

## Proclaiming the Gospel, Part 2

### Romans 15:14-33 (ESV)

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*14 I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. 15 But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. 17 In Christ Jesus then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. 18 For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, 19 by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; 20 and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, 21 but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.”*

*22 This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 23 But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, 24 I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. 25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. 27 For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in their material blessings. 28 When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. 29 I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.*

*30 I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. 33 May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

A commercial pilot was flying passengers from New York to Los Angeles, and he came across this great span of central Illinois. As he was flying over, he pointed to his co-pilot and said, “See, down there? Way down there. Do you see those tiny little lakes? I grew up in that area. And as a young boy, I would go out in a little boat on one of those lakes and I would look up in the sky and see these huge jetliners that were flying. And I would say, “One day, I’m going to fly one of those jetliners, and then life will be great.” And he said, “Now, after 20 years of flying, I look down there and I think, ‘Wouldn’t it be great to be in one of those little boats, fishing?’” (Laughter!)

We are fickle regarding what we think the good life is. The good life is only one step away, and once we get there, it's somewhere else. And before long, we may even end up where we started. How about you? What dreams make you think that if they were fulfilled, life would be great? Perhaps it's the dream of flying planes. Perhaps it's the dream of fishing on uncharted rivers. Perhaps you're young and you think, "I'd love to have a big family someday." Perhaps you think, "I'd love to own my own company. I'd love to play on the World Cup Soccer Championship team. I'd love to play the piano in front of a huge audience, in some amazing concert hall. I dream of building skyscrapers." Perhaps you dream of learning dozens of languages or finding the cure for cancer. All of these dreams are noble if we do not think that in them alone we will find purpose. None of these things satisfy our longing for meaning if God is not the center. Meaning, purpose, significance in life flows only from God and is found only in Him. I love what the prophet Jeremiah says. He writes:

**Jeremiah 9:23** Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches,

None of those things provide significance where we can boast, "Yes, I've found purposeful life."

**Jeremiah 9:24** but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness...

When we understand and know God, we hear God's call to worship Him. We hear the call of Romans 12:1.

**Romans 12:1** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

We receive the gift of being part of God's mission when we enter in to the grace of God for salvation. And that's a mission that never loses its luster.

Today we open up our Bibles to Romans 15 where we discover that the good life focuses on Christ's mission. The good life invests zealously in the mission of Christ. That's the significant work that lasts from now into eternity. And that mission is simply proclaiming the Gospel and strengthening His church in discipleship. It's making disciples wherever we go.

When Jesus calls us to follow Him, He first calls us to receive His grace, to receive gifts—the gift of spiritual life, the gift of a new heart, the gift of His Spirit to indwell us, the gift of adoption into His family, the gift of a room in His Father's house forever, the gift of an eternal inheritance with Christ. The Gospel is an offering of grace. It is an offer of a gift; a magnificent, eternal gift. And we receive this gift, the gift of salvation, through faith alone in Christ alone. We do not work for this gift. We cannot earn this gift. We cannot attain this gift. We cannot build this gift. We cannot deserve this gift.

Because God's salvation is by grace and by grace alone, this does not mean that works have no part in the life of a Christian. With the free gift of salvation, God gives us another good gift, and that is the gift of meaningful work; meaningful, productive labor that is fruitful now and into eternity. God designed us to connect to work in such a way that we would enjoy what is produced by the labor of our hands. And He provides us a kind of work that is so significant that its value never ever fades. It never diminishes.

Paul began this Roman letter by announcing his zeal for the work of Christ, the work of proclaiming Jesus as Lord to the ends of the earth. And he ends this letter by reflecting upon the work that God has given him and the work that is yet in front of him.

**Romans 1:15** So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

He has not been to Rome yet. And he says, "I'm eager to do this work as well. I want to come to this precious church and I want to share with you even more of the Gospel that God has revealed to me; more of who Jesus is and more of what He's done on our behalf." He says, "While I know that when I preach the Gospel there's going to come hard times and sufferings against me. I may even be imprisoned. I may be beaten. I may ultimately even die for this. I want you to know that I'm so enthused by the value of this work, that I'm not ashamed of the gospel, and I'm going to continue to proclaim it because in the Gospel, the power of God is unleashed to bring salvation to everyone who believes it."

