

## Romans #34 - Real Ministry: Planning

- Well, good to see you. Hey, we're in a fantastic, amazing, epic, one of the most incredible books written in the history of the world. What is that book of the Bible? Romans.

- And it's in chapter 15 that we find ourselves and as you find your place, we're coming near the end of our almost year-long study of Romans. And some of you may think, a year, that's a long time. Imagine if the sermons weren't so long, how long it would actually take to go through the book of Romans? And what we're learning is how God has a relationship with us and then uses us to help others come into relationship with Him. And we've been learning from one of the greatest minds in the most influential lives in the history of the church. This book is written by none other than the great legend, the Apostle Paul. And sometimes when we think of Paul, if you're familiar with him at all, you can almost treat him like a superhero. The reality is, he's just a human being like the rest of us. But his life is really incredible. Over the course of about 10 years or so, his ministry took him from one town to another. He would travel oftentimes by foot upwards of 20 miles a day. In addition, he would preach. He would teach. He writes books of the Bible. 13, maybe 14. There's a debate over one of the books of the Bible called Hebrews, whether or not he is its author. He trains leaders. He starts riots. He gets in lots of trouble and he spent some time in prison. He's got a real colorful, interesting life. Here's how he explains it in 2 Corinthians 11, he says he has stripes beyond measure. That's whipping and beating. He says elsewhere, "I bear the scars of Christ on my body." If you were to ask him, "Paul, how committed are you?" He'd take his shirt off, show you his back. And you'd see all of the scars and his body would tell the tale. He says he had stripes beyond measure in prisons. Let me say this. The only thing worse than in prison is in prisons. Amen. It's one thing to do prison ministry, it's another to do it from the inside. He says he had five times 40 stripes minus one. This is the lashing that they gave the Lord Jesus. And they would say that 40 would kill someone. And he received 39 lashes, five times. You're talking months of physical recovery. You're talking a body that never functions entirely the same. Three times, he was beaten with rods. He says he was stoned. If you're from California, it's probably not what you're thinking about. This is where people throw rocks at you. In addition, he says three times, he was shipwrecked. How many of you, after one shipwreck, I'm done with ships. I'm just done. Three times shipwreck, a night and a day in the deep meaning he was shipwreck and he spent a whole night just holding onto the debris seeking to survive. In addition, he says perils of waters, robbers, perils of my own countrymen and Gentiles, perils in the city, perils on the wilderness, perils in the sea, right? There's just nowhere to go. Every day is a bad day if your name's Paul. Perils among false brethren, weariness toil, sleeplessness often, hungry, thirsty, cold, naked. That's where I'm out. I'll just tell you that right now. I just like, when I'm naked, I'm retiring. That's officially, we've all got a line. That's it. When your pastor, how's your day going, pastor? I'm naked. That's where I'm at today, right? He's having a bad day. He goes on to say, above all of that, my deep concern for all the churches. He's a pastor. He loves people. It's like a father with the family. What keeps him up at night is not the things that he is going through, but the love and affection and what others are going through. Now, all of this he writes happened before he pins this book of

Romans. And I bet you, I was just thinking about it. If you're Paul and you're going out for a job interview, can you imagine presenting your resume? So, what you've been doing the last 10 years? Well, I mean, if you need a riot, I'm really good at starting one. I've done some prison ministry and yeah, I'm good at shipwrecks. I spent a little time on an island talking to a volleyball. It's been an interesting 10 years for me. How many of you at this point, if you could retire, you would retire? He's in his 50s. I'm 50. Let me tell you what 50's like, horrible. You can't see anything and you can't do anything. It's at the point if I drop something, I order another one. I'm not picking it up. That's just too much. I'll be honest with you. When you turn 50, your energy levels are over, over. So, let me say this, if you're 20, do things and eat carbs while you can. The clock is ticking, kid. It's nearing an end. I'll be honest with you, last weekend, I slept in, I got up at 11. Okay. No, no, no. We're not done yet. And I laid there for a while and I thought, I would like to have breakfast, but I really need a nap. And so, I'm not gonna lie. So, I got up at 11, I took a nap. Then I woke up from my nap and I just laid in the bed for about an hour. Grace walked in, she was like, "What are you doing?" I said, "Nothing. "I'm doing nothing." And it made me so tired. I took another nap. I'm not even kidding you. So, I got up at 11, I took two naps and then I got up and we had dinner. And so, that's where I'm at. So what I'm telling you is this, if you are Paul, how many of you after this resume, you would just say, you know what? I'm gonna apply for early retirement. I just would. See, the only reason most of us work into our 50s, we have kids, a mortgage. That means we have weddings and college. He had no wife, no kids, no mortgage. He had no debt. He had no house payment. He had no college. A boy is me, that's it. You're welcome, Lord, Jesus. I'm out. What he doesn't do is retire. Instead, what you're gonna read in this section, he gives us the plan for the next season of life and all the work that God intends for him to do, or at least is put on his heart. The big idea is this, you can retire from your job, but you never retire from your faith. And I wanna say this to you, older saints. And if you don't know if you're older, if we went to school together, you're older. Okay? So, for you older saints, what can happen is a lot of people moved to Arizona because we're a retirement community. You can golf and go out to eat and there's good medical care, and there's sunshine. And it's a great place to be. And it's fine to retire from your job, but you never retire from your faith. And one of the things that Paul is demonstrating is that the older you become, the more helpful you become. You've got life lessons, experiences, insights to share with others. So, for those of you who are older saints, we need you. We love you. We are glad to have you. The life experience you have has been so expensive for you to obtain that we want you to invest it in others. And so, what Paul does for us here, he gives us his plan for ministry. And he's gonna talk about planning, provision, partnership, and prayer. And he is a model for all of us on how we should look at our life and invest it for the kingdom of God. So, we're in Romans 15, we'll start with planning. Planning. How many of you are planners? You like plans. You named your kids Excel and PowerPoint. You've accepted Dave Ramsey in your heart. If you see a footnote, you're happy, right? You're just that person. So, here's the plan. He says, Romans 15:22-24, "This is the reason why I've been so often hindered "from coming to you." He says, "I've been trying to get to the City of Rome, "but I've not been able to make it. "But now, since I no longer have any room for work "in these regions, "he's been on the other side of the Roman Empire. "And since I have long, for many years, "some of you have hopes and dreams that have been delayed "for many years, but they are still to come to pass, "to come to you. "I hope to see you

