**Sermon-Based Discussion Guide**

**Acts 20:1-16**

**\* Read Acts 20:1-16. Open in Prayer.**

**\* Sermon Overview**

In this sermon, Pastor Aaron will emphasize the theme of encouragement. In order to do this, he will show how King Jesus has been working in the past, is working in the present, and desires to work in the future. We will be encouraged by the Word as we give praise to God through remembering and reflecting on God’s goodness, graciousness, power, and faithfulness and as we resolve to reflect His goodness, graciousness, power, and faithfulness in the days ahead.

**\* Prompt Questions**

1. Was there anything that stood out to you in the pastor’s sermon? Are there any clarifying questions that you may have regarding the sermon?

2. How have you been seeking to apply the sermon in your own life this week? Or, what is one way that you can apply the sermon to your life this week?

3. What was the take away from the sermon for you? If you had to sum up the main idea of the sermon in one sentence, what would it be? What main themes do you see in the text and did you hear in the sermon?

4. How have you seen God at work this week in your life and in the lives of those around you? How has God been working in you this week through His Word, through prayer, through the body of Christ, and through service/evangelism? What were the highlights and lowlights of your week? How can we be praying for you specifically?

**\* Observation/Interpretation Questions[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to get through every one of these questions. I have given them in hopes that they will drive us back to the text so that we may diligently search the Scriptures as the Bereans did (Acts 17:10-15). These questions will give us a grasp of what the text says/means so that we can apply the text to our lives. I would encourage you to spend the majority of your time on application questions so that we can become “doers of the Word and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

**1. What is the context of Acts 20:1-16?**

*Luke wrote Luke and Acts (written around A.D. 62) to Theophilus in order to give him an accurate account of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and to tell how Jesus continues to work through Spirit-empowered witnesses to carry the gospel to the end of the earth without hindrance and with boldness. Acts 1:8 serves as the theme verse of the book and as the outline for the book, for chapters 1-7 focus on Jerusalem, chapters 8-12 focus on Judea and Samaria, and chapters 13-28 focus on the end of the earth. The risen Lord sends His Spirit to empower followers of the Way to be witnesses who proclaim the kingdom of God to the end of the earth.*

*In this passage, the theme of encouragement is evident (see verses 1, 2, 12). Before leaving Ephesus, Paul encouraged the saints. Upon entering Macedonia, Paul encouraged the saints, as he waited for news from Titus about Corinth. After receiving good news concerning Corinth, Paul went to Corinth for three months to encourage the saints. When he was set to leave Corinth, his travel plans were altered by Jews who plotted against him so that he went back through Macedonia. Along with representatives from the churches of Galatia, Macedonia, and Asia Minor, Paul headed to Troas with the offering collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem. At Troas, Paul gathered with the saints one last time to encourage them through the partaking of the Lord’s Supper, the preaching of the Word, and the raising of Eutychus from the dead (which demonstrated the power of God). Finally, on his way to Jerusalem for the Pentecost and to deliver the offering, Paul encouraged the Ephesian elders at Miletus on one of his port stops. In all of this, Luke parallels the journey of Paul to Jerusalem with the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem, though there is a difference between the nature and purpose of their journeys. The emphasis is to show that Paul takes the road of self-denial, cross-bearing, Christ-following/imitating for the sake of encouraging the saints through word and deed.*

*Note that Acts 20:1-16 plays out Paul’s resolve in Acts 19:21-22.*

*As you read this passage, ponder on these questions: Like Paul, how can I encourage the saints (write down practical ways that we can encourage one another)? What place does the Word and the Lord’s Supper have in encouraging the saints? Why does Luke include the Eutychus story and why is Paul going to Jerusalem?*



*Note: This map of Paul’s third missionary journey (A.D. 52-57) comes from the ESV Study Bible.*

