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**A Time to Say Goodbye (Acts 20:18-38):
 Saying Goodbye to Bob & Amelia Emmons and Dan Herard**

Pastor Gene Giguere, May 24, 2026

Introduction

- 1) Whenever we have to say good-bye to someone we love, someone whom we’ve labored with for years in the Gospel, it’s challenging and a little bit complicated.

Saying good-by brings up a number of emotions that range from deep gratitude to sorrow. As believers, we understand that God is always working and that His plan always bears within it a plan for the future, as well as a thankfulness for the past and the present. We know we’ll miss the week-by-week fellowship we’ve had with our dear friends who are relocating.

But we also know that the Lord is creating a new beginning for them and for us.

- 2) So, let’s talk about change this morning and why everyone hates it.

Life is a series of changes – things *never* stay the same for long. If you’re enjoying your kids or your grandkids, your also aware that they’re growing every day – and changing too. I have pictures of all my grandkids in my office and some of them look nothing like the way they look now.

Change is difficult if we like things the way they are. It’s disorienting. Things remain as they are only for short periods, short seasons; then, another season comes and we have to adjust.

Change can come with respect to our health, or our job, or our finances, or any number of things.

Change should be working in the life of every believer as we move into a deeper and deeper life with God as we advance toward spiritual maturity. As we do, we see things clearer. Where before we saw men walking as trees, now we see things more clearly.

But I think the most challenging kind of change to navigate is in relationships. Someone we love dies – and it's a milestone. There's 'before' dad died and 'after' dad died. We have a conflict with a family member and things cannot be reconciled, or so it would seem. And there's a sadness that pervades each day lurking in the background of our lives. Somethings not right and we know it.

We want things to be like they were before, but they're not. And when we've done all that we can to fix it, we have to give it to the Lord. But that's much harder to do than it sounds. And the degree of hurt and difficulty is directly related to the amount of love we have for that person.

Change.

3) The wisest man who ever lived (**1 Kings 3:12**) wrote:

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace”
(**Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**).

So, one day you're rushing to the hospital to welcome a new baby into your family; the next day you're dressing in black and going to a funeral. One change feels good; the other hurts.

If you're in a time of laughing, enjoy it! Because God's Word promises that a crying time is somewhere ahead.

If your nation is at peace, enjoy it; it will be at war again before you know it. And times of dancing can quickly turn to times of mourning.

To be human is to live through a continual rhythm of hellos and goodbyes. We're playing on the rug and before you know it, we're getting on a school bus for the first time. Mom (and maybe dad) is crying. Then, before long, we're leaving the house we grew up in and we're off to college, or the military, or we're moving to chase some career opportunity. Eventually, we're sitting down, reflecting, counting the cost, and trying to figure out how Medicare works.

And all along the way, there have been so many goodbyes! So many moments when we've had to let go of friends and family that we love in order to turn the page and begin the next chapter.

And do we ever get used to it? No.

- 4) Relationships are God's good gift to us, but, as with all things in the human experience, when things change it can hurt. Relationships can be interrupted by death, or sin, or misunderstanding, or distance – and that's what we're acknowledging together this morning.

The fact that our fellowship with Bob and Amelia and Dan – although they will remain fixed within our hearts – will be interrupted by distance, challenges us. Pretending that it doesn't make us sad doesn't make us more faithful; it only makes us dishonest.

No, saying goodbye is a fundamental part of what it means to be human, forcing us to juggle competing ideas like hope and loss, gratitude and sadness.

Saying Good-bye is Sad

1) But, sad goodbyes, as it turns out are VERY biblical things!

Paul had been in Ephesus for a long time. He'd planted the Church there, prayed with them, taught them, ministered to them and raised up some leaders among them. But now he was leaving.

There was work to do in other places – the call of the Gospel. Not only that, Paul was aware that great difficulties lay ahead of him and that he would never see their faces again. So, he gathered the leaders of the Church to say good-bye.

He said to them:

“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia [Minor, Turkey today], ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ²² And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

²⁵ And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert,

remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

³³ I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. ³⁵ In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

³⁶ And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

³⁷ And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, ³⁸ being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship" **(Acts 20:18-38)**.

Do you see all that emotion? Paul was a pillar in that local Church, just as Bob and Amelia and Dan have been – laboring in the Gospel, reaching for souls, rejoicing in the fellowship of the saints.

And guys, as you pack up and leave *Harvest* – at least geographically – I want you to know on behalf of this whole Body what your love and work and presence has meant to us.

You have all been an intricate part of the beautiful “tapestry of faith” (to steal a phrase) the Lord Himself has woven here at *Harvest*.

- 2) Well, Paul too had spent years pouring his heart and soul into the Church at Ephesus. But now, he was being called away.

But notice it: *Paul didn't run away from the sadness; he embraced it* – and so did his friends. He knelt to pray with them. Then they fell on his neck with tears and covered him with kisses.

The Berean Standard Translation has it: “Then there was much weeping among all, and having fallen upon the neck of Paul, they were kissing him.”

They're hearts were broken at the thought that they might not see him again. There was much weeping.

Paul didn't tell them to suppress their grief. He understood that grief is part of what it means to love one another and to be human. Together, they felt the weight of the moment, acknowledging the sting of their changing relationship.

They were holding two competing thoughts in a delicate balance: the sorrow of goodbye and the joy of the continuing work of God.