There's no work like this. There's no other labor that we could participate in that is more meaningful and more significant than the work of ministry of Christ through the Gospel. Significance in our lives flows from working for our Lord Jesus with faith and zeal. God created each of us to live lives of eternal significance. In order to connect us to eternal significance, He gives us an eternal work that would glorify God in this world.

There is an important observation as we think about the work of Gospel ministry. Some people have the foolish idea that God primarily uses pastors, missionaries and full-time ministers for the work in His field. And I tell you, the vast majority of God's workers do not make Gospel work their vocation. God designs for most of His workers to worship Him as they engage in vocations of carpentry, nursing, painting, teaching, child care, engineering, investing, selling, farming, cleaning, security and hundreds of other vocations. God does not call every believer into vocational work of Gospel ministry, but God does call every believer to labor fully, all their lives, in the mission of Jesus. Remember that for the first 30 years of Jesus' life, Jesus worked with His hands as a carpenter. It's sacred, noble work.

The apostle Paul fulfilled the Father's will by working as a tentmaker while he was a missionary. Every vocation that is honest and productive is sacred to God. It's an act of worship before Him. No vocation is "secular" in the sense that it is disconnected from our worship of our Lord. I emphasize this as we talk about Christian workers, God's workers, because I want us to see that every one of us is called by God to engage and commit ourselves to the mission of Jesus. Most of us do this in ways that incorporate our

vocations; the vocations that are out there in the world, and not inside the church itself. All of us are called to this fantastic, meaningful, productive labor; the work of Jesus' mission.

So we open up our Bibles to Romans 15, and we are learning seven central qualities of a person who connects to Jesus' mission. We discovered the first three qualities last week. We discovered that God's workers are

### **1. Equipped by God for Gospel work. (15:14-15)**

God makes us adequate for the supernatural work. We're not adequate in ourselves, but God equips us. So let's be assured of that.

We also secondly learned that God's workers are

### **2. Zealous to worship God. (15:16-17)**

Our primary focus is not horizontal, how we're helping people. That's important, but that's not our primary focus. Our primary focus is we want to give praise to God. God is worthy of receiving adoration, acclaim, glory, honor to His name. We want to do something with this temporal life that God has given us, that would lift up a sacrifice of praise to God. That's our passion. That's our zeal.

And thirdly, God's workers are

### **3. Dependent on God's power. (15:18-19)**

Our own efforts are feeble, and frail. They will not accomplish anything of eternal value in themselves, but God loves to take feeble efforts of finite men and women and supernaturally infuse them with power to perform miracles through us. And we know that. That's what we believe.

So the fourth quality, we're going to pick up in Romans 15:20. And that is that God's workers are

### **4. Directed by God's plan. (15:20-24)**

We don't follow our own plan. We follow the Lord's.

*20 and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel...*

That's God's plan. It's the proclamation of the Gospel. Every one of us are ambassadors of Jesus. But for Paul, he says God's specific plan for me is

*20...not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation,*

So Paul's design was to go to Gentile cities where the Gospel had not been preached yet.

*21 but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."*

In this, Paul is simply following God's plan. It's a plan that God had ordained for Paul and set out clearly for Paul. He goes on to say

*22 This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.*

So, he had wanted to come and visit the saints in Rome many times, but the plan of God was not to go to a place where the Gospel had already been proclaimed. The plan of God was to go to other places. He says, "I couldn't go to Rome because the Gospel was already here. A church has already been established. And I was hindered by God's plan from coming to you because God had other places for me to go and preach the Gospel, to spend time with the people. This is the reason why I've been so often hindered from coming to you."

*23 But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions...*

In other words, "I've gone to every city that is in view up until I would get to Rome."

*23...and since I have longed for many years to come to you, 24 I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain...*

He says, "There is a place beyond Rome, yet west of Rome, called Spain. It's the farthest reaches of the known world. And I know God would have me go Spain. And so, I'm really excited because in between here where I am and Spain, is Rome, and I want to stop there. I want to spend some time with you for a while before I would travel on to Spain.

*24...and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.*

And then he says, "When I'm there, I'm asking that you would help me. I hope that you would help me on my journey to Spain and that you would participate in the work that I am going to do to take the Gospel to Spain."