**2. What is going on in Acts 20:1-6?**

*In these verses, we see Paul accomplish two purposes: (1) encouraging the saints and (2) collecting the offering. First, Paul encouraged the saints everywhere he went—beginning in Ephesus, onward to Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Illyricum) and Greece/Achaia (Corinth), and concluding in Troas (in this current passage). Second, Paul collected the offering for the poor Jewish believers everywhere he went. However, Paul did not experience a persecution free journey, as hostile Jews plotted against him in Corinth (verse 2; also, see Acts 18:12-17); Paul and his traveling companions would also face the hardship of traveling with a large sum of money, which is why the men in verse 4 go with him as representatives of the churches to guarantee the integrity of Paul in delivering the offering and to protect the offering from bandits on the journey to Jerusalem.*

*As you read through the rest of the notes on this question, you will notice that the comments and quotes address the following topics: (1) Paul’s collection of an offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem; (2) Paul’s partners in the gospel ministry; (3) Paul’s reconciliation with the Corinthian church.*

*Note that one of the purposes of Paul going to Jerusalem was to take a collection from the Gentile churches to the needy Christians in Jerusalem (see Romans 15:14-33 [specifically verses 25-33]; Acts 24:17; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9 [specifically 8:16-24]; Galatians 2:10). This is one of the reasons that Paul traveled back through Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Illyricum [see Romans 15:19]) and Achaia/Greece (Corinth). About this collection, John Polhill writes, “Not only was it to meet a genuine need, but it also was a graphic way of demonstrating the unity in Christ between his Gentile converts and their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.”*

*Note Paul’s companions: (1) Sopater of Berea (Romans 16:21; note that the name is Sosipater in this verse); (2) Aristarchus of Thessalonica (Acts 19:29; 27:2; Colossians 4:10); (3) Secundus of Thessalonica; (4) Gaius of Derbe; (5) Timothy of Derbe (Acts 16:1-3; 19:22); (6) Tychicus of Asia Minor (Ephesians 6:21-22; Colossians 4:7-8; 2 Timothy 4:12; Titus 3:12); (7) Trophimus of Asia Minor (Acts 21:27-36; 2 Timothy 4:20); (8) Luke of Philippi (Luke probably remained in Philippi from the time Paul left in Acts 16 until he returned in Acts 20, which would have been about a 10 year span). As you read the names of these men who represent the regions Paul’s ministry impacted for the sake of Christ, ask yourself these questions: who have I equipped to know and follow Jesus? Who have we as a community group sent out to multiply community groups, to multiply disciples in another city around the world, who are equipped to make disciples where they live, work, and play?*

*Note that Paul wrote 2 Corinthians before visiting Corinth for the final time. Also, Paul wrote Romans during his final Corinthian visit. Thus, both of these letters are written by Paul in the mid-50s A.D.*

*For other passages in Acts where “encourage” is used, see Acts 11:23; 14:22; 15:32; 16:40. For other passages instructing us to encourage one another, see Proverbs 27:17; Ecclesiastes 4:9-10; Romans 14:19; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 4:11-16, 29; Colossians 3:15-16; Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:24-25.*

*John Polhill writes, “Paul was primarily occupied with his Jerusalem collection during the period covered by Acts 20:1-6. The mystery is why Luke did not mention it (see Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25-28)….It is clear, however, what Luke did want to emphasize. He wanted to show how Paul’s journey to Jerusalem was as foreboding as that of his master before him, how it ended in chains, but how even in the seeming defeat of his arrest in Jerusalem God turned the events to the triumph of the gospel, leading Paul to the capital of the empire, the end of the earth, to bear witness openly and unhinderedly.”*