in passing as I go to Spain "and to be helped on my journey, "thereby you once I've enjoyed your company "for a little while." So, Paul says here, here's the plan. Here's the plan. And let me say this, some people will say that planning is unspiritual. There's like, you just need to follow the Holy Spirit. Okay. Let me tell you this. He gave us the gift of administration. So, he wants you to make a plan. And ultimately, God has plans for you. And when we plan, all we're asking is what is His plan? This is where it says in Ephesians 1, that God has planned good works in advance for you to do. So, when we make plans, we're asking God, what's your plan? And then how can my plan be your plan? That's all we are doing. Planning goes together with power. What we just learned previously week in Romans 15 was ministry power. This is Romans 15. We looked at verses 14 through 21. This week, we are looking not just at ministry power, but ministry planning. And these go together. These absolutely go together like a sailboat. So, ministry power in the Holy Spirit is like the sail. Ministry planning is ultimately like the rudder. You need both. Some of you, you're filled with the Holy Spirit. You have a lot of power, a lot of zeal, a lot of energy, a lot of enthusiasm, you're very excited. But you don't know what you're doing or where you're going. We call this your 20s. Okay? Very excited. But have no idea where you're going or what you're doing. Other people are really good at plans, but they lack no power. We call these the mature saints. This is why it's good for us to be together. That some of you are filled with the spirit, a lot of enthusiasm. Others of you have wisdom and can make a plan. And what Paul is demonstrating here is that to live life and to do ministry, you need the power of the Holy Spirit, the sail, and you need the plan of the Holy Spirit, the rudder to direct what God would have for your future. And I would just say, practically for you, planning is working on your life. And we spend so much time and energy working in our life that sometimes we don't pull back to work on our life. I've shared this story or illustration before, but I took it from a business book I read. And it was a cruise ship was sitting on the dock in a bay. And two people came up and one asked the other in relation to that boat, who is the most important person? The answer that most of us would give is the captain. And then the person said, no, the boat builder. You can have the world's best captain, but if the boat don't float, it don't matter. Planning is building your boat. It's working on your life, not just in your life. It's trying to determine how to bring all of life together so that literally it floats into the future that God would intend for you in the will of God for you. And what he's giving us here is a model of planning and just practically give you some things. So, I like an annual plan for our ministry and our family. Grace and I do a vision retreat, that's my wife, every year. And we did that not too long ago. And we just sort of look at the whole year. What are the things that God is saying to us, praying and planning and seeking His provision. And then we look at the schedule and the holidays and the seasons and the priorities. And we're asking Him if he has any scripture or directives for us. In addition, I like quarterly planning. Okay. What school's about to start? What happens now? Okay. You're coming to the holidays, what's that gonna look like? Okay. We're heading into the spring and for our kids, that means baseball season. And now we're back to the summer looking at the annual rhythms every quarter. And this includes, for Grace and I, every week, having something that we call a sync meeting. We have a date night and a sync meeting. That's just our recommendation. Date night is where you get dressed up, you go somewhere nice. You make a good memory. You connect, you have fun. A sync meeting is not romantic. It's very practical. Unless you're a highly organized person, then maybe it is a little romantic for you. But what the sync meeting is,

we look at the calendar and we have a joint shared calendar so that we know everything that the other is doing. We share all of our accounts, bank accounts and everything else. So we get together, okay, what's our budget? What's our schedule? What's our plan? What are we doing? We did that recently. It took a few hours just to plan out the next few weeks so that when we get together on date night, we're not arguing over the budget or discussing what we are going to be doing as a family. So, you need to have rhythms in your life for planning. Paul is your modeling for us planning. Part of his ministry planning, and I wanna talk about us as a church family is strategizing for urban ministry. And what he says is, I've been doing ministry in one portion of the Roman empire. And what he has been doing is going primarily from one city to another. One of the curious things about the New Testament, and it is a clue for those of us who care about the cultural change, and trying to create the best environment for human life and flourishing, how do you affect cultural change? The Apostle Paul is still, by God's grace through the Holy Spirit affecting cultural change a few thousand years later. And his model as well as the first disciples was to focus on urban centers. And so what he says here, as he says, basically, "I've completed the work in this area. "There's nothing left for me to do." What that doesn't mean that he's reached everybody and planted every church and finished every assignment, but that he has set up in the major cities, Jesus-centered, Bible teaching, spirit-led healthy churches, And from there, they would finish the remainder of the work. If you look at the New Testament, it literally is just a record of ministry from city to city. So, 1 and 2 Corinthians is a city called Corinth. Galatians is written to a city called Galatia. You're looking at Romans right into a city in Rome. That's how the New Testament is put together. And so, they would go from city to city. And what's interesting is that historians like Rodney Stark and Wayne Mix, they tell us that by 300 AD. So, Jesus lived, died and rose mid 30s AD. Within less than 300 years, what had happened was upwards of half of the people who lived in major Roman cities, were Christians. They love Jesus. 90% of people who lived on the farm were pagans. The word pagan literally means the one who lives on the farm. And so, Christianity did not start as a suburban or a rural or rather an urban movement from city to city. The reason why this strategy was employed by the Holy Spirit through men like Paul is because cities are upstream and rural areas are downstream. In the city, you've got transportation, you've got education, you've got law, you've got shopping, you've got economics. You've got politics. Decisions are made in the city. Culture is created in the city and it flows out from there to the suburban and rural areas. That's why our valley is so strategic. You are now in the fifth largest city in the United States of America, the fastest growing city in county in the United States of America and the hottest real estate market in the United States of America. And what you have in our valley is a strategic, urban density to reach the rest of the Southwest and ultimately the west coast, or as I like to call it, the left coast, which still needs to be reached. And so, where we find ourselves is in that kind of area, that Paul is typically ministering to and from. And so, if you think of it this way, culture is made upstream in the city and it flows downstream to the suburban and rural areas. Therefore, if you want to affect cultural change, bring Jesus and Bible teaching, the presence of God and the people of God into the places that are urban centers because they are strategically designed for laws. If we wanna change law, let's go there. They oversee entertainment. If we wanna entertainment to be changed, let's go there. They educate people. So, if we wanna affect the next generation, let's go there. That's why cities are so crucial and so important, including our

