

Prayer:

Slide # 1

Romans

Theme: The Righteousness of God – The Gospel of God

Outline:

- **Prologue:** 1:1-17
- **Doctrinal:** 1:18-8:39
God’s holiness – man’s sinfulness – 1:18-3:20
Justification by grace through faith – 3:21-5:21
Sanctification of the believer – 6:1-8:39
- **Dispensational:** 9:1-11:36 (The place of Israel and the church)
- **Practical: 12:1-15:33** (Duties and privileges of the believer)
- **Epilogue:** 16:1-27

Paul had never been to Rome and so in this letter he spelled out the essentials that these believers needed to know by way of REMINDER. He emphasizes that we are made righteous with God on the basis of faith and then we should live by faith. We are saved by faith and then we live by faith. Both of these truths are brought out in the KEY introductory verses which the rest of the letter then builds on.

Slide # 2

Romans 1:16–17 (NKJV)

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

17 For **in it** [the gospel believed] the righteousness of God is revealed **from faith to faith**; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

“**From faith**’ points to the initial act; **to faith**’ to the life of faith which issues from it.” - **W.E. Vine**

Having fleshed out “from faith” – “to faith” Paul then he then circles back to finish telling them what he had started to tell them in chapter one – namely details related to his unique calling and his missionary plans. Last week in Romans 15:14-21 we saw Paul spelling out his unique missionary calling as that of being called to go where the gospel had never been preached before and to open up new territory to the gospel.

Today he now shares his specific plans with the Christians in Rome and how they fit into those plans as seen in Romans 15:22-29.

Slide # 3

- Rom. 15:14-21 – Describes Past Ministry
- **Rom. 15:22-33** – Shares Future Plans
- Rom. 16:1-16 – Extended Greetings
- Rom. 16:17-20 – Final Exhortation and Encouragement
- Rom. 16:21-24 – Greetings From Those with Him
- Rom. 16:25-27 – Final Benediction

Paul’s mission plans come under the heading of three things. 1) His Purpose (gospel), 2) His Plans, and 3) His Priorities. His purpose, plans, and priorities pretty much express where his heart is coming from and he fleshes that out in our study this morning.

Paul’s whole life was about the gospel...

Slide # 4

Romans 1:1 (NKJV)

1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, **separated to the gospel of God**

Romans 1:15 (NKJV)

15 So, **as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel** to you who are in Rome also.

If anyone ever lived GOSPEL READY it was Paul. He lived to proclaim the gospel. This was his great PURPOSE everywhere he went with special emphasis on where it had never been preached before.

Paul now builds on his mission purpose, so clearly spelled out in the previous verses, by telling his future plans going forward.

Romans 15:22–29 (NKJV)

22 For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.

Paul in Romans 1 shared that he had long desired to visit Rome (Rom. 1:10, 13) but explains here that he had “been much hindered from coming”.

In the Bible we find there are various things that may hinder the minister of Christ.

Slide # 5**Acts 16:7 (NKJV)**

7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them.

1 Thessalonians 2:18 (NKJV)

18 Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.

In the case of the Spirit hindering – the timing was not right. In the case of Satan hindering he seeks to frustrate the gospel going forward. But in the case of Romans 15:22 Paul is saying that his pioneer MISSION work of going into new territory to the East has prevented him from coming to Rome.

Up to this point Paul has been preoccupied with taking the gospel from the Jerusalem area all the way up to the regions of Illyricum (Rom. 15:19). This involved 3 missionary journeys over about a 10-year period of time.

Slide # 6

In the OT when Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem there were many things that served to try and distract him from the work.

Slide # 7**Nehemiah 6:3 (NKJV)**

3 So I sent messengers to them, saying, “***I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.*** Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?”

Paul had this same mindset! He refused to be deterred from his great work of opening up new territories to the gospel. He refused to “come down” or in this case “go up” to Rome until he accomplished his objective.

Paul had his GOSPEL priorities! And up until now these priorities had prevented him from going to Rome which he had long desired to do.

