
“Hands On The Rope, Striving In Prayer”

ROMANS 15:22-33

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AT A GLANCE

Paul was a man consumed with the glory of Christ. His ambition was not for personal success or comfort, but to see Christ magnified where He had not yet been named. And yet, Paul understood something that we, too, must grasp—God’s mission is not just about those who go, but also about those who send, those who give, and those who pray.

INTRODUCTION

Church, imagine what it must have been like to be in Paul’s shoes as he wrote these closing words to the Roman church. A man on mission, unwavering in his call, relentlessly pursuing the spread of the gospel.

Rome was not his final destination—Spain was. But even as he set his sights on new frontiers, he was keenly aware that the work of the gospel was not just about reaching the lost, but about strengthening the church, uniting believers, and living in obedience to the Spirit’s leading.

Paul was a man consumed with the glory of Christ. His ambition was not for personal success or comfort, but to see Christ magnified where He had not yet been named. And yet, Paul understood something that we, too, must grasp—God’s mission is not just about those who go, but also about those who send, those who give, and those who pray.

Our passage today is a testimony of a life yielded to the will of God, a vision for global missions, and an exhortation to the church to engage in the work of Christ in every way possible. As we open this text, my prayer is that we would receive it not merely as spectators, but as participants in God’s plan for the nations.

ROMANS 15:22-33

²²This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. ²³But 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, ²⁴I 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. ²⁵At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. ²⁶For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷For 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 material blessings. ²⁸When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. ²⁹I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. ³⁰I 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, ³¹that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³²so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. ³³May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

WESTWARD EXPANSION

Verse 22 This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. Paul's ambition was to preach Christ where He was unknown. Up to that point, going to Rome was not prudent.

But something changed that warranted his visit to Rome. **Verses 23-24 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.**

There were still plenty of non-Christians in the region, but Paul was saying the gospel had advanced to these regions enough that he felt comfortable expanding into another one. Thus, his hope was to go to Rome **in passing** on his mission to take the Gospel to **Spain**.

BUT FIRST, EASTWARD

But first he had another mission— delivering aid to the saints. He continues in **verse 25-27 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 material blessings.**

Paul wrote about collecting this offering to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:1-4 & 2 Cor. 8:1-9:5), whom he encouraged to match the **Macedonians'** generosity, who gave “beyond their means” and **were pleased to do it**. The Macedonians were poor Christians themselves, but they recognized the opportunity to meet others' needs.

What a beautiful act of kindness. This act of generosity was not just a kind gesture but a profound expression of unity within the body of Christ. These Gentiles refused to allow social dogmas to keep them from giving joyfully to the work of the Lord on behalf of persecuted Jewish Christians.

Indeed, Paul says, 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 material blessings. Gentiles have received the spiritual blessings promised to Abraham and his offspring. Plus, the gospel was birthed in Jerusalem, with a Jewish Messiah, and propagated by Jewish Apostles.

If they've come to share in their spiritual blessing, Paul asserts it is only right that they share in our **material blessings**.

For Paul, generosity was a normal part of Christian living, but American Christians give less than 2% of their income to the work of the Lord. In the Great Depression, they gave 3%! What does that say about our priorities? Lord, help us align our resources with Your mission!

LIVING AMBITIOUSLY LORD WILLING

In **verse 28** Paul returned to his mission to Spain. **When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.** Paul was an ambitious visionary with ambitious plans. And he did get the offering delivered to Jerusalem and he did make it to Rome, but not quite the way he had envisioned. He was taken there as a prisoner and lived there under house arrest for two years.

He knew where he wanted to go, but he also knew that God's plans were supreme. He fully embraced the principle in *James 4:15*: “*If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.*” He lived “Lord willing.”

We can make ambitious plans, but we must hold them loosely. When we live “Lord willing,” we experience incredible peace, knowing that God’s plans are perfect. The frustration comes when we cling too tightly to our own plans. But when we submit to God’s will, we find joy even when things don’t go as we expected.

Did Paul ever make it to Spain? We don’t know for sure. Church tradition says he did, but modern scholarship suggests otherwise. Regardless, the value of a dream isn’t just in achieving it, but in pursuing it with faith.

We have ambitious goals at Wildwood. We hope to raise up 50 missionaries and support another 150. Will we make it? Only God knows!

As Kent Hughes said, “To God the journey is most important, for it is in the journey that we are perfected, and it is in hardships that he is glorified as we trust Him...It is of greatest importance that we have hearts with dreams, great visions of what God can do with us.”

