these. Some of these experiences are enjoyable, and others are painful, but all have God's fingerprints all over them. One way or another. Would you like to learn how to identify the season you are in and make the most of it? If yes, let me suggest 4 stages of seasons.

Accept what season you are in. Stop living in denial of the season. Say aloud what you are frustrated about with this season. Identify your hurt or joy.

Define what season you are in. Can you name it? Again, give the season a name. Empty nest? Recovery or rehabilitation. A season of loneliness. A season of parenting. Grandparenting.

Learn everything from the season you are in. What lessons are you learning from this season? If you are in a season of singleness or widowhood, maybe you are learning patience. If you are in a season of bankruptcy or incarceration, maybe you are in a season of learning how to own your mistakes.

Move on when the season is over. Is it time to move on? The apostle Paul reminds us to make the most of **every** opportunity because the days are evil. The more evil the days, the harder it is to manage your time, life, schedule and even discipline.

You can maximize every season by leaning into *Ephesians 5-NIV, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.*

The Greek word for make the most of every opportunity is an economic term. It means to "buy up the time at a marketplace." Your greatest success as a follower of Christ is attached to your being a good steward of opportunities God gives to you.

Your hospital stay is an opportunity to witness.

Your unemployment is a time to humble yourself and learn trust.

Your being underpaid at work is a time to teach you how to work hard and with excellence regardless of pay.

Your win or your sin can teach you many things about self and about God.

God is faithful and he keeps his promises for a long time. Each of the seasons you are in God, will help you reclaim God's purpose and God's power in the Holy Spirit for that season.

As we move on through our text let me invite you to make two declarations:

- * I renounce and repent of the mistakes I have made in the season I am in.
- * I reclaim my God-given future free of the shame and guilt from those mistakes.

Now, back to Paul. We pick him in up in a Sunday-Go-to Meeting in the early church in verses 7-12. Let me describe it out of my bible. Yes, this is a final church service for Paul. And there are a couple details I want to point out about church in Paul's time. Church met on Sunday because Jesus rose from the dead and the church at Pentecost was born on a Sunday. **Sunday is a big deal to God.** Make it a priority in 2026. Don't miss coming unless you can't help it. Watch the service online however if you do.

The Lord's people gathered together in the evening of the early church. Church happened on a Sunday evening so those who worked could attend, especially slaves. They met in people's homes and this church met in the home of a wealthy Christian. How do you know because it had a 3rd floor. The service was made up of Romans, Greeks, Jews, Slaves, and people from all over the world-cosmopolitan describes this church Paul is preaching in.

The early church gatherings looked more like a family gathering than a church service. (Acts 20:7-12)

Church included dinner and the Lord's supper, and everyone fellowshiped together. Slaves ate at the same table as their masters. Unheard of in that day!

The sermon was long; it would be Paul's last one preached in this setting. Paul also, had in his possession some of his letters that he had written to

Galatians, Colossae, Philippians so those would be shared also. Preaching for Jews. Letters for churches. Church was edification and celebration.

Whether it was the lateness of the hour or the stuffiness of the room, it certainly was not the boredom of the sermon, a young follower of Christ fell out of the window-Eutychus. Died at impact. Was diagnosed as dead by Luke who records the story. Then resurrected by Jesus as Paul throws himself on the boy, like Elijah. Now, that is a service you did not want to miss.

So, let me ask the question on your notes, “does it really matter that I attend my churches weekend worship experience regularly?” Does it really matter that I attend my church’s weekend worship experience regularly?

When church breaks up the next morning, Paul senses his time is done and the Holy Spirit directs him to Jerusalem. Paul lived in the reality that God had a sovereign plan for his life. (*Acts 20:22*)

The last verses of Acts 20 are spoken from a beach 30 miles south of Ephesus. Paul is not wanting to jeopardize the Christians in Ephesus so he asks the leaders to come so he can give them his commencement speech.

The theme of the commencement speech is... God’s metaphor for your life is to **“RUN THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE YOU.”**

*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. (*Acts 20-NIV*)*

Starting well is good, finishing well is the best!