We all have to live by priorities of one kind or another. Sadly, for many the gospel is not much of a priority – if at all. You can’t do everything, but we are called to MAJOR on the gospel. That is why we are here – in terms of our mission.

Slide # 8

Paul was a man who lived out the GOSPEL as his priority as a way of life.

You know who shares the gospel? People who are praying to share the gospel, people who are planning to share the gospel, people who are intentional on sharing the gospel, people who prioritize sharing the gospel. It doesn't just happen.

One survey says that only 3 in 10 unchurched **Americans** (29%) say a **Christian** has ever **shared** with them one-on-one how a person becomes a **Christian**. This means that 70 percent of unreached Americans NEVER have anyone share the gospel with them. Relatively few Christians live “Gospel Ready”. Most don't even think in this mode.

Let me ask you. Have you ever shared the gospel with anyone? Is sharing the gospel a priority for you?

Year ago an atheist reportedly said this...

If I firmly believed as millions say they do that the knowledge and practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another, then religion would mean to me everything. I would cast away earthly enjoyments as dross, earthly cares as follies, and earthly thoughts and feelings as vanity. Religion would be my first waking thought and my last image before sleep sank me into unconsciousness. I should labor in its cause alone. I would esteem one soul gained for heaven worth a life of suffering. Earthly consequences would never stay my head, or seal my lips. Earth, its joys and its grief's, would occupy no moment of my thoughts. I would strive to look upon Eternity alone, and on the immortal souls around me, soon to be everlastingly happy or everlastingly miserable. I would go forth to the world and preach to it in season and out of season, and my text would be, WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT A MAN IF HE GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD AND LOSE HIS OWN SOUL?

This in essence, defined the apostle Paul! A gospel passion defined him. And may it define us as well!

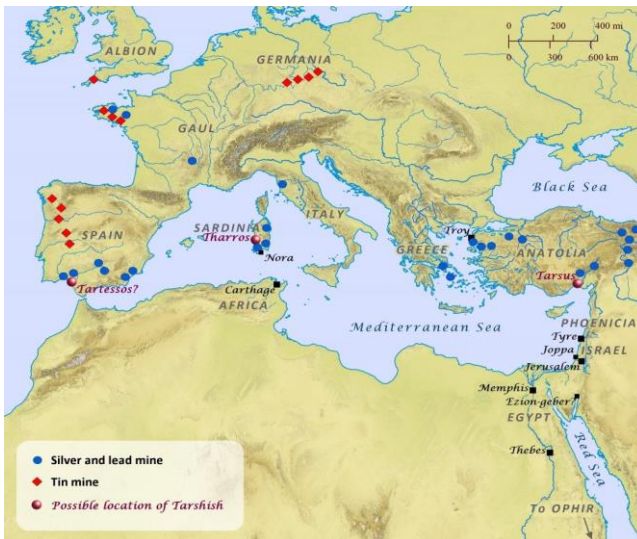
23 But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you,

Rome had Christians there already – so although Paul desired to visit this Gentile HUB of the Roman Empire it was not his number one priority. But now, having opened up the whole (previously unreached) area to the East of Rome, he is now ready to come to Rome and then press into areas further to the West.

24 whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while.

Here we see Paul's plans. His goal was now to press on to the West all the way to Spain, whereby he would continue to open up virgin territory to the gospel. On his way to Spain, he hopes to have a "**stopover**" in Rome and to be helped on his way from there by the Roman Christians but, at the same time, enjoy their company for a while. But this indicates he does not plan to stay in Rome long. His plan (his goal) was now to move into the unreached area of SPAIN!

Spain, in the OT is the region associated with "Tarshish". It was considered to be the farthest area to the West (cf. 1 Kgs. 10:22; Jon. 1:3). It was considered the end of the known world.

Slide # 9

Did Paul ever make it to Spain? That is debated. The Bible doesn't say. Some believe that after Paul was imprisoned in Rome he was released for a while and made this missionary journey to Spain before again being imprisoned and executed in Rome.