Paul really wanted to visit this Roman church and fellowship with the believers there. Paul didn't intend to stay long in the city, but he hoped to use Rome sort of as a missions base from which to reach Spain with the Gospel. And as we see God's plan, we also see Paul's vision. We see Paul dreaming big dreams of what God would do through His work. He believed that God wanted him to plant churches in the farthest region of the known world. We don't know whether Paul realized the dream of reaching Spain. Some scholars think he did. Other scholars say, "No, we don't think he ever got to Spain." The point is not whether God allowed Paul to get to Spain or not. The point is that Paul was

dreaming about it. He had a sacred ambition. He wanted to do everything possible in order to fulfill God's work for Him; that God had set aside for him to do.

I want to encourage you to dream big for God's glory. What do I mean by that? I simply mean that we would ask God to use us to bring honor to His name in some significant way. It's that we wouldn't think so insignificantly as to not really give honor to God, but that we would say, "God, here I am. I'm willing to be used. Here's my five loaves and two fishes. However simple I am, I want to be used in some significant way to bring You glory." I believe that dreaming big for God and for His glory involves us praying three prayers. And this isn't a formula so much as it's a suggestion of how to pray to expand our vision of what God might do through us and in us as individuals, but also as a church.

1. Let's ask God to do something extraordinary through our lives that would promote His Name.

This doesn't mean big numbers. It doesn't mean hundreds or thousands or millions of people, but it means that we believe God is willing and able to do a supernatural work through us. Your big dream may be caring for a few foster children throughout your life and having an eternal significant impact on those few that live in your home for a certain amount of time. And impact generations to come as a result of stopping and considering, "What ambition do I have for doing something that would honor Christ Jesus?" Your dream may be to help young women have enough hope to keep them from aborting their babies. That's a huge dream! That's significant if you would be involved in that and God would actually use you in that way.

2. Let's ask God to do something that would transform the souls of people.

I think that's what it means to dream big for God. Again, this doesn't mean large numbers. I'm not talking about doing something where your name is up in lights or on some building. I don't think that's the kind of dream that Paul had. It's just that he had a heart that said, "I want to do something that would honor the Lord Jesus. And whatever that is, I'm going to think about it. I'm going to roll it through my heart and through my soul."

Your big dream may be to teach a Sunday School class to children. And you know that you're not just teaching a lesson and then finishing up after the lesson and saying, "See you next week." But you have a heart for these kids. You're not teaching lessons, you're teaching children. And you're praying over them. You know what's going on in their life. You call them up during the week, and after they graduate from your class, you stay in touch with them. You let them know that you care about their soul and you're feeding Gospel into their lives. And God uses you to make an eternal impact to bring salvation into the hearts of these little children. That's a huge dream! It's a big impact for the glory of Christ.

3. Let's ask God to do something that would grow prayer, righteousness and love in our own church.

God uses His church. He loves His church. Anything we do to strengthen her is something that is connected to eternal significance. Your dream may be starting a Mom's prayer group with other moms in the church. Your dream may be opening up your home to a few new families throughout the year just to say, "I just want to let people know that they're welcome into my life and I'm representing this church to welcome them into our church because people need Christ and they need people to share Christ in their lives. I just want to share my testimony. And I want to hear what's going on in your life. 'How can I pray for you?'"

We're not responsible for the outcomes of our labors. Paul would say some plant and some water. It's always the Lord that gives the increase. We don't create our own increase. It's always the Lord. But what Paul is doing is saying, "I have an ambition to think about planting. And others have an ambition to think about watering. And as we do that, we roll these dreams through our hearts and they become like a fire, like a burden in our lives. We are responsible to possess a heart that yearns to be greatly used of God. That's our responsibility. Our responsibility is not the outcome. That completely is in the hands of God and His sovereign grace. But our heart is to say, "Do I have a fire inside of me that says, "I want to be used of God to do something that would honor Him in a significant way"?"

Paul here says he was hindered from coming to Rome. It was the plan that God had ordained for Him that actually hindered him from coming and fellowshiping with brothers and sisters in Rome. There are two applications to draw from the way Paul made ministry decisions in following the plan of God.

Application #1: We are right to dream big in serving the Lord.

We dream about almost everything important to us. So, a single person dreams often about a future spouse and what that's going to be like. And then they get married and they dream about children. A person in college dreams about the career they're going to have. And once in a career, they dream about promotions. If you're an athlete in junior high or high school or college, you dream about championships that you might win. We dream about a new home that we might build. If you get into middle age, you're going to probably start dreaming about retirement and what that's going to be like. And what we mean by dreaming is that we think about it. We roll it through our soul with kind of a gladness, kind of a hope, kind of an anticipation; a future joy that we anticipate.