*ESV Study Bible: “Paul departed from Ephesus for****Macedonia****(probably going first to Philippi). In the final days of his Ephesian ministry, after writing 1 Corinthians, Paul had considerable conflict with the Corinthian church, making a ‘painful’ visit to them (probably by sea) and writing a ‘tearful’ letter upon his return to Ephesus (*[*2 Corinthians 2:1–4*](https://www.esv.org/2+Corinthians+2%3A1-4/)*), which he at first regretted having sent (*[*2 Corinthians 7:8–9*](https://www.esv.org/2+Corinthians+7%3A8-9/)*). As his time in Ephesus neared its completion Paul wanted to return to Corinth but feared how he might be received there after having sent the harsh letter. He evidently sent Titus ahead to ‘test the waters’ at Corinth. Upon leaving Ephesus (*[*Acts 20:1*](https://www.esv.org/Acts+20%3A1/)*), Paul did not head directly to Corinth by sea, but first went north, visiting the Christian communities along the way and hoping to meet up with Titus returning from Corinth. He went to Troas, and then possibly on to other churches in Macedonia (*[*2 Corinthians 2:12–13*](https://www.esv.org/2+Corinthians+2%3A12-13/)*). In Macedonia (perhaps at Philippi, Thessalonica, or Berea) Titus finally joined him and brought the good news that the church had repented of its opposition to Paul’s leadership and had become reconciled to him (*[*2 Corinthians 7:5–16*](https://www.esv.org/2+Corinthians+7%3A5-16/)*). Paul then wrote 2 Corinthians (before going to visit Corinth for three months).”*

*NIV Zondervan Study Bible: “Paul has been in conflict with the Corinthian church and sent Titus with a letter to try to restore good relations (see 2 Corinthians 2:3-4). After missing Titus in Troas, he finally meets him in Macedonia (see 2 Corinthian 2:12-13), where Titus reports the good news that the church repented and has reconciled (see 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; 7:5-13). From Macedonia, Paul writes 2 Corinthians as a letter of reconciliation. He then travels to Corinth, where he spends three months (see Acts 20:2-3). From there he writes Romans, his greatest theological work, to prepare for his visit to the church at Rome (Romans 1:10-13; 15:23-29).”*

*Derek Thomas writes, “Paul had expected to meet Titus (whom he had sent on a fact-finding journey to Corinth) in Troas, but not finding him there, he went on to Macedonia, where he ended up encountering Titus, probably in Philippi (see 2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:5-16). Titus brought good news, at last, from Corinth, which resulted in Paul’s writing his second letter to Corinth (actually his fourth). Paul then spent what amounts to several months visiting the churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea) in a ministry of encouragement (see Acts 20:2). It is also likely that he traveled extensively in Macedonia at this time, reaching as far as Illyricum on the Adriatic coast north of Macedonia (see Romans 15:19-20)….Finally, Paul arrived in Corinth (for the third time), and spent three months there.” Also, Thomas writes, “Paul’s journeys to Corinth follow this pattern: He visits Corinth for the first time, spending eighteen months in the city (Acts 18:11). Then, from Ephesus, he writes the ‘warning letter,’ followed by 1 Corinthians. As he indicated in the close of 1 Corinthians (see 1 Corinthians 16:6), he makes a second visit to Corinth—the ‘painful visit,’ after which he writes the ‘letter of tears’; Paul then writes 2 Corinthians (from either Philippi or Thessalonica), in which he indicates that he wishes to come to Corinth again (the third time, 2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1). Then he comes to Corinth for the third time (see Acts 20:2-3) and spends three months there.” He continues, “There are, then, at least four letters to Corinth: 1 Corinthians 5:9 refers to an early letter in which Paul had warned the Corinthians not to associate with sexually immoral people; 1 Corinthians itself had been written from Ephesus following the visit of Stephanus and others, telling of serious divisions in the church; 2 Corinthians is thought to have been written after leaving Ephesus but before arriving in Corinth (probably from Philippi). In this second letter, Paul informs us of a ‘letter of tears’ (see 2 Corinthians 2:3-4; 7:8), one that must have been written between 1 and 2 Corinthians.”*