own. Now, what he's saying here is this, he's been doing work in one portion of the Roman empire, and he's now going to transition to Spain. So, he's going to collect an offering. He's gonna go to a city called Jerusalem, where Jesus died and rose. He's then going to pass through the city of Rome. He's going to visit them for a period of time. And then his ultimate goal is to start a brand new season of work in what is the region of Spain. What's crazy about this, I told you the guy's in his 50s and he's had a hard decade. He is beat up and he is beaten down. But what he's planning is a journey that altogether would be at minimum over 3000 miles. Now, imagine you were to go from here to Anchorage, Alaska, and there was no trains, planes or automobiles. You just had to walk or figure it out. That's what he's saying he's gonna do. And the region of Spain that he wants to minister to, it is so geographically large, that it is three times... It is larger than his previous three missionary journeys combined. So, here's what he's saying in his 50s. Now I'm going big. I don't know about you. Like now I'm going to bed. That's kinda what I'm thinking in my 50s, but he's gonna go big. And the point is that just because he's getting older, doesn't mean that his vision is getting smaller, and that's an encouragement to us all, but especially us older saints. Now, there is a big debate and the debate historically is, did Paul ever make it to Spain? We don't know. Most historians would say no. There are a few potential lines of reasoning from church history and the church fathers that would indicate that perhaps he did make it to Spain. The point is simply this. He may have had a vision that was much bigger than his life. We tend to have something called the bucket list. And the goal is to check off everything on your bucket list. Let me say this, Paul didn't live that way. Instead, I would submit this to you. Your vision for your life should be bigger than your life. You need a reason every day to get up and to go do something for the kingdom of God. If you are child of God, you need to have some reason why you get up tomorrow and something that you are doing, some vision that you are pursuing. Some ministry that you're investing in. The vision for your life should be bigger than your life. Don't feel bad if you've not accomplished everything that you were hoping to, he did not, but he fulfilled God's call on his life. He didn't sin and falling short to do perhaps all the things that he hoped, but he was aggressively seeking to take every opportunity to maximize his life effectiveness and ministry. In addition, we tend to focus a lot on the rival. God tends to focus a lot on journey. The question is, well, did Paul ever get to Spain? I don't know. It doesn't seem perhaps that he did, but here's the big idea. Sometimes there are places that we wanna get, and God is more concerned with the people that we're becoming along the journey. You may not have done everything you wanna do, but God used those circumstances to craft character into you, to make you into the person that he intends for you to be. And so, I just want you to know that the father, heart of God is this, He's more concerned sometimes about who His child becomes, His son or His daughter along the journey than whether they achieve the outcome or objective that they were shooting for. And that's certainly the case with Paul. In addition, I would encourage you in life, one example from the Apostle Paul at one principle from his life is follow the compass not the clock. How many of you set intense deadlines and nearly kill yourself to get things done by your deadline? Okay. I've done this in the past. I blew out my adrenal glands twice. I've had two intestinal ulcers. I made myself super stressed. There was one season I had a nervous side switch. Everybody thought I was flirting with them. I was not. I mean, it was terrible, right? And what it was was I would set deadlines that God did not set. And I would drive myself in a way that God did not ask. And if

you have ever experienced this, it's because you're an American. This is how we live. So, we're anxious and we're stressed and we're self-medicating with caffeine and we're up all night and it's not a healthy lifestyle. And here's what he says. He says, "I have longed for many years to come to you." When he says this, "I've been trying to get to the city of Rome for years, "but I haven't made it yet." But he's still going that direction. The point is, follow the compass, not the clock. Go the direction that God has called you to go and let God set the timing for when you arrive. Some of you, you're not in sin, you've not failed. God's not opposed you, you're not doing anything wrong. You just need to know that as long as you're following the compass, you let Him determine the clock. That's what Paul says. So my question to you is this, he's got a plan. God's birth something in his heart. He said, "I wanna get to Rome. And I wanna get through Rome. "And I wanna get to Spain. I wanna preach, teach, "plant some churches, get some stuff done." And they just think about it. It's pretty amazing. History outside of the Bible says that he's a short bald guy with a crooked nose who got beat up a lot. I mean, just standing DeVito. Okay. So we got here, we got Danny. That's just what I saw. I don't know if it was Holy Spirit or not. Probably not. But that's what I saw in my mind. So, here you got Danny DeVito and he's like, "I've conquered the Roman empire. I'm gonna go get Spain." Like how are you gonna do that? He assumes that the Holy Spirit is gonna work. And he assumes that God is going to show up. But he has desires, he has longings. He has dreams, he has hopes, he has visions. And for him, he would summarize it in the word Spain. My question to you is, what's your Spain? What has the Holy Spirit burdened you for? Who do you have a heart for? What do you have a heart for? Send me out. I'd love to serve there. I'd love to do that. Or I'd love to see this. Or I'd love to do that. My question to you, I love you. What's your Spain? What is that earth in your heart? And maybe it's even been a bit dissipated because it's not happened as quickly as you were hoping. It's been years. You need to follow the compass not the clock. For us, Arizona is our Spain. We did ministry somewhere else for decades. God moved us here. Here we are. This is our Spain. We have a heart. We wanna be here. We're glad to be here. We're excited to be here. We love you. We're glad to see you. You are part of our Spain, my wife and our children. My question is what is your Spain? Is it time for you to make some plans? Is it time for you to dream some dreams? Is it time for you to take some steps in the direction that God has encouraged you? Then he talks not only about planning, but then provision, and there's great leadership lessons in here. People tend to think of the Apostle Paul as almost exclusively a thought leader, he's also a people leader. There are two kinds of leaders. There are thought leaders that have great ideas and there are people leaders who know how to encourage and mobilize people. Paul is both. Up until around chapter 11, chapters 1 through 11, he functions as a thought leader. He's teaching a lot. 12 through 16, he's a people leader. He's organizing, mobilizing, encouraging people for mission, for ministry. And so in addition to planning, he says, you need provision. Here's why, vision requires provision. Vision requires provision. Here's how he says it. "At present however," Romans 15:25-27, "I'm going to Jerusalem." It's where Jesus died and rose bringing aid to the saints. Those are God's people. He called us God's saints in chapter one. For Macedonia and the Achaia, these are regions where there were churches and Christians have been pleased to make some contribution. That's a generous financial gift for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem for they were pleased to do it. And indeed, they owe it to them. For the Gentiles, those of us who are non-Jewish have come to share in their spiritual blessings. And