- 3) But this final meeting was not defined by sorrow alone – that would have been too much to bear! No, it was also about the work of God continuing. Did you catch all of that in the midst of the sorrow? Paul said ...

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

These instructions acknowledge that the work was to continue – and that the enemy would try to stop it! And so, he commissions them. He reminds them of the gospel. He encourages them to *stand firm*.

He knew that any act of leaving implies both a past and a future. A goodbye does not erase the past; in fact, it calls the past to mind so that a future is possible. It's a celebration of what has been built, and a launching pad into what is to come.

- 4) Saying goodbye reminds us of all that these dear saints have accomplished among us. How they've served Jesus by serving the Body and our unsaved neighbors. They leave behind big shoes to fill, but we have to remember that *the church is not built on its own strength*.

The Lord was faithful to accomplish the work through them and He will be faithful to see that it continues – just as Paul knew the work in Ephesus would continue.

So, we honor them as God's good gift to us, one that as enriched us in many ways. But we also look to the opportunities to serve that will be created by their absence and wait eagerly to see who the Lord will raise up to fill them.

And so off they go with all blessings of God's people – and we promise to always hold you in our hearts. We know the Lord will use them in the new community to which their going. And the bond that we have in Christ will never be broken.

Miles are nothing to the Holy Spirit! And the same God who has knit our hearts together will go with them and stay with them. He is the Lord of the Church they're leaving, and the one they're going to.

Why it's Hard to Say Good-bye

1) So, yes, saying goodbye is sad, and let me tell you why it's so sad.

It's sad because of love. It's sad because *Harvest* is a real Church family. If we weren't, it wouldn't hurt.

If my postman moves a way, I wouldn't be sad. Not that I don't like him, he's a great guy, but I don't know him well enough to be sad that he's leaving. A postman is a person in my neighborhood. A member of *Harvest* is a person in my family.

We're sad when people have to leave because they're a part of us – friends, family, co-laborers in Christ. We only grieve for those we love deeply—for those who have shared our burdens, sang songs with us, prayed for us, laughed at our joys, and comforted us in our trials.

From the moment Amelia, Bob and Dan walked into *Harvest*, they engaged in the work of service. They been around a long time. They've walked with us through the valleys and rejoiced with us on the mountain tops. They've all brought the spirit of grace and have touched many people with the Lord's love. That's why saying goodbye is so daunting.

But I know that **Psalm 121:8** is true of you and it's true of us: "The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore." God is *going* with you and He's *staying* with us – that's a pretty neat trick, don't you think? The same God who has been your anchor here at *Harvest* is already waiting for you at your new home.

You are not losing connections; you're expanding them. In that we rejoice.

As for us, we can't let ourselves become consumed by a sense of loss or else we'll miss the opportunity to celebrate what God is doing in this season of change.

Our hearts ache because of the profound love God has set within our hearts for those we love. But we need to say, 'Lord, how thankful we are for relationships strong enough to make us sad!'

Saying Good-bye is Hopeful

1) One last thing – something that is distinctively Christian.

We have another important goodbye recorded for us in the pages of Scripture. This one is a LONG goodbye. It encompasses all of **John 13, 14, 15** and **16!**

Jesus was saying goodbye to His disciples. He had a lot to teach them because – as with Paul at Ephesus – the work would have to continue in His absence. And so, He said (**John 14:1-6**):

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”

Here Jesus was preparing them for change, for temporary separation. But that's the thing! For believers ALL separation is temporary! And so, Jesus gave them the ultimate comfort: that even when we must say goodbye to one another on earth, that separation is never forever.

Even when we say goodbye to the saints on earth by death we are not really saying “Goodbye” but saying, “See you later.” In the family of God there are no real ‘ends’; there are only transitions.

Life is short, and none of us know how many days we have left to journey with the people we love. And so, we join hands and look back with hearts full of gratitude for the blessings we've received together. And then we turn and look to the beautiful horizon of *all God is about to do*.

- 2) Paul ended his 2nd letter to the Thessalonians by saying, “Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all” (**2 Thessalonians 3:16**).

We have to resist the temptation of thinking Paul was just writing some generic benediction to close out his letter. You know, like we might close a letter, “I love you and miss you much. Hope to see you soon.” Above All, Paul desired that all believers would have peace in their lives, whether he was with them or not. Paul often prayed that his fellow believers would have peace “at all times in every way” – and he also knew that that peace only ever comes when we're aware that the Lord is with us.

So, this morning we say more than goodbye to Bob and Amelia and Dan. We say, “Thank you! And may “the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all” (**2 Thessalonians 3:16**).

Let's pray:

Bob and Amelia, Dan, may the Lord bless you in all you do and make His face shine upon you. May He be a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path. May the relationships you build in the days ahead be as rich as the ones you've formed here – and may your new home be a place of abundant joy and peace. Thank you for loving us. Thank you for being our family. Heavenly Father, we thank You for the incredible gift that these wonderful saints have been to this Church. We are grateful for the memories we've shared, the love we've exchanged, and the ways You've worked through them during their time here. As they prepare to move away, we ask that You go before them. Protect their journey, settle them into their new homes, and open doors of opportunity for them to serve and be blessed and a blessing. Though we are separated by miles, may we remain always be united in the precious Holy Spirit. Strengthen them, guide them, and fill them with Your joy. We ask all these things in the Name of the Victorious One Jesus.

Amen.