

Great Commission People (Part II)

Romans 15:14-33

Romans 15. We continue our studies in **Paul's magisterial epistle.** (Pray)

What would we lose if we didn't have the book of Romans?

- **Some things we'd hardly know at all & some things we wouldn't know as well .**
 - What Paul says about general revelation in creation, human sexuality, the human conscious, how the cross satisfied the justice of God, the place of Israel in redemptive history, and the role governing authorities - these are a sampling of the subjects that Paul either **uniquely** or **more fully** articulates in this book.
- We also wouldn't have the "**great 8**" – (Romans chapter 8: life in the Spirit, adoption, suffering and glory, the Spirit's intercession, God working all things together for our good, and the fact that nothing can separate us from God's love).
- We wouldn't have great "**therefores**" of **5:1**, **8:1**, and **12:1**.

We should thank God for this book. We will study it for the rest of our lives.

- In addition to these important things, in Romans we find **precise details related to Paul's specific calling and strategy for world evangelism** and **church planting**, which we find here at the end of **Romans 15**.

Perhaps you've seen articles or books on "**100 Places to see before you die.**" (I'm always discouraged knowing I'll never complete the list... "**maybe I can do 2-3 of these...** I've been to Rome, Ga, no need to go to Italy. I've been to London, KY. Who needs the U.K.!)

Paul lists three places he plans to visit **3 places before he dies**: first to **Jerusalem**, then to **Rome**, and from Rome to **Spain**. He's writing in **Corinth** so Jerusalem is in the **wrong direction! It's a two thousand mile detour!** But he's not on a **vacation**; he's on **mission**.

- His travels required **risk** and **resolve**.
- His life was in **danger** constantly.
- His travel was **strenuous**. Stott calculations (by ship):
 - (1) Corinth to Jerusalem = **800 miles**.
 - (2) Jerusalem to Rome = **1500 miles**.
 - (3) Rome to Spain = **700 miles**. Total: **three thousand miles by ship**.

His travels reveal something of his **missionary heart**, and what it means **to be GC people**.

Last week we looked at Romans 15:14-21, and I gave you 4 Directives:

1. **Be part of a healthy, gospel-centered church.**
2. **See life and ministry through the lens of worship.**
3. **Remember that ministry fruitfulness is the result of divine enablement.**
4. **Have the right kind of ambition: one driven by the gospel and a heart for people.**

Today I want to add 4 more directives from verses 22-33.

Paul and the Mission of God (Isaiah 66:18-23)

Before giving them to you, I want you to observe something important in this whole section: ***The Mission of God***. While this passage focuses on Paul's **personal** mission, and the way in which the Christians in Rome can **support** his mission, **this text also reminds us of the fact that our God is a missionary God**.

- God will give the Son the nations as an inheritance. (Ps 2)
- **Many believe that Paul's missionary journeys are a fulfillment of Isaiah 66.**
 - We looked at Paul's burden from Isaiah 52:15 last week, but there are many **other echoes of Isaiah in this book**, including Isaiah 66.
- Paul is speaking of continuing his mission to **Spain**, having traveled from Jerusalem to Illyricum already, proclaiming the gospel and planting churches (**Illyricum** is modern day **Albania** [NW of Greece]).
- Scholars have speculated what other plans Paul may have had beyond Spain.
- While that's unknown, **Paul's entire missionary enterprise seems to have been motivated by Isaiah to some degree, who spoke of the coastlands and islands hearing about our God.**

Here's Isaiah's itinerary, prophesied some 700 years before the birth of Christ:

Isaiah 66:18-23

¹⁸ "For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming **to gather all nations and tongues**. And they shall come and shall see my glory, ¹⁹ and I will set a sign among them. And from them **I will send survivors to the nations**, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, **to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory**. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. ²⁰ And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations **as an offering to the LORD**.... ²¹ And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.

²² "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make [**the creation groans for that; we groan for that**] shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain.

²³ From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD.