they also ought to be of service to them in material blessings. So, Paul talks about planning. Now he's talking about provision. And what this is, this may shock you. How many of you, you've received a mission support fundraising letter. You ever gotten one of those? Usually it's a college kid. Like I'm gonna go to Mexico for the summer. Please pray and give a gift. Or somebody's being deployed overseas for international missions. We're gonna go to this country and live there and serve these people. Or it's a service project. We're gonna go to this place and we're gonna serve these people. And we're gonna build a house or we're gonna preach the gospel. We're gonna do something for the kingdom of God. The book of Romans, this might blow your mind. It's a fundraising mission, support letter, the best one ever written. If you got that, you're like, I gotta write a check. That was incredible. I mean, it's really well done. He's never been to the church at Rome that he's writing to. We don't know who planted the church at Rome. Oftentimes, we see where one of the apostles of Jesus plants a church. We have no idea who planted the church in Rome. All we get early on in the book of Acts, there was a piece called Pentecost and it says that there were visitors there from Rome. Maybe they got saved and maybe they went back and told everybody about Jesus. We don't even know. Paul's never been to the city of Rome. He knows a few people in the Roman church because through travel, sometimes their paths cross, and he's heard of some of them, but he doesn't have this deep, profound relationship. He's never actually attended that church. And what he wants, he wants them to provide partnership for his plan. So, what he tells them is, "Hey, my name is Paul. "You may have heard about me. I've been trying to get there. "I'm on my way. I hope to get there soon. "When I get there, I'm going to need your help, "your provision for my ministry." And what he's saying is, this other region provided a generous gift for the church in Jerusalem. So before I visit you, I got to deliver this financial gift to the church at Jerusalem and then I'm going to come to you. But I'm asking you to be generous with your provision for this next mission. And provision is where we share what he calls here blessing. Provision is where we share blessing. Blessing comes from God. And then as we share it, we are giving pro-vision to God's vision. And what he says is that the blessing here is twofold. It is spiritual and material. He uses this language. Some of you may have wondered, okay, what does the Bible mean by blessing? What Paul says here, sometimes it's spiritual, sometimes it's material. Spiritual is, I was talking to somebody recently. They're brand new Christian. They became a Christian here recently at our church. And they're just overwhelmed at the spiritual. They're like, God loves me. And all my sins are forgiven and all my mistakes are forgiven and God wants to help me. And God's teaching me stuff and God's answering my prayers, and God's given me new relationships with awesome people. And I'm learning the Bible. And I feel a burden lifted and I just feel really hopeful for my future. That's a spiritual blessing. That's a series of spiritual blessings. Oftentimes, our blessings are spiritual. Sometimes they are material. You get a job, you get an inheritance, you get a promotion. It's a tangible physical material blessing. Somebody gives you a gift. Somebody says, "You're having a hard time. "I'm here to help you. "You're struggling. I'm here to meet a real need." And so, blessing can be spiritual or it can be material. And what he's saying is that there is a church in Jerusalem and there's a church in Rome, the church in Jerusalem, they had a lot of spiritual blessing, but not a lot of material blessing. These are the people who brought us the Bible. They have the temple, they're all Jewish. They gave us the Old Testament. They brought Abraham and all the saints in the Old Testament. Jesus was

Jewish. He lived, died, rose in and around Jerusalem. Like they were spiritually blessed, but they were materially poor. They didn't have a lot of money. There are a lot of churches like that. They're spiritually very rich, but they're materially very poor. I've seen them traveling the world. When I was in Haiti, the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere. There's a lot of people who love Jesus but they lack material wealth. I've seen this recently in the recent years, moving to Arizona going to Mexico. Sometimes there are some churches that are spiritually very rich. They love Jesus. They're filled with the Holy Spirit. They know God, they know the word of God, but materially, they're poor. And what he's saying is that the church in Rome, they are, in regards to material blessing, very rich. But spiritually, they are not as rich as the church in Jerusalem. Why? They're all brand new Christians. They're trying to figure out Hebrew. That's not their language. They're trying to figure out the Old Testament. It's all new to them. They just met Jesus. And they're the first believers in their whole city. And they're starting at zero. They don't have generations of legacy. So spiritually, they're not as blessed, but materially, they are more blessed, because their city was a very affluent city. And because the church in Jerusalem had spiritual blessing and the church in Rome had material blessing, the spiritual blessings of the church in Rome, blessed, excuse me, in Jerusalem blessed the church in Rome. And what he's saying is, the Roman church now needs to bless, needs to bless the Jerusalem church.