The question we ask ourselves as people who have been redeemed is: Do I dream that way of God's work? Do I wake up thinking about what God might do to use me to bring Him glory? As I go through the day, do thoughts pop into my head as I pray over those things? When I rest my head at night, are those the thoughts that really cause me to have great joy and enthusiasm? Is that part of my existence or is that something that sort of has just flat-lined and is really not part of our every day life? As people who are redeemed, we are a people who are loved by God and a people who are called to a work that is significant, that is powerful, that is eternally meaningful. And that is such an incredible, incredible gift!

William Carey, who was a missionary to India and he translated the Bible into over 40 languages, famously said this: “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.” I love that! Let’s look and say, “God, You’re a big God and You love to do the amazing supernatural work of life transformation through Your Gospel, and we expect that to happen and for me to be part of it. And then let me go out there and attempt that. Let me take action. Let me not just be passively sitting in a chair waiting for that to happen. Let me go out there and be involved in labor; sowing and watering and then watching You do something great with my small, meager efforts.” Friends, I believe the church needs people of holy ambition. That’s the Apostle Paul. May it be true of us!

Application #2: We can trust God’s leading in ministry during interruptions of our desires and plans.

So as we follow God’s plans, we may make out a three-year ministry plan. But guess what? God doesn’t read it. It’s great to make a three-year ministry plan about what you’d like to see happen in your life and through your life, in your church or through a Sunday school class, or whatever ministry you’re involved with. But God doesn’t read those things. We’re right to make plans, but then hold all of them loosely. Here’s what Proverbs 16:9 says.

**Proverbs 16:9** The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

It’s right to plan our way, but we realize that the Lord is the one who establishes our steps. Ministry for God almost never goes according to our plans. Interruptions in our plans are indications of God saying, “I’m in control. I’m behind the wheel. I’m directing the course according to My pleasure.” In ministry, there is never a series of unfortunate events that hinder God from doing His work through us. From our point of view, that might seem true. “God, if this wouldn’t have happened, then you could have done this.” God is never without power to do whatever He pleases to do. God’s delays and detours may be disruptive to us, but they are ordained from eternity past by God. So we should expect that God will divert us from our own plans at times. His detours may be health problems. His detours may be plane delays or relational problems. His detours may be financial problems, even world conflicts. Sometimes, his detours are through disagreements among brothers and sisters who should be getting along. But in all these things that are out of our control, we can trust Him!

For twenty-five years I’ve loved being a shepherd of this church. One of the great joys of being a shepherd is meeting so many godly people who are so passionate about the work of Christ and His mission. One of those was a woman named Christine Barrett. I think it was about 15 years ago that she went to heaven. She was in her late 80’s when she passed into Glory. But she was a woman who had a fire in her gut for the Gospel. She was actively involved in child evangelism all her life. One time, I remember as a young pastor, it was my first year of ministry. After church she came up and I was used to people saying nice, complimentary things about the sermons to help me along. She said, “Pastor, that was a great sermon, except there was no Gospel in it.” Oh! And I started

thinking, and she was right. I need to make sure I share the Gospel in the messages. And so, that was her passion.

One day I got a call. Christine was headed by ambulance to the ER. I got to the ER and I was there praying with her. She's in her late 80's. She said, "Pastor, the doctors are telling me that things might not be good and that I might not have long here." She shook her head at me and she said, "Pastor, I just can't believe that. I can't believe that's true." She said, "I know that God has so much more for me to accomplish still with my life here on earth. I can't believe He would take me home just yet." Now two weeks later, she was home in Glory. So God's plans were different from hers, but I loved her heart. That's the way I want to be. I want to be 88 years old, in the ER, and the thing I'm thinking about is "I have so much work to accomplish yet for Christ. I want to remain here so that I can complete what I think would bring Him honor and would bring Him glory." God's workers are also

### **5. Confident in God's blessing. (15:25-28)**

*25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints.*

So that's where Paul is headed now, from here.

*26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.*

The Christians in Jerusalem were really under stress and persecution. They needed material assistance. Their jobs were being eliminated. They were being imprisoned.

*27 For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings...*

Without the Jews, they wouldn't have had the Gospel because there would have been no Jesus.

*27...they ought also to be of service to them in their material blessings.*

That's Paul's logic.