18: God's plan for the nations to worship Him

19: He will send survivors (missionaries) to the distant coastlands (v. 19), a people who haven't heard:

- **Tarshish (probably modern Spain)**
- **Pul (maybe another spelling of Put, which was Libya)**
- **Lud (ancient Lydia in modern Turkey)**
- **Tubal (in modern Turkey)**
- **Javan (Greece)**

To Isaiah these represented the **remotest places on earth**.

Isaiah foresaw it; Paul launched it; we now participate in it!

20: The same language as Romans 15: “they shall bring your brothers from all the nations, as an *offering to the Lord.*” (see Rom 15:16)

21: Isaiah speaks of the Gentiles/nations becoming “**priests,**” they will carry out the calling of Israel as those who worship and offering sacrifices to God, as the people of God.

22-23 – The glorious promise of the future – a renewed world. God will be praised, and every promise will come true.

I think it’s likely that Paul had Isaiah in mind.

- Even if he didn’t, one thing is clear from Isaiah: **God has always had a plan to gather believers from among the nations.**
- The Great Commission doesn’t start in Matthew 28.

You and the Mission of God

The question for every Christian is **How will I participate in God’s mission?**

Christopher J.H. Wright:

We ask, “Where does God fit into the story of my life?” when the real question is, “Where does my little life fit into the great story of God’s mission?”

People who have a holy ambition seek to align themselves with the mission of God for the glory of God.

More Directives for Great Commission People

These particular points involve us mainly *supporting* those in the front lines of missional engagement.

- **Piper, “In one sense, Romans is a missionary support letter.”**

We must all be involved with making disciples **locally**, but some, as we said last week, will go to distant places to make worshipers, and **we must support them.**

- **We have many opportunities locally:**
 - **Sarah Beth: Cedar Point Apartments: Opportunities abound to make disciples among the nations two miles from this building! (180 apartments, 80% refugees). Just two miles from our building! [Table in the Foyer]**
 - **A place of contrasts: many wealthy, unbelievers all around us...**
- **We have many who are overseas.**
 - **“I will go down [to the pit] if you hold the rope”** said William Carey to a band of brothers.
 - **Faithful supporters are good rope-holders.**

We must not underestimate the importance of financial, relational, and prayer support – which this text speaks of.

#5: Support the work of church planting (15:19-24)

Notice Paul's church **planting strategy**...

19-21: It involved **frontier evangelism** and **church planting**.

- from Jerusalem to Illyricum, preaching where Christ was not named.

22: Because Paul has been all about this work of frontier evangelism and church planting, **he hasn't been able to get to Rome yet.**

23: But now he has **"no more work to do"** in these areas.

- Of course, **there was work to do there!**
- **Though Paul's work on the Eastern Mediterranean was heroic and fruitful, still only a small number of congregations existed.**
- There were **many more people in need of the gospel.**
- Paul told Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim 4:5) in **that same region!**

But we should remember **Paul's unique strategy:** preaching the gospel to unreached people and **establishing churches in major, influential cities:** **Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Athens.**

- **Paul believed that by focusing on these influential cities, you would also then reach the outlying areas.**
- **Example: Acts 19-20.** Paul ministers Ephesus for about three years, and from there, Epaphras is converted (Acts 19:10) and goes back to Colossae, shares the gospel, and eventually a church is established.

Acts 19:8-10

⁸ And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 20:31 adds that he was there a total of **"three years"**)

Notice that **"all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord."** (19:10)

- Paul's work in Ephesus was probably the reason churches would exist in not only Colossae but **Laodicea**, and **Hierapolis** as well.
- Paul had a plan. He trusted in God, but he had a plan.

(This strategy is still important for today; but I don't think it is absolute as some make it to be. With globalization and technology and travel accessibility, I think it's possible to influence the world from small towns and mid-size cities. With that said, we must be intentional about Planting in major cities, **for there's more imago dei per square inch than anywhere else!** We should not be "city negative" but "city positive").

Having followed this city-to-city pattern, Paul believes it's time to move to a new influential area: **Spain**.

- Schreiner says that Paul was about 60 years old at this time!
- Not: "There's nothing more for me to do, let's move to FL and pick up shells!" No!
- He may have even had to learn Latin at age 60!
- Example: My friend Joel.