Question, are we both here in Scottsdale? We are. I want you to know this, friends, and it doesn't happen everywhere all the time, we're doubly blessed. Okay? Let me just start with an easy one. Okay? Is Scottsdale materially blessed? Chuckle, chuckle, chuckle. Yes. And if you drove in from Apache junction, you're like, yes. Okay. Because in Scottsdale, that is the concentration of wealth for the Southwest. A lot of business owners, a lot of landowners, when you see a private airport, you know you're not in the poor neighborhood. Okay? When you see valet parking, you're not in the poor neighborhood. When you see high-rise condominiums, you're not in the poor neighborhood. When you see this many restaurants, you're not in the poor neighborhood. When you see this many golf courses, you're not in the poor neighborhood. Scottsdale is a very affluent area, lots of material blessings. But we as a church, do we true or false, also have a lot of spiritual blessings? We do. We do. This city was founded. I just thought of it. I don't know if you know this, Scottsdale was founded by a Christian pastor. He was a Bible teaching church planter. From day one, there has been spiritual blessing on Scottsdale. It's why we have things like the Center for Arizona Policy and Alliance Defending Freedom, and a lot of other organizations that fight for family and faith and freedom. That's why a lot of people are moving here because it's an Oasis in a crazy world. And so, we're doubly blessed. There are some great churches here. There's some great theological institutions here. We're very honored to be here. You're very teachable people. But there is a love for the Bible here that's unusual for most major cities, at least in my experience. That being said, we're both. We are materially blessed and we are spiritually blessed, which means we are given an incredible, not only opportunity, but responsibility. To see where can we help? What can we do? Where can we bless and how can we be generous? And so, I would give it to you is this, what he's talking about here is a tithes and offerings. Think of your finances and your wealth as two pockets. A tithe literally means a 10th or a 10th of your income off your gross, not your net. It's called first fruits. So, the Bible talks about a tithe. Offering is the other pocket. It's something beyond the tithe. That's special. It could be for a missions trip or a capital campaign or a building or



something like that. And what he's saying is, the church that he was working with, they gave an offering to the Jerusalem church and he's gonna come to Rome and he's asking them for an offering so that he can go to Spain. There will be times in our church that we come to you and we say, "Okay, in addition to your tithe, this pocket, "we're looking for an offering, this pocket, "to expand the kingdom of God." And that's exactly what Paul is doing here. We would call this a special offering, or we would call this a capital campaign? And within this, let me just talk a little bit about why the Jerusalem church was so important. There's an image I would give for you, a trunk and branches. And what the branches do, they borrow the life from the trunk. And so, if the trunk doesn't exist, the branches don't exist. And if the trunk is not healthy, the branches aren't healthy. Jesus set up the early church so that Jerusalem was the trunk and places like Rome and other regions, they were the branches, they were the branches. And he said this when he gave his final decree before sending back to heaven in Acts 1, he says, "The Holy Spirit will come and you will be my witnesses "in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth, "Spain and Scottsdale." Okay? Where are the ends of the earth? But what he said was, start in Jerusalem. That meant that he was establishing Jerusalem as the trunk and then the branches would go out from there. For our church here at the Trinity Church, we're four years old. We will turn five in September. Unless the Lord tells us otherwise, this is our trunk. It's our trunk. And the hope is to have a good, healthy trunk. And I'll be honest, on four and a quarter acres, it's a little tight, little difficult. But eventually what we're asking is, "Lord, are there branches that you would want to go out "from here?" Church plants, we are helping church planters. We have one of our church planters in this week and we're coaching them. There are churches that we're helping international admissions. So, there are resources going out and we'll tell you more about those as we head into the fall. But in addition, would there be church plants or campuses? And so, what Paul was saying was, I want the church in Rome to help me start new churches in Spain. And so, just to catch you up to speed, he's talking about planning and provision for their church. Let me just briefly bring up to speed planning and provision for our church. It was about a year ago that we closed for COVID. We closed briefly, and we got a lot of work done because you guys were very generous in tithes and offerings. You were generous. And then you went beyond that. That allowed us to do a lot of improvements to our home so that we could grow our family. Every family needs a home. This is our home for our church family. This include getting the cafe across the street. And I just wanted to say thank you. It allowed us to expand quickly. So, students and womens and young adults and premarital and parenting and join the team, they're all over at the cafe. It allowed us to purchase with cash and renovate a studio so that we could do all of our capture, all of our editing, social media monitoring, all of our technological work. And we do that here in Scottsdale. We did some great improvements on property. We put in the men's restroom. We put in the lobby, we increased the kids' space. We've really grown in kids' ministry. in the last year, we've added over 2000 young children to our roster. Just since we started date night on Wednesday nights, we've added over 200 new children to our roster. And so God, be fruitful and multiply. You just dibs, like you just called that. So good job, making a lot of babies, which is an indication that your marriage is doing good. So, I'm happy for you. So, as we're growing though, you've been very generous, but what we wanna do now, we wanna establish, I wanna establish and finish Scottsdale. So, I'd just give you this as a prayer, as part of the plan. And later, we'll ask you for provision. We're working with a city and a landscape

architect to get a site plan. We need to pave this lot, put in a counseling and office center in the back, and then a large park out front with trees, for shade, safety, for kids, places for people to meet and mingle, food trucks, after party, places to build relationships. And if you're single, stop going to the bar, get a Bible and show up here and see if you can find a better candidate for life together. That's kind of what I'm working on, to be honest with you. So, I would encourage you to be in prayer because what we wanna do, we wanna finish the trunk and then we can look toward the branches. And God woke me up last weekend and as fast as I was praying about, "Okay, Lord, what's next?" So, I'm in a season of listening. So, I'd encourage you just to be in prayer and we'd be listening to what God would have next. There's great need over on the west side as growing with family, so is the Southeast. Up in Prescott, they're saying that upwards of a hundred thousand people are going to be moving into that region in the next few years. There's people everywhere who need Jesus. And Jesus loves all of those people. That being said, just be in prayer and we'll be bringing you more plans as we get approval from the city. We'll be asking for more provision, we'll be asking for offerings in addition to the regular tithe. But two things I'd say on this point before proceeding forward, number one, you can't mature by taking. You can only mature by giving. I told this to the kids all the time. You're not going to mature by consuming, but by sharing. In addition, what is really fantastic is when you and I share generously, the Lord multiply supernaturally. There was a little boy in the Bible. He's out hearing Jesus preach. There's 5,000 men plus women and children. So maybe 15, 20,000 people. And he sees the people are hungry. And what does he do? He brings his lunch. It's got a little Lunchable, hands it to Jesus, right? Jesus peels the plastic bag. It's in the Hebrew. Trust me. I'm just going to, so we're in the Greek. And then what does Jesus do? He starts feeding everybody. And what does he do? It feeds everybody. It's amazing that sometimes God asks us to give generously so he can multiply supernaturally. Now, the Lord could have fed the multitude without the little boy's lunch, but then the little boy got the incredible gift of seeing the Lord multiply supernaturally what he had given generously. This is why the Bible says the Lord loves a cheerful giver. He talks about planning provision. And then he talks about partnership. Partnership. Romans 15:28-29. And I want you to think through this in terms of your life, your ministry, your business, right? What is your plan? Where is it your provision and who are your partners? He says, "When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected," he says, "Okay, I gotta get to Jerusalem, give them the offering. And then I'm gonna come see you. I will leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessings of Christ." Okay? Now, Paul is the most productive apostle, not to speak ill of any other leader in the New Testament. But after Jesus, he's the next big towering figure. Much of Acts records his life in ministry. He writes, as I said, 13 or 14 books of the Bible. He trains more leaders. He walks more miles. He plants more churches. He endures more controversy. He spends more days in jail. He takes more beatings. And the question is, how did one guy get all that done? The answer is, it takes more than one guy. Throughout all of his writings, he names people who are helping him. You're gonna meet some of them here soon as we get to the last chapter of Romans. He's gonna name some people. Whenever Paul writes a letter, he's telling you, these people are my partners, and these people are my partners, these people are praying. These people are giving. These people are traveling. These people are serving. Everybody's partnering in a different way. The question is, if you're