*28 When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. 29 I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.*

You might underline that. He's very confident that as he follows God's will, as he is passionate about God's glory, as he is invested in the work of the Gospel, that Christ will bless this work. He knows that Jesus is with him. He knows that Jesus is still a miracle worker. He knows that his labor is not Paul's labor. He's not doing this for himself, for his own esteem. He's doing it to lift up the name of Christ. And he knows that Christ is

working through him. And he is as confident that Christ will bless the work that is being done through him, as he is confident that Christ would bless the work that He did when He was here on this earth in bodily form. He's just confident that's who Jesus is. He's a miracle worker. He loves to use weak instruments to do His pleasure. Later Paul is going to write in 1 Corinthians 15

**1 Corinthians 15:58** Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

That's an absolute truth. We never do anything for Christ that is empty or void of God's blessing. There may be a different kind of blessing than the one we had hoped, but there's always Christ's blessing. It's eternally fruitful. It's eternally meaningful. Paul never talked of triumphs that he accomplished through his own efforts or through his own talents. Instead, he talked of what Christ had done through him. Paul never says, "Hey! Look what I did!" He simply talked of Christ's blessing upon his life and work. All the glory belongs to Christ.

**Zechariah 4:6** Then he said to me, "...Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."

Beloved, we can be confident that God will use us if we simply present our bodies to Him. D.L. Moody was a young man. He went to a meeting, and this is a famous story. He heard a preacher say, "If only one man would give himself entirely and without reserve to the Holy Spirit, what the Spirit might do with such a man!" D.L. Moody walked home that night and he said, "God, may I be that man!"

Now, not all of us are D.L. Moody with that kind of talent, with that kind of spiritual gifting. But all of us could have that same fire and say, "God, by Your grace, let me be that man. Let me be that woman." Let's pray that God would bless the work of our hands, and pray believing, pray confidently that this is exactly what God does. God's workers are equipped by God for Gospel work. They're zealous to worship God. They're dependent on the Spirit's power. They are directed by God's plan. They are confident in God's blessing. And finally, they are

## **6. Reliant on community prayer. (15:29-33)**

*30 I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers...*

Underline that word. It's such a great picture of wrestling. It's striving not against each other, but striving with each other; wrestling against the forces of darkness together for the cause of the Gospel. And he's petitioning. He says, "I need your prayers! Brothers and sisters in Rome, pray for me as I'm about ready to go to Jerusalem. It's going to be bad out there. I know that. I've been anxious about it. Pray for me."

*30...strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea...*

He knows when he gets to Jerusalem, there are people already plotting to kill him. They've already tried to take his life, to assassinate him. And he's going back into the lion's den. He says, "Pray that when I get there, that they'll be unsuccessful. Pray for me. I need that. I need God's protection." He also says

*31...and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints...*

"Pray for unity in the church. These Jewish believers have a hard time fully embracing the Gentile believers and the Gentile churches that I'm planting. They have a hard time understanding how these Gentile Christians can honor God without fulfilling all the Jewish laws. And so pray that there will be unity in Jesus' church. There's a spiritual conflict inside that church as well. Pray that they'll accept this gift and that they'll do so with love from the Gentile church."

*32 ...so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.*

"Pray that I'll ultimately be able to get to Rome to be able to fellowship with you."

Paul sensed his own weaknesses. He sensed his own fears, and so he did what every Christian does. He calls on brothers and sisters to pray, because he knows that God hears prayers. God hears the intercessions of the saints, and He acts on the basis of intercession. We often have not because we ask not. So as you're involved in God's Kingdom work, work of the church, work of the Gospel, never be shy about asking other Christians to pray for you. Don't feel that that's selfish. It's the most unselfish thing in the world to ask other people to pray for you and your needs, especially to pray as you're involved in the work of Christ. When asking for prayer, you are asking for a gift that will bring spiritual strength to the giver. There are three key truths about intercessory prayer that we learn.

Truth #1: Intercessory prayer makes us active laborers in another's work for Christ.

I love that word "striving together." It's the word, agonize. "Agonize with me. Join with me in the service. I'm agonizing as I'm preparing to do the service. Won't you agonize with me? You're joining me. You're part of my work. You're participating in the honor of Christ through prayer. I know you can't go to Jerusalem; not all of you can. You have to stay back in Rome. But I'm going, and won't you go with me through prayer, and participate?" It's through intercessory prayer that we become participants, active laborers in others' work for Christ. Paul says "please engage in this way. Come alongside of me. The enemy is strong. It's easy to get discouraged. Pray for me!"