Spain was ripe for new work, but it was very different for Paul.

- It was more **remote** than the other places he had ministered.
- It was also a **Latin** speaking area, not Greek speaking.
- And it seems to have had next to **no Jewish presence**.
- But he's determined to go to this distant coastland.

V. 24: Church Planting Support:

- Paul wants the Romans to support his work of church planting.
- He wants them to be his new home base.
- He wants to be "**helped**" ("**assisted**") by the Romans on his journey to Spain.
- Notice verses **28-29** – he hopes to leave from there for Spain.
- "**Support**" or "assistance" would have certainly involved **money**, and probably **some Latin translators**, and **a place to retreat** if things go badly (Bird).

Application: How you can support the work of church planting

General Budget: Over **200K** per year goes to **ministry and missions**.

- Of that 200K, Over **40K to CP** (Indirect funding for mission)
- Of that 200K, **\$100K goes to goes to IDC Plants, the Lebles, A29**

IMB Special Offering = An additional **10-12K per year**.

- We have 9 units with the IMB currently and 4 that will leave in Sept.
- And by January we will have about 20.

Direct support to our planters is also an option (DC and Baltimore and Utah, Dennis in Kenya, Stephen in Frankfurt, etc)

Support the work of training church planters (Jay's work in India, A29 school, seminaries, helping spread the word about training events, etc).

Look for other opportunities.

#6: Support the work of mercy ministry (15:25-27)

Paul has not been able to get to Rome because of his pioneer work in other regions, and now, he adds another hindrance, in somewhat of a parenthesis: he is going first to Jerusalem **bringing (diakonon) aid** to the poor saints there (cf., Acts 11:28).

- This act of mercy had been **a long-cherished project for Paul**.
- He had been organizing a collection for the saints in Jerusalem from the churches of **Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia**. (See 1 Cor 16:1-5; 2 Cor 8:1-24).

- So Paul isn't asking the church in Rome to participate in it, but he does highlight **the example of the churches of Macedonia and Achaia: Thessalonians, Philipians, and the Corinthians.**
- They are “**contributing**” - the word is *koinonia*, fellowshiping, partnering)

So we find an important pattern churches doing mercy ministry

- These churches are known for **generosity and compassion**, and Paul wants to spur the Romans on to the same kind of generosity and compassion.

Notice 4 quick applications about the example of these (mainly Gentile) churches:

1. We should give out of a basic commitment to the poor. (26)

- “the poor saints in Jerusalem.”
- Paul is fulfilling a promise made in **Galatians 2:10**, “remember the poor.”
- **Galatians 6:10**: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Bless both believers and unbelievers as you have opportunity.”
 - The Bible gives us a picture of generosity and financial support for ministers/missionaries (Gal 6:6; 1 Cor 9:11-14; 1 Tim 5:18; Phil 4:10ff) the church (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32ff; Rom 12), and the poor (Ps 41:1-3; Prov 14:21, 19:17; Acts 20:35; 1 Tim 6:17-18).
- Paul reminded the **Corinthians, concerning this particular effort to care for the poor, that God would supply all of their needs as they participate in this offering, and that it would result in glory to God**: “You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.” (2 Cor 9:11-12)

2. We should give cheerfully (26-27)

- “they were pleased” to do it (twice). They get to give!
- This too reflects **2 Corinthians 9**: “God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7).
- Many of those in Macedonia were not wealthy (2 Cor 8:1-5):

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

8 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, **2** for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. **3** For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, **4** begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— **5** and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

That's an amazing testimony! Affliction + poverty = abundance of joy and wealth of generosity. How? Grace.... And total commitment first to God himself.