There is some extra-biblical information that might hint at this. For example, an early church father called "Clement of Rome" wrote: "**Paul having taught righteousness to the whole world, having gone to the limits of the West...**". That suggests that he did eventually make it to Spain, but it is uncertain.

Note that uncharacteristic here Paul indicates that he is hoping that they will HELP him on in his missionary endeavors.

Not everyone can go like Paul did. Not everyone is gifted or has the opportunity to go in this fashion. But consistently there are opportunities to HELP in one fashion or another. Certainly, we can PRAY, as we will see next week in our study. But we can also support financially and physically and through encouragement. The great missionary mission to reach the unreached is really a TEAM effort, as Paul indicates here.

Slide # 10

1 Corinthians 3:6–8 (NKJV)

6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

We have various and differing roles, but we are all involved in the WORK. Some HELP, some GO! Some have a support role, some have a front line role. But in the big scheme of things everyone has a role to play.

But before Paul presses on to Spain (making Rome a stopover on his way), he first has another PRIORITY to deal with – namely to securely deposit the collection that has been gathered for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

25 But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.

We believe that Paul wrote the letter of Romans from Corinth on his 3rd missionary journey (cf. Acts 20:3). This meant he would do a major backtrack – all the way back to Jerusalem before he proceeded on towards Rome.

Slide # 11



Depending on mode of travel it was about 1800 miles from Corinth to Jerusalem and then about 1500 miles back to Rome via a different route. To go directly from Corinth to Rome was about 750 miles. This means that Paul was putting on about an extra 2500 miles to make this trip back to Jerusalem. That is really saying something about the effort being made. It would have taken him about 2 months to do it – if he kept a steady pace. So this was no small venture.

The Christians in Jerusalem suffered extreme persecution from about AD 35 on (cf. Acts 8:1-4). About 20 years have lapsed since then because we believe Paul wrote Romans in about AD 57. The Church in Jerusalem was also known for experiencing extreme poverty. As I say this had been going on for over 20 years and it was still a very difficult place to live for Christians.

In that context, Paul says he is going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. The word “minister” here (Gk. diakoneo) is the word from which we get our English word deacon. It means SERVANT. Paul sees himself as going to Jerusalem to SERVE the saints there.

Paul consistently calls believers in the NT “saints” which literally means “set apart ones”. We are now set apart as belonging to Christ. That makes us completely distinct and separate from the world.

Paul’s consistent emphasis is evangelism – but in going to Jerusalem, he is targeting the SAINTS in particular. His great desire is to minister to them – to build them up – to strengthen them.

Realize that Paul before his conversion, had notoriously persecuted the church starting in Jerusalem.

Slide # 12

Acts 26:10–11 (NKJV)

10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

It seems to me that after his conversion Paul now had a special place of sympathy in his heart for what these dear saints had been through – and especially since early he had been a part of their oppression. Many had been made poor by him and his actions. Perhaps there were widows there whose husbands he had killed. Perhaps there were those who still hung their heads in shame because Paul had pressured them to blaspheme.

Even though he knew he was forgiven, I don’t think Paul ever got over what he had done to the church.

Slide # 13

1 Corinthians 15:9 (NKJV)

9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

With all this background, Paul, at great personal effort, now prioritizes to go to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.

26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.

The major reason for this trip was to deliver to the poor saints in Jerusalem the funds that had been collected from the churches Paul had planted on his missionary journeys. In particular, Paul mentions those in the Roman provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. This would have included places like Phillipi, Thessalonica, and Corinth.

Slide # 14



Over 10 years earlier Paul and Barnabus had been involved in another aid project for the poor saints in Jerusalem during a time of famine (cf. Acts 11:27-30; 12:25). At that time when they took aid to Jerusalem they met with the “pillars” of the church (Peter, James, and John) who recognized the special calling of Paul and Barnabus to the Gentiles, but they did make one special request.