**3. What is going on in Acts 20:7-12?**

*In this passage, we get a glimpse of a worship gathering in the early church, though it is unique given that this is the last time Paul spent with these saints (more than likely). In their gathering on the first day of the week, Paul partakes of the Lord’s Supper with the saints, preaches the Word, and fellowships with the saints over a meal talking about the power of God and the Word of God. In all of the events of this gathering, Luke tells us that the saints were comforted/encouraged.*

*One of the unusual events in this passage is the death and raising from the dead of Eutychus. A key question we must answer is this: why does Luke include the Eutychus story? One answer is that this event demonstrates the power of God, which brings comfort/encouragement for the saints. Another answer is that this event confirms that the ministry of Jesus continues through His disciples. As in verses 1-6, the main thrust of this passage is encouragement, which happens in many ways—giving to help those in need, discussing the Word of God, remembering the gospel through the Lord’s Supper, conversing about the work/power of God, and more.*

*Note that Eutychus means “lucky one” or “fortunate one.” Also, note that Eutychus is a boy somewhere between 8 to 14 years old.*

*For passages related to raising the dead, see 1 Kings 17:19-22; 2 Kings 4:34-35; Luke 7:11-15; 8:49-56; John 11:38-44; Acts 9:36-43; 20:7-12.*

*For passages that indicate that the early church met on Sunday for worship, see Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Revelation 1:10. Why did they gather for worship on Sunday? Because it was the day of the Lord’s resurrection, which they commemorated when they gathered (see Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1)*

*John Polhill writes, “In the New Testament, miracles of raising from the dead present an implicit symbolism of the resurrection. In the case of Lazarus it is quite explicit. Indeed, in the present case there are some rather strong linkages with the resurrection. It was Easter time. The Passover had just ended, the season of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It was the first day of the week, the day of Jesus’ resurrection; and, given the season, Paul may well have been expounding on that event. The restoration of Eutychus’ life was a vivid reminder to the Christians of Troas that the Jesus whom Paul had been preaching was indeed the resurrection and the life.”*

**4. What is going on in Acts 20:13-16?**

*In these verses, Luke describes Paul’s journey from Troas to Miletus, where he will once again take up the ministry of encouragement to the Ephesian elders. Yet, Paul’s journey is not one of ease and comfort, for he and his traveling companions endured the hardship of travel and the threat of persecution/opposition. Though Paul was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem, what we do know from verse 16 is that Paul desired to encourage the saints on his way to Jerusalem, knowing that this was the last time he would see many of the saints in his earthly life (see verses 17-38).*

*As you read this passage, ask yourself these questions: why do we fail to encourage one another? How might the example of Paul taking time to stop, reflect, and encourage be an encouragement for us to do the same?*

**5. What are some application points to consider?**

Here are some points of emphasis that we see in this passage that lead to application:

(1) Paul’s concern for the poor and the Gentile churches’ willingness to sacrifice for believers in Jerusalem. One of the ways that we can encourage one another is by meeting needs. In our context, one of the ways this applies is a selflessness to our giving that seeks to glorify God and build up the church.

(2) Paul’s desire to encourage the saints. Perhaps one of the most difficult things for us to do is to encourage. We live in an age marked by skepticism, cynicism, and criticism. When was the last time that you took time to encourage someone else in their walk with Christ. Take time today to think through how we can encourage one another, which is a mark of humility and gratitude.

(3) God’s power displayed (or made visible) by the raising of Eutychus from the dead. One way that we can encourage one another is by remembering, reflecting on, and celebrating the power of God at work in and through the lives of others. How have you seen the power of God at work in the life of someone in your community group this week—their growth in the fruit of the Spirit, their willingness to serve someone this week, etc.? How have you seen the power of God at work in your community group and in the family of Highview over the past two years?

(4) Paul’s self-denial, cross-bearing, Christ-following journey to Jerusalem for the sake of other believers. Luke highlights that Paul, like Christ, makes a journey to Jerusalem with great resolve and great purpose. Though the nature and purpose of their journeys differ, both make the journey out of a heart that considers the interests of others greater than their own, both accept the cross/punishment that is coming, and both live for the glory of God. In our own lives, how might this type of life (self-denying, cross-bearing, God-glorifying/Christ-following pattern of life) be an encouragement to others? Take time to talk about how this pattern of life would impact where you live, work, and play.