going to accomplish anything, you gotta find your team. And what he's saying is, I'm coming through Rome going to Spain, but I'm going to Rome to find my team. What he's saying is, who wants to go with me? Who wants to be a part of it? Who wants to give, who wants to pray? Who wants to be on the supply line writing the checks? Who wants to be on the front line doing the work? That's what he's asking. And the point is this, a great team beats an old star player every time. I don't care what the sport is, basketball, football, soccer, baseball. You could have one person who is perhaps the best player in the history of that sport, and if they are up against a good team, the good team wins every single time. It's all about building the team. It's all about finding the partners. And if God has given you a vision, part of your plan needs to be not only the pro-vision, but also the partners. Who's gonna do it with you? Who's gonna go with you? Who is going to compliment your giftedness and who's gonna help achieve the vision that God has given to you? Another thing I would say is, here's what Paul is showing and demonstrating and modeling your resources or in your relationships. If you're in business, your resources are in your relationship. We call it sales, right? In life, okay, I need resources to do something. What that means is, the resources are in the relationships. If you're going to be a person who accomplishes things, you must be a relational person. And what Paul is telling them, he's saying, "I'm coming and I'm gonna be there for a while, "you can get to know me. "We're gonna build a relationship, "but ultimately, I am looking for resources "so I can get to Spain, preach the Bible, "plant more churches, see more people need Jesus. "Like I got some stuff I wanna get done." And I'm asking if God is burdening you to be partnering with me. Okay? And I just wanna thank you. If Trinity Church is your home and you're part of our church family, thank you. You're partnering with us. That's what it is. And you're part of the team that God has assembled. And if you would like to join the team or you'd like to know more about the team, there's a date coming up. I would encourage you to put on your calendars, August 18th, that's a Wednesday night. We're gonna pull everybody together for what we call Team Trinity. Team Trinity is all the partners. Everybody who's giving, serving, praying. That's how you're on the team. And so, we're gonna get together. We're gonna cast a little vision, do a little worship. We're gonna then talk about our plans for the fall, the provision and the partnership needed to accomplish those plans. We wanna follow Paul's model here in scripture. But even if you're not connected, you're not involved yet. Just show up. That's all you gotta do. And let me tell you this, we do relationship, not membership. There's no condo time sales pitch. We're not gonna put you in a room and make you sign something. We don't do that. We do relationship, not membership. And we just want you to come. We want you to get to know us. We wanna get to know you and then help you find your place on the team. What has God burdened you for? What is the ministry that he's called you to? And it'll be during the season where I'm doing a series on spiritual gifts. So, we've got a few more weeks. We finished the book of Romans. I'm gonna do a four week series on spiritual gifts to get the partners in place to follow the vision that God has for us. And so, we'll talk about spiritual gifts, your divine design, how God takes your abilities and your capacities and your eccentricities. And we've all got them. Amen. And what happens is, then God uses those so that you have a unique ability to minister to people in a way that other people don't because of your divine design. And so, we're gonna look at spiritual gifts week one. Week two, we're gonna look at the serving gifts. Week three, we're gonna look rather at the speaking gifts, week four, we're gonna look at the supernatural gifts, prophecy, healing, miracles, and tongues.

Oh my. And I wrote a 35,000-word book for you on all of these things to help you figure out how has God made you and what might God have for you. Okay? And all of that is going to be sort of culminated on that August 18th, Wednesday night, just come hang out, let us meet you. Let you meet us. And if God burdens your heart, tell us where or how you want to partner. Now, here's the point in this partnership that I think is really incredible. And I mean this sincerely with all my heart. Great people are the greatest thing in a great city. The greatest resource that the city has is its people, particularly God's people. What's interesting about this, let's just pull that out again. Just read it. Paul talks about going to visit Rome. When I've completed this and delivered to them, what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. He says, "I'm coming to Rome. "I know that when I come to you, "I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ." Here's what he's saying, I'm coming to Rome. Does he talk about anything that he's going to see? See, you and I, when we make travel plans, okay, I wanna see that, I wanna go there. Or this is what literally pays Rick Steves mortgage, right? And this is it. This is how he pays his bills, right? And so, what happens is we're going somewhere. Like I wanna go to that restaurant and I wanna go to that gallery. And I wanna go to that park. And I wanna go to that river. I wanna do these things. Paul mentions nothing that he's gonna see in Rome, but he mentions the people that he's looking forward to seeing. Let me say how incredible this is. The city of Rome is a magnificent city and he doesn't seem to be all that concerned about the city as much as he is God's people who live in that city. The city of Rome at this time was literally the center of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was the largest strongest empire on the planet. They had an incredible military. They would overtake disparate nations and people groups, and they would conquer them. And then they would bring what was called Pax Romana, Roman peace through their strong military. Then they also created the Roman road system. And if you've ever heard that old phrasiology, all roads lead to Rome. Literally, wherever you were out in the Roman Empire, they built the first equivalent of a highway system. So, if you drove here, thank the Romans. Okay? They created the first highway system. Wherever you were at in this vast Roman Empire, if you just got on a road and walked it, eventually it dead ended, guess where? The city of Rome. All roads led to Rome. It was a city of about a million people. It was the center and the crowning Jewel of the Roman Empire. In addition, it was on a river. If you were born in Arizona, this is where water and the earth dwell together. It's fascinating, Google it. I'm not even lying. And it's supposed to rain tonight. So, just go outside and just think bigger. Okay? Just think bigger. So, they had a great river and it was a city built on the river, which means that there's lush farmland and crops are gonna grow. What that means is, now you've got great fresh food, fruits, vegetables, livestock. And in the city then, you've got the best restaurants, right? This is like old town, right? So, it's the place to be. It's the finest of wines. It's the choicest of meats. In addition, the city was so magnificent. It was a tourist Mecca, and everybody would wanna go there 'cause it was the best place to be. In addition to great restaurants and nightlife, they had gambling, they had casinos. So, they don't like the casinos, curse the Romans. Okay. They started public gambling. In addition, they had lots of entertainment. They had chariot races, which was the beginning of NASCAR. And no, it was, I was thinking about it today, like left turn, left turn, left turn, left turn, left turn, left turn, left turn, left turn, left turn. The rednecks. Okay. So, it's just the chariot races, it's NASCAR 1.0. In addition, they have plays to go to, they have concerts. They have magnificent nightlife. And what's really interesting, one of their

