

A Final Farewell: Six Words to Live By from the Apostle Paul

What would you say if you had one last conversation with the people you love most? In Acts chapter 20, the Apostle Paul faces exactly that moment. Gathered with the elders of the church at Ephesus on the shores of Miletus, he passes on six powerful principles that are just as relevant for believers today as they were then.

What Does It Mean to Live with Godly Character?

Character Counts More Than You Think

Paul opens by pointing to his own manner of life. From the very first day he arrived, he lived consistently. His character was not made up as he went along. It was solidified from the beginning, rooted in who Jesus is.

As Proverbs 26 reminds us, "Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?" Faithfulness stands apart. It is rare, and it is powerful.

Godly character shows up in three specific ways according to Paul.

- In your attitude toward serving. Paul says he served "with all humility" (Acts 20:19). True servants do not serve for praise or personal gain. They serve because Jesus served.
- In how you handle trials. Paul mentions "many tears and trials" (Acts 20:19). Character is what gets revealed in the dark. If you follow Christ, your character will be tested.
- In how seriously you take your calling. Paul kept back nothing that was helpful (Acts 20:20). Whether teaching believers or preaching the gospel to those who do not yet know Jesus, He gave everything with excellence.

How Do Convictions Differ from Beliefs?

Your Convictions Control Your Actions

Beliefs can be adjusted. Convictions are the non-negotiables. They are the lines in the sand that say, "This is who I am until the day I die."

Paul says in Acts 20:22-24, "And see, now I go bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me, nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy."

He knew chains and suffering were waiting for him in Jerusalem. And he went anyway. That is conviction. It builds courage. It builds confidence in doing God's will.

Paul had two anchors that kept him steady. The first was an anchor of perspective: "I do not count my life dear to myself." His life was hidden in Christ. The second was an anchor of priority: finishing his race with joy and testifying of the gospel of grace.

As Psalm 16:8 puts it, "I have set the Lord always before me, because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

How Can Someone Have a Clear Conscience?

A Clear Conscience Is Not an Accident

Paul tells the elders plainly in Acts 20:26, "I am innocent of the blood of all men." That is a bold statement. But it was not arrogance. It was the result of consistently choosing what honors God.

A clear conscience starts at the cross. As Hebrews 10:22 says, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." The cross does not merely pardon sin. It purifies the conscience.

A clear conscience is also maintained through the whole counsel of God's Word. Paul did not shy away from difficult passages or hard truths. He gave people everything, the comforting and the convicting, because both are necessary for growth.

What Should Christians Watch Out For?

Be Watchful of the Harmful

In Acts 20:28-31, Paul urges the leaders to be watchful on three levels.

- Watch out for yourself. The Greek word used here means to hold the mind toward something with focus, intention, and discipline. Spiritual disciplines, time in God's Word, prayer, and personal accountability, keep you strong and effective.
- Watch out for those in your care. Whether you are a pastor, a parent, or a small group leader, you have been entrusted with people. Shepherd them. Feed them. Love them. Jesus purchased them with His own blood, and that tells you exactly how valuable they are.
- Watch out for wolves. Paul warns that wolves will come both from the outside and from within. Their goal is to destroy God's flock. If you feed people but never warn them, you are simply fattening them up for the kill. Both feeding and warning are necessary.

How Do You Trust God When You Cannot Control the Outcome?

Trust God to Care for Others

In Acts 20:32, Paul says, "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

A gardener plants, waters, and tills. Then he goes home and sleeps, because he knows only God can make things grow. There comes a point where you have to take your hands off what only God can hold. Do your part faithfully, and trust Him with the results.

What Does It Look Like to Be a Blessing to Others?

Be a Conduit, Not a Container

Paul closes his farewell by pointing to generosity and service. He says in Acts 20:35, "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Being a blessing to others involves three things according to Paul.

- Be free of covetousness internally. Covetousness kills ministry. The core of serving others is outward, not inward. It is giving, not getting. Contentment in Christ makes generosity possible.
- Show others Jesus practically. Give because Jesus gave His all for you. Let your generosity point people to Him. You never know when a simple act of kindness becomes a divine appointment.
- Pray with people. Paul knelt down and prayed with the elders before departing. Prayer is what holds it all together. Pray for your church, your family, and the people God has placed in your life.

The result? Acts 20:37-38 says they wept, embraced him, and walked him all the way to the ship. Those who bless others will be blessed in return.

What Will Your Last Words Be?

John Wesley, the famous Methodist preacher, spoke these words with his final breath: "The best of all is this, God is with us. Farewell."

You never know how long you have with the people around you. The goal is to leave them gazing at God, with the fingerprints of Jesus Christ visible on your life and theirs.

Life Application

This week, choose one of Paul's six words to put into practice intentionally. Maybe it is spending time daily in God's Word to keep your conscience clear. Maybe it is identifying a conviction you have been letting slide and recommitting to it. Maybe it is simply finding one person to bless, through a prayer, a kind word, or a small act of generosity.

Ask yourself these questions as you go into the week ahead.

- Is the character I display in public the same as who I am in private?
- What convictions have I allowed to soften, and what would it look like to stand firm in them this week?
- Who in my life needs me to pray with them, not just for them?
- Am I being a conduit of God's blessing to others, or am I holding everything close for myself?
- If this were my last conversation with someone I love, what would I want them to walk away knowing?

Paul's farewell was not a goodbye. It was a charge. Live with character. Hold your convictions. Keep a clear conscience. Stay watchful. Trust God. And be a blessing. These are not just words for pastors and leaders. They are words for every follower of Jesus Christ.