3. We should give to magnify the fruit of the gospel in our lives (27b)

- Paul says the Gentile churches “owe it” to the Jerusalem saints.
- **And that** “if the Gentiles have come to share in their **spiritual blessings** (the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, and the fulfillment of God’s promises), they ought to be of service to them in material blessings.”
- **One of the ways we display the fruit of the gospel in our hearts, is through in generous giving.**

4. We should give to demonstrate our unity in Christ (27)

- Paul’s gift was more than charity; it was about unity.
- This gift represented unity with ethnic diversity.
- **The Gentiles gift to the Jews was a sign that they were family; the Jewish Christians acceptance of the gift was a sign of family.**
- This gift was a symbol of the long awaited promises of Scripture of the Gentiles being part of the people of God – not just in right relationship to God, but also in relationship to Jewish believers.
- We should do all we can to build bridges, and show how the gospel brings us together across ethnic lines.

Ways to Participate in the Work of Mercy Ministry

- **Immediate Need:** Harvey Relief
- **Ongoing Ministries:** 127 & IGP (you can give direct though they’re in our budget), Micah Fund, Adoption Fund

#7: Refresh those on the front lines (15:28-29; 32)

- **Up in verse 24,** Paul speaks of “**enjoying the company**” of the Romans.
- **In verse 29,** he adds, “I know that when I come to you I will come in **the fullness of the blessing of Christ.**”
- **And verse 32,** after requesting prayer he says, “so that by God’s will I may come to you with **joy and be refreshed in your company.**”

Clearly Paul doesn’t envision a sending church to be this kind of mechanical business deal.

- He isn’t using the Romans.
- He wants there to be **relational support.**
- **Remember how he began the letter:** “For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— that is, that we may be **mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.**” (Rom 1:11-2)
- **He hopes to be an encouragement to them, and the Romans to him.**

This is one way we can support those on the front lines, through relational refreshment.

- **Piper: “God loves to refresh his people through his people.”**
- **Paul mentioned Onesiphorus doing this for him elsewhere:** “May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.” (2 Tim 1:16).

One of the greatest challenges of being a missionary is lacking community.

- **The next time someone says, “I don’t have community,” I’d like to take you to a few of our missionaries, and show you what a lack of community looks like!**
- **You are surrounded by it. It may not be the community you wish you had; or the community you used to have, but you have Christian community. You have Christians all around you!**
- **Some of our folks don’t know of any believers out of a people group of about 15 million!**

Paul did get to Rome, and was refreshed, but not the way he anticipated!

- You can read **Acts 20-28** and find out how Paul got to Rome!
- It wouldn’t take months, but **years**. He would get there as a **prisoner**.

Acts 28:11-15:

¹¹ After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. ¹² Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. ¹³ And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. ¹⁴ There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵ And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage [was encouraged]. ¹⁶ And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

Let us refresh one another!

Let us refresh those in leadership; those overseas on the front lines!

Application: How to Refresh Those on the Front Lines

- **Personal Visits (these are our primary mission trips)**
- **Communicating via technology**
- **Advocacy teams – if you have interest, email Nate...**
- **Practice hospitality**

#8: Pray for those on the front lines (15:30-33)

Finally, Paul asks the church to strive together in prayer for him.

This is a wonderful little paragraph on prayer.

7 Challenges

1. See prayer as a privilege (30).

- Notice how **Trinitarian** this prayer is: “by the Lord Jesus,” “love of the Spirit” “to God”

- Prayer is conversation with the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.
- It is a gift of grace that we can commune with God.
- It is a privilege to call one another “brother and sister.”

2. Pray is an expression of love. (30b)

- “love of the Spirit” – that is **the love that comes from the Spirit**.
- **The logic:** (a) If you are a Christian, then you have the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9); (b) if you have the Spirit, then you will love (Rom 5:5; Gal 5:16ff); and (3) if you love, you will pray.
- **You manifest your love for others on your knees, not just in acts of service and words of edification.**

The first reaction to those in ministry leadership and those on the front lines in mission isn't to be their **critic**; it isn't to first **assess them**; it's **to intercede for them**.

3. Pray passionately and persistently (30c) “I appeal to you...” “strive together with me”

- Paul doesn't simply say, “Hey, pray for this and that.”
- He says “**agonize**” in prayer with me.
- “**Pray until you've prayed**” is an old Puritan line.

4. Pray for those on the front lines to be spared & for their work to be acceptable (31-32).

Paul mentions two dangers: one from without and one from within.