Truth #2: God's workers need the prayers of the saints to be fruitful.

James would say the prayer of a righteous man is effective and powerful (James 5:16). He also says we have not because we ask not. Prayer is God's sovereignly appointed

means to accomplish His will. It's His sovereignly appointed means to affect outcomes, to change the course of men's hearts, to even move the hearts of kings. And when we engage in intercessory prayer, two fruits are always born. One, it transforms the heart of the one praying. As we pray for others, our hearts are also ignited with a zeal for God's glory. Just simply through prayer. Secondly, it secures God's blessing upon the life and the work of the person that we care about, that we love, and says that we're interested in their service for Christ.

Truth #3: God always answers prayer, but perhaps not in the way we expect.

That's a very important principle. So let's assume that the saints in Rome prayed for Paul as he is making his journey to Jerusalem. What might we assume would happen then, as God heard the prayers of the saints at Rome on behalf of Paul, as they're striving together with him in prayer? What might Paul's experience be in Jerusalem? We might assume that he gets there and all the attempts to harm him come to fruitless vanity, emptiness. Paul is comforted. The saints receive him with great joy. Everything goes great, and Paul leaves with a heroes welcome as he leaves the city after his visit. We might expect that, but that's not what happened. That's not what happened at all!

If we read Acts 21-23, what we find is that an angry mob of Jewish unbelievers attacked Paul. They wanted to take his life. The Roman guards rush in and secure him. Then Paul is tried and he's found guilty and he's imprisoned. Paul appeals to Caesar, and in chains, they load him up on a ship to send him to Rome. And on that ship, there is a shipwreck where everyone should have died. The ship's captain thought for sure everyone was going to die. Paul said, "No. The Holy Spirit told me that everyone's going to be rescued." But he's shipwrecked and he's on this island of Crete for some time. And when he does make it to Rome, he's not free to go around visiting the church in their houses and just fellowshiping and having dinners with them and going to prayer meetings. He's in prison. That's what happened.

So did God answer prayer? And I say, yes. He answered it not in the way perhaps the people who were praying envisioned God might, or maybe even wanted God to do. But He did it sovereignly and supernaturally for the greatest effect of His glory. He protected Paul. He didn't allow those who wanted to kill him to be successful in killing him. He kept his life. He allowed Paul to continue to be a great Gospel ambassador among the prisoners and among the Roman guards all along the way until he got to Rome. And there, He also protected Paul so that Paul would get to Rome and that Paul would be able to fellowship with this church, and even reveal an example to the precious church of what it means to live for Christ in the midst of hardship and persecution and trial.

Let us pray for one another. God loves to hear us call out on behalf of one another, especially as we're engaged in Christ's work. And the last observation we'd make about God's workers is that they're

## **7. Bold with God's message. (15:29-33)**

And really, that's the whole spirit of this whole paragraph. It's Paul's boldness. And he calls us not to be shy, not to be timid. He doesn't call us to be a different kind of personality, but whatever personality we have, use that and press courage into it. Press boldness into it so that when people walk through the sphere and the circle of your life, they hear about Christ. Some are soft-spoken and some are loud and boisterous. Some are very calm and reserved and some wave their arms and get really excited. He doesn't ask us to change our personality, but whatever personality God has invested, He calls us to be bold with the Gospel, to be able to say with Paul, "This is the most significant work that is possible in all of life and I want to be part of it."

**Romans 1:15-16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

There are two takeaways at the end.

1. Without Jesus Christ, we have no life. We will never find purpose until we embrace Jesus as the Life Giver and Savior. God's Word says

**Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

This salvation is a gift of God, and God offers it to you and to me. He says it's not earned through works, otherwise, you'd be able to boast about salvation. But it's a gift that you receive through faith. Once we receive this free gift, we're His workmanship. We're created in Christ Jesus for good works. And God prepared these works for us beforehand to enjoy, so that we would live our lives in meaningful, significant labor for Christ. If you do not have Christ as your Savior, you cannot have purpose and meaning. Jesus says, "I've come that you might have life and might have it to the full." Won't you embrace it?

2. With Christ Jesus, we have life. We have it abundantly. Let's live our lives to complete the joyful works that He has given to us. It is in this that our lives are never wasted. It is in this that our life is made full.