Darrell Bock writes, “In sum, this unit gives us a sense of Paul the pastor. Here he seeks to instruct his people as he departs. One of the highest priorities for Paul in ministry is that his people will be equipped theologically and spiritually to persevere after he is gone. In a sense this is the Pauline legacy, to ensure that he leaves behind not a monument to himself, but Christians who are a monument to God in their faithfulness. It is also clear that part of what makes this ministry possible is the commitment of time that people give to hearing the word. Paul can spend a long evening with people on this special occasion. No one seems to be watching the clock, as it were. They are eager to hear what is being taught, all except a boy who grows weary and yet experiences God’s grace in an unusual way.” He continues, “We also see Paul as one who is committed to team ministry. He understands that team ministry builds experience for the future and allows those ministering to share the burden and accomplish far more as a group than one individual can.”

Tony Merida writes, “In summary, Acts 20:1-12 illustrates the ministry of Christ-exalting, Spirit-empowered encouragement. We may encourage people in personal meetings, through financial offerings, in gospel partnerships, and in our weekly worship assemblies. In all things let’s commit ourselves to building up one another. And let’s be thankful that we have the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (see John 14:16), with us, in us, and working through us for this ministry.”

**\* Application Questions**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to use every question, for you will have time for 3 to 5 questions. I’ve tried to offer enough for you to pick the ones you think will best fit your group, as you know what your ladies or men are going through at this time and may need to hear. Also, please note that these questions might be adjusted to reflect what the pastor calls us to do in application of the sermon.

1. In this passage, encouragement is a major theme, as the word is used three times (see verses 1, 2, 12). In our lives, how can we encourage one another? Write down 3 to 5 ways that you can encourage someone this week, particularly thinking about the people in your various contexts—home, work, community group, discipleship group, friends, area of service, etc. What is encouragement and what is not encouragement? Why is it that we should encourage one another? Remember, one of our four commitments of community groups is love. How does encouragement fulfill this commitment to love one another?

2. In this passage, the background scene that Luke does not highlight is that Paul is collecting an offering from the Gentile churches to deliver to the church at Jerusalem to aid the poor. How might this offering symbolize unity and love between the body of Christ? How does this offering portray the gospel to a watching world? In your own life, how does our use of money reveal our understanding of the Lordship of Christ in our lives?

3. Acts 20:4 mentions many of Paul’s colleagues in the ministry. How is this verse a reminder that we can not walk the Christian life alone? Why is it that we need community with one another? What are the benefits of gathering together in community groups to pursue knowing and following Jesus together by the Word, prayer, fellowship, mission, etc.?

4. Looking at Acts 20:4 from another perspective, how has the disciple making of those in the early church multiplied the impact of the earliest followers of Jesus? Who can we point to that we have helped lead to know and follow Jesus? Who is it that has helped us know and follow Jesus? Who is it that the Lord has put in our path where we live, work, and play that we can help lead to know and follow Jesus?

5. In this passage, we see the power of God displayed through the raising of Eutychus from the dead. As we move toward Easter, how does this passage cause us to reflect on Jesus who says, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25)? How have we seen the power of God displayed this week in our own life and in the lives of the body of Christ?

6. The contexts of Paul’s gathering with the saints at Troas is a farewell meeting. In this gathering, Paul shares a meal, partakes of the Lord’s Supper, raises Eutychus from the dead, and preaches/teaches/converses about the Word. Though our community group gatherings is a different environment/context, how might the sharing a meal (gets at relationship commitment of community group) and teaching/preaching/conversing about the Word (gets at the growth commitment of community group) be done in a way that would encourage the saints to know and follow Jesus and call the unbeliever in our midst to know and follow Jesus? Practically, have we been intentional about getting to know one another in the group so that all can know others and be known by others? Practically, have we cultivated an environment where people have the freedom to ask questions about the Word if need be, where people can be rebuked/corrected by the Word if need be, etc.?