- **That he will be rescued from unbelieving Jews in Judea.**
 - Many hated Paul and considered him a traitor.
 - In Acts 20:2-3, they plot to kill him!
 - Acts 21: Some of his friends urged him not to go to Jerusalem; but Paul said he was willing to die there. It was a real threat.
- **That the collection would be acceptable to the Jewish Christians.**
 - He didn't assume this would be the case, given the antagonism that existed.
- These are still two essential prayers for those in ministry leadership: **(1) to be spared persecution from outsiders, and (2) for insiders to receive their ministry.**
 - The greatest problems Paul faced were not from **outsiders** but **insiders**. (Carson)
 - The hardest things ministry leaders face are usually from those on the inside.

5. Pray knowing that God may not answer your prayers the way you envision! (31-32)

- From the book of Acts, those requests were answered, but one of them was not how Paul imagined!
- Regarding the **gift**, according to **Acts 24:17**, it appears the gift was received.
- Regarding the threat of **persecution**, Paul was actually kept safe ... **by being sent off to prison!**
 - Some say the prayer wasn't answered, but it was – just **very unusually**.
 - The Roman Tribune rescued Paul from death. That's how Paul was kept safe!

God often answers our prayers in the way we don't expect!

- Sometimes the journey is much different than we imagine.
- Sometimes he doesn't change the situation; he simply gives more grace (2 Cor 12).
- **32:** On the way to Rome, Paul would be **nearly lynched, almost assassinated, kept in prison unfairly, shipwrecked, and snake bitten!**

6. Pray not just for the immediate needs, but for long term vision (32)

- Paul's prayer doesn't stop with the immediate need of going to Jerusalem.
- He prays with vision – **to go on to Rome and find refreshment.**

It's certainly good and right to pray for the immediate: the next worship service, sermon, meeting, etc; **but expand your horizons to where it may lead.**

- Pray that the sermon may have a ripple effect for years to come....that this message that is emphasizing missions, may create a missional passion for our young people, and for older people to be renewed in vision as well...
- Don't limit your prayers to the narrow, immediate, short term.
- Jesus Christ is risen from the dead – He will build His church, so pray with vision!

33: A prayer of blessing from the **God of Peace.**

- That's the refreshment we all need.

Summary Application on Prayer:

There's a time to refresh those on the front lines, and a time to wrestle in prayer for those on the front lines (32-33).

- Let's refresh one another, and let us pray for one another!
- Let's pray for those in leadership and engaged in mission.
 - **Believe that God answers prayer!**
 - Paul thinks prayer really makes a difference!
 - **Pray for the physical safety and well-being of those on the front lines.**
 - They can't stay in the country if they're not healthy.
 - Pray for their children, marriages, etc. (School just started back for some kids; cross cultural schooling can be quite stressful).
 - **Pray that their ventures will be successful.**
 - Paul is praying that his mission to Jerusalem would be a success.
 - **Pray that the word would "run and be glorified."**
 - "Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, ² and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith." (2 Thess 3:1-2)
 - Above all, Paul wants to make the gospel known, and so we pray for the hearts of those who will hear the gospel.
- Get prayer cards
- Pray in small groups // pray with Sunday Am prayer (prayer@idcraleigh.com)
- Pray with your kids

James Fraser (1886-1938) was accomplished concert pianist and honors student in engineering at the University of London. He left those career opportunities to be a missionary to the Lisu peoples in western China. He was particularly known for his emphasis on prayer. He said this:

We do our part, and then can only look to him, with others, for his blessings.... I believe it will only be known on the last day how much has been accomplished in missionary work by the prayers of earnest believers at home.”
(James Fraser, Prayer of Faith, 11).

May this vision of the nations worshiping the Savior spur us on to mission today.

We know where history is heading, and let's align our lives with this great mission:

9 And they sang a new song, saying,
“Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.” (Rev 5:9-10)

I don't know how many cool places you see *before you die*.

But you definitely should make preparations to see this place *when you die*.

To see this One who was slain for the nations; who will rule and reign forever in the New Heavens and New Earth.