stadiums sat 150,000 people. That is more than the Arizona corridors and the diamond backs and the sons. We believe in resurrection. Okay? They're coming back. And the coyotes combined. See, we tend to think, oh, our city is a big deal. Actually, theirs was a bigger deal. And we tend to think, "Oh, those primitive people." And they'd look at us and say, "That's adorable." The point is, and how many of you know that Rome still exists? Do you know that? It still does. The city is like 2,700 years old or something like that. How many of you have been to Rome? How many of you wanna go to Rome, right? Many of us still want, would like to get Rome. Home was going to Rome. He'd been trying to get that for years. And what he says is, "The thing I'm looking forward to "is seeing God's people, "because that's where the blessing is." This is incredible. I love cities. I love culture. I love nightlife. You look at me, I've obviously found a fork. I don't mind going out to dinner, right? But at the end of the day, Jesus died and rose for people. That must mean that people are his highest priority, that should mean that they should be our highest priority. And what's really interesting, I've been all over the world. I've had a great life of great blessing and great provision. I've been to Greece and Israel and Turkey. I've been to over a dozen nations. I've preached in over a dozen nations. I've preached in maybe three dozen states in America. I've been to a lot of amazing places. My favorite memories are not the places I've been, but the people I've met. And when you get with God's people and they're full of the Holy Spirit, it's like a family reunion because it's a family reunion. God's your father. God's my father. Nice to meet you, brother. Nice to meet your sister. Let me say, you and I have been given this unique opportunity. Right now, people are coming to Arizona like they were going to Rome. People are moving. They are coming. They are moving. Okay? Just go out, look at all the license plates and say California and pray for them. Okay? So, people are coming to Arizona. You know what that means is, they're coming because the city is great, but they can meet God's people. And that would be the greatest thing that could happen to them. So, let us be the people who say, "We're here to welcome you. "We're here to share our God with you. "We're here to bless you. We're here to care for you. "And we want you to meet God's people. "And we want you to join God's people." And here's what's gonna happen this winter. I don't even think you need to be a prophet to see it. People are coming here. The whole world was closed and it's gonna snow and everybody wants to leave. And where are they going to come? Scottsdale, Arizona, baby. And you know what? We want them not just to come here because of the great city that we live in. And it is wonderful and beautiful, but to meet God's people and to enjoy blessing, starting with forgiveness of sin, eternal life, salvation through relationship with Jesus Christ. Okay? So, then he closes. And for those of you who are organized, it's planning, provision, partnership, and prayer. You're welcome. All right. Prayer is the last one, Romans 15:33-33, "I appealed to you brothers," and what he's doing here, he's making a request of the church family. By our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the spirit, that phrase just rings and sings. Do you love the Holy Spirit? People always say, I love Jesus. Do you love the Holy Spirit? I love Jesus. I love the Holy Spirit. And it's the love of the Holy Spirit. The love of the spirit to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf. Here's what he's saying, pray for me. I don't think I've done a great job of this as a pastor, but he's sort of giving a good example to me saying, "Pray for me 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." You know what church should be? Refreshing. You know what life