7. In this passage, Luke highlights for us that Paul imitates Christ by self-sacrifice/denial, cross-bearing, Christ-following pattern of life on his journey to Jerusalem (see Luke 9:23-27). In our own lives, how have we seen a pattern of Luke 9:23-27; Philippians 2:1-4 demonstrated in our lives? How might the holiness of our lives and the others-focus of our lives be of encouragement to others?

8. As you think about encouragement, who can you invite (or who have you invited) to join us for Easter Sunday? Who have we had the opportunity to have gospel conversations with in the last month because God opened the door and equipped us with boldness to share?

9. As you look at this passage, how does it call us to obedience and an others-focused mentality? Remember, Pastor Aaron is challenging us to be about obedience and others in 2018.

10. Here are some good questions to reflect on and act on this week (these were passed along to me by Pastor Aaron and Dr. David Jones):

A. What do you take as the main theme from this sermon?

B. What have you learned today about Jesus’ character that has affected you daily?

C. Do you have any clarifying questions concerning the sermon?

D. What did the Holy Spirit convict you of because of His Word today?

E. Will you ask forgiveness and what will you change?

F. Will you be willing this week to pass on to someone else what you’re learning about Jesus? How will you be intentional this week to do so?

11. In his book, Asking the Right Questions, Matthew Harmon gives the following instructions/questions for understanding and applying the Bible:

A. Understanding the Bible

1. What do we learn about God?

a. Look for God’s character (who he is, what he is like).

b. Look for God’s conduct (what he is doing).

c. Look for God’s concerns (what things, events, people, he is concerned about).

2. What do we learn about people?

a. Look for aspects of what it means to be created in God’s image.

b. Look for the fallen condition.

c. Look for how God’s people should live.

3. What do we learn about relating to God?

a. Look for things to praise and thank God for.

b. Look for sin to confess and repent.

c. Look for promises and truths to believe.

4. What do we learn about relating to others?

a. Look for how we should interact with and treat others.

b. Look for ways to pursue reconciliation with others.

c. Look for specific ways to love, serve, and care for others.

B. Applying the Bible

1. What does God want me to think/understand?

2. What does God want me to believe?

3. What does God want me to desire?

4. What does God want me to do?

**\* Sermon Take Away**

Encourage one another this week with stories of how the Lord has, is, and will work through His Word to lead you to know and follow Jesus so that others may know and follow Jesu.

**\* Bible Reading Plan**

1. Monday—2 Corinthians 3; Job 33

2. Tuesday—2 Corinthians 4; Job 34

3. Wednesday—2 Corinthians 5; Job 35

4. Thursday—2 Corinthians 6; Job 36

5. Friday—2 Corinthians 7; Job 37

6. Saturday—2 Corinthians 8; Job 38

7. Sunday—2 Corinthians 9; Job 39

* **Unhindered Series**

1. April 1st (Easter Sunday)—Luke 24:13-35

2. April 8th—Acts 20:17-38

3. April 15th—Acts 21:1-26

4. April 22nd—Acts 21:27-22:29

5. April 29th—Acts 22:30-23:35

6. May 6th—Acts 24:1-27

7. May 13th (Mother’s Day)—Acts 25:1-12

8. May 20th—Acts 25:13-26:32

9. May 27th (Memorial Day Weekend)—Acts 27:1-44

10. June 3rd—Acts 28:1-31

1. For this discussion guide, I used the following resources: Darrell Bock, *Acts;* I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*; John B. Polhill, *Acts*; Derek Thomas, *Acts*; R. Kent Hughes, *Acts*; R. C. Sproul, *Acts*; John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of* Acts; Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesu in* Acts; ESV *Study Bible*; *NIV Zondervan Study Bible.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)