THE FULLNESS OF THE BLESSING OF CHRIST

There’s incredible power and peace when we know we’re committed to doing what the Lord wants us to do, even when it doesn’t work out exactly as we planned. I think this is the heart of what Paul says next in **verse 29 I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.**

Paul was confident that when he made his way to Rome, he would be there **in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.** When you know you’re following Him, when you’re sensitive to the Holy Spirit, you know that wherever you go, you’re there in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

STRIVING IN PRAYER

Having the blessing of Christ does not mean you’ll never face hardship, though. Paul risked his life in Jerusalem. Thus, he invited the church in Rome to do something for him. He said in **verse 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...**

To **strive** means to work tirelessly and deliberately. He asked that we strive **in prayers to God on my behalf.** Paul was asking them to put their hands on the rope and strive with him in prayer. Once again Paul evokes two witnesses – **The Lord Jesus Christ and the love of the Spirit.** He’s begging his **brothers** to earnestly help him.

He said something similar in 2 Corinthians that changed the way I think about praying for other people, especially missionaries. *“You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.” 2 Corinthians 1:11*

Prayer isn’t just a formality—it’s real, effective help. Last Sunday, we prayed for our missionaries in Thailand who lost their infant son last year. We asked the Lord to encourage them by giving them a nugget of fruit. That same day, they received news that a man they had been praying for was saved!

Like Paul, our missionaries long for the prayers of the church. And as we can see, our prayers help them. You and I get to put our hands on the rope and pull this incredibly heavy weight of missionary work with people all over the world and we get to do it in our living room and at our dining table and in our Connect Groups and with our kids! We get to be part of God’s movement around the world without even needing a passport.

Right now, there are thousands of missionaries facing persecution, danger, loneliness, and exhaustion. They hear their children asking, “When do we get to go home, Daddy?” They question, “Why are we here? Why did we bring our kids here?” And yet, they press on. What sustains them? The power of God—and the prayers of the saints.

If we are serious about sending 50 of our own people into the field, we must also be serious about striving in prayer. If our sons and daughters don't see us genuinely praying for other missionaries, why would they believe we will pray for them when they go?

How Then Should We Pray?

PRAY FOR ENDURANCE

Ministry is hard, and the enemy attacks relentlessly. Many missionaries face discouragement daily and need the relentless prayers of the saints. Pray that God gives them strength to persevere.

PRAY FOR PROVISION

Roughly 99.5% of American giving to missions goes to reached language groups, leaving only 0.5% for the unreached. That is unacceptable. At Wildwood, we prioritize missionaries working among the unreached. Fifteen of our twenty-one missionaries work among unreached language groups.

As I am preaching this, we have a newly supported missionary family is boarding a plane headed to the unreached in Japan. Pray that more churches would do the same—and be open to God moving in our own hearts regarding generosity.

PRAY FOR FRUIT

The effect of ministry fruit is profound. Many missionaries labor for years before seeing a single conversion. Pray that God gives them glimpses of His transformative power to encourage them.

PRAY FOR PROTECTION

Missionaries often risk their lives for the gospel. We must pray for their safety and trust God's will for their lives.

Paul specifically asked for prayer for his safety in Judea, saying in **verse 31 & 32...that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.**

Paul hoped that their prayer for protection would mean he would be able to come to them in Rome. It was indeed God's will that Paul go to them in Rome, only as a prisoner.

We do not know whether Paul ever made it to Spain or how he ended up in a Roman prison again. We do, however, believe that Paul was martyred after his second imprisonment in Rome. His life was a drink offering poured out for the sake of the nations, a sacrifice of which the world is not worthy.

But Paul counted his life as worth nothing at all. He simply wanted to complete his race and finish the task the Lord Jesus gave him. (Acts 20:24)

Paul's unwavering dedication to his mission was grounded in his deep trust in God's plan, whether in life or in death. With that same faith, he extended a heartfelt blessing to the Roman church, entrusting them to the God of peace who sustains and strengthens His people in **verse 33 May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.**

HANDS ON THE ROPE

Paul's life was marked by holy ambition—an ambition that was neither self-seeking nor self-glorifying but wholly surrendered to the will of Christ. He made plans, he pursued goals, but he held them all loosely, knowing that God's purposes would always prevail. And in this, he teaches us a vital lesson: our lives, our resources, and our prayers must be leveraged for the glory of Christ, wherever He calls us to labor.

Some of us will be sent to the nations. Others will be called to send, to give, and to strive together in prayer for those on the frontlines. But all of us, without exception, are called to live with the same unwavering confidence that Paul had—that wherever the Lord leads, He goes before us, and that in the end, the greatest joy is found in obedience to His call.

So, church, let us live “Lord willing.” Let us hold our plans with open hands, our resources with joyful generosity, and our hearts with steadfast devotion to the mission of Christ. And as we put our hands on the rope and strive together in prayer, may we see the gospel advance to the ends of the earth, for the glory of God and the joy of all peoples. Amen.

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