groups should be? Refreshing. You know what children's ministry, student ministry, young adult ministry, women's ministry, men's ministry should be refreshing. Not only do we live in a desert, culturally speaking, politically speaking, socially speaking, it's a very barren, desolate and dry world. And people are parched at the soul level. And when they come together, as God's people, should it be to be refreshed, refreshed in your company. May the God peace be with you all. Amen. And what he's talking about here is prayer. And he uses the language of strive together. In the ancient world, this is the language that you would use for an athletic team. Where a sports team comes together, they're all striving together. They're all pulling together. They're all unified. And what he's talking about here, and we're gonna do this particularly on August 18th. Spend some time in prayer striving together as we prepare for this next season of ministry that God has for us. But what he's talking about here is striving together in the spirit and what this does, this mitigates against division and it brings unity. Because what happens when there is division it's, I want this, well, I want that. Why I think we should do this. Why I think we should do that. Why I think this person should be in charge. I think that the person should be in charge. Division, unity is what happens when we don't ask what do we want or we ask, what does he want? Okay, Lord, what do you want? I'll say this, I've been senior pastor twenty-five years. And one thing I learned some years ago, people come up all the time. They're like, "I think we needed this. "I think we needed that." The first thing I've learned is to ask and say, "Have you prayed and asked the Holy Spirit "if that's what he wants?" Zero times at 25 years have I heard anyone say, "I prayed about it "and I feel like this is what the Lord is asking of us." So, go talk to him first. Okay. That ultimately, when we ask God, what do you want? Because you know what? Whose church is? This? This God's church. I didn't die for anybody. I didn't rise for anybody. I can't save anybody. All right. Whose life? Who rules over your life? Jesus does. It's his life through you. It's not just your life, your marriage, your family, your money, your ability. Everything we got, it's His. We're just stewards of that which He owns. And so, it's reasonable to say, what do you want? What do you want me to do? What do you want me to give? Where do you want me to serve? What do you want us to do? What do you want? And what happens is, if we're all striving together in prayer, we're getting God's vision so that we have unity rather than division 'cause division literally means, multiple visions. And he's gonna warn us at the end of Romans 16, he says, "Watch out for those who cause division, "watch out for those who cause division." And the way we overcome division is striving together in prayer to get God's vision. I'll say this, my wife, Grace and I, we met at age 17 in high school. We've been together for a while. Do you think that maybe we ever disagreed possibly about something a little bit? We did. So, pray for Grace. She's learning, she's coming along. She's figuring stuff out. Okay? And if you didn't laugh, it's 'cause you're not married. And so, there are times that Grace and I have disagreed, and the question is not, does she win and I lose or do I win and she loses? The question is, what does God want? And what I found is, praying is better than arguing. Praying is better than fighting. Praying solves things that nothing else will solve. If you wanna grow in unity, just pray with people. If you're having a problem, don't fight about it, pray about it. Don't just yell at them. Talk to Him. Some of the biggest decisions in our life, we didn't start at the same place, but we strove together in prayer and we came to the same place. One of those was whether or not we move to Arizona. We came to the place where God spoke to us both and burdened us both and called us both. So, we're here together. Yay. And what he's talking about here is

striving together in prayer. And this is because unified unbelievers are more powerful than divided believers. Up until this point, Paul has told us, "Here's the gospel. Here's how you get saved. "Jesus is Lord God savior, king, Christ. "He lived without sin. He died for your sin. "He rose as your savior. "He hears your prayers. He's ruling and reigning. "He's coming again to judge the living and the dead." The nations need to know who this Jesus is. And if we're divided, it doesn't happen. This is why in his high priestly prayer, John 17, Jesus' longest prayer, he spends the longest section of the longest prayer, praying that we would be unified not divided. because divided believers will be defeated by unified unbelievers. There's a story in the Old Testament, Tower of Babel. Godless people, coming together to build a city without God, a counterfeit of the kingdom of God. They're trying to build a high tower so they can sit up light, God look down on everyone else. Like what do you need to have Him for? We can make it ourselves. We need God for, we'll be our own God. God looks down and He says, "They are unified and nothing, "nothing will be too hard for them to do." What God says is, they're so unified. They're gonna win. So, He scatters them and He divides their languages. That's why we have nations and languages. 'Cause God knows hat unified unbelievers are more powerful than divided believers. Conversely, unified believers are more powerful than unified unbelievers, because unified believers have someone named the Holy Spirit. And he blesses and multiplies unity. That's what Paul is saying here, is that praying is how we have unifying. Let me give you a few things in closing and I'll bring the band up and we'll spend some time together and worship. First thing he says is, pray for deliverance from my enemies. Okay? Every leader has opponents and enemies. If you're gonna call the shots, you're gonna take the shots. Now, what's interesting is, when he says, "Pray for the unbelievers who are my enemies." You think all those are the non-Christians. No, those are the religious people. The greatest threat to the safety and freedom of Jesus as well as Paul, as well as everyone else is unbelieving religious people. They think they're doing it for God, but they don't even know God. This was Paul before he got saved. He was a mass murderer. I mean, he was a murderer, not a mass murder. He was a murder of Christians. He's a religious guy. He's a zealot. He's basically the equivalent of a jihadist before he meets Jesus. That's just who he is. And then he meets Jesus and his former team turned against him. The religious people were harassing him. They were following him. What's really interesting is they had assassination attempts trying to kill him. Eventually, they brought false charges and they had him arrested. He ended up spending a few months under the tutelage or under the oversight rather of a Roman guard while he's being held for trial. He's like, "That's great. I'll tell that guy about Jesus. "And then he'd go tell the other soldiers "and we'll have a revival in the military." That's kind of Paul's attitude. Finally, he's under arrest. His reputation is destroyed. They've tried to take his life. And what he says is, "I'm a Roman citizen. "Therefore, I have the legal right "to have my case transferred to the city of Rome." Where did he wanna go? Rome. How did he get to Rome? Through arrest. So, he makes it to Rome as a prisoner to have his case heard. And the book of Acts ends with him under house arrest in Rome. The moral of the story is, God has you where He wants you. You may just not like how you got there. Same thing for Jonah. He's like, "I don't wanna be in Nineveh," but it's the fish thing, for real? So what happens is, sometimes you are where God wants you to be, but you just don't like how you got there. He got to Rome, but he got there by the unbelievers arresting him and religious people persecuting him. So, he asked for prayer for his enemies. Please pray for my enemies. He also

then prays that he would help God's people be able to serve them, that he would bring joy and that the people would be, I love these words. We can just have the band star. This is what we're gonna ask God for right now in prayer. He says, what I'm asking God for is that the people would have joy and that they would experience peace. Holy Spirit, thank you so much that you hear and answer prayer. And God, I pray for a supernatural spirit of joy. The fruit of the spirit is joy. The joy of the Lord is our strength. Even when Jesus went through hard times, it was for the joy set before him. And so Holy Spirit, we invite you now to bring a supernatural joy to the people and that Paul prays that they would have peace, that they would have peace with God, that they would have the peace of God, that they would have peace and forgiveness and love and mercy and grace between one another. God, this is a dark world. Let this church be a light place. This is a place where we want people to be, to be encouraged in a world that is discouraging, to be lifted up in a world that beats them down. And so, Holy Spirit, we come now for a moment of refreshing in your presence. And we ask that the prayer of Paul also be our prayer and that you would come to fulfill it for us as you did for them. And that you would reveal to us the future life and ministry that you would have for us so that we could be a part of it with joy and peace, in Jesus name. Amen.