Slide # 15

Galatians 2:10 (NKJV)

10 They desired only that we should **remember the poor**, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

Now it would seem for several years Paul has been working on another collection for these poor saints in Jerusalem. This particular collection is addressed in places like 1 Cor. 16:1-4, and 2 Cor. 8-9 (cf. Acts 20:4; 24:17).

Notice the emphasis on the fact that it PLEASSED these largely Gentile churches to be a part of this effort.

Slide # 16**2 Corinthians 8:1–4 (NKJV)**

1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:

2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, **they were freely willing**,

4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

Note that the word in Romans 15:26 translated as “contribution” is Greek work “koinonia” which is often translated fellowship or communion. It has the basic idea of sharing. To be in fellowship together is to share together. In this context here in Romans he is talking about sharing funds as a means of support.

27 It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.

Note the DOUBLE emphasis on “pleased” them as seen in verse 26 and now again in verse 27. This was voluntary giving – they did so because they wanted to and yet at the same time Paul says it was also their duty – “they are their debtors.

What an interesting balance – free-will giving that at the same time was a moral obligation.

Slide # 17**2 Corinthians 9:7 (NKJV)**

7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, **not** grudgingly or **of necessity**; for God loves a cheerful giver.

Romans 15:27 (NKJV)

27 It pleased them indeed, and **they are their debtors**. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.

God wants us to be givers. It is the appropriate thing to do. And yet He wants it to be from the HEART and to be done CHEERFULLY.

Paul explains that the Gentiles are debtors to their Jewish brethren because the Gentiles have now become partakers of what is rightfully Jewish “spiritual things”. These “spiritual things” are gospel realities.

Slide # 18

Galatians 3:14 (NKJV)

14 that the **blessing of Abraham** might **come upon the Gentiles** in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit **through faith**.

The Bible came through the Jews. The covenants (properly speaking) were made with Israel. The Messiah (properly speaking) is Jewish. As Jesus said, “salvation is of the Jews.” (Jn. 4:22). The gospel emanated forth from the Jews. The gospel first came forth from Jesus and then through the apostles (Heb. 2:3). Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was Jewish.

So us Gentiles owe much to the Jews in terms of our spiritual blessings. Without the Jews we would not be where we are with the Lord. As Gentiles, we have been “grafted in” to the promises, as Paul states in Romans 11:17-18.

The believer in Christ should be the best friend the Jew has in this world! – **George Zellar**

Indeed, as true born-again Christians, we should all be “Friends of Israel”. The promise that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 still holds.

Slide # 19

Genesis 12:3 (NKJV)

3 **I will bless those who bless you**, And **I will curse him who curses you**; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Yes, Israel generally has been a stiff-necked people, and yet as a people we owe them much! We as Gentiles are their debtors as Paul says.

Paul is relating a general principle here: With a million Christian ministries someone once asked where they should give their offerings. The reply came back that it is appropriate to support those who are feeding you. The principle is that those blessed spiritually by someone’s ministry should support that work appropriately.

Slide # 20**1 Corinthians 9:14 (NKJV)**

14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

Galatians 6:6 (NKJV)

6 Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.

Paul made a really BIG deal about this offering, raising the funds, making sure it was safely delivered to the Jews, and elaborating on it here in Romans and other places.

WHY it was so important Paul does not specifically say here – other than it really was a moral obligation to do so.

However, the greater context here in Romans 15 speaks to the importance of the unity of the church involving both Jew and Gentile. That really is what Romans 14 and the first half of chapter 15 are all about. In Romans 15:7 Paul says to the Roman Christians to receive one another to the glory of God. He then goes on to emphasize the place of the Jew in relation to the Gentile as seen in Romans 15:8-13.

It is because of this STRONG emphasis in context on the unity of Jew and Gentile believer that most think a KEY driving motive behind the importance of this financial gift for the Jerusalem church was really largely about emphasizing the unity of the church between Jewish and Gentile believers. This overture would go far in emphasizing their unity, which, as we have noted, was of utmost importance in the mind of Paul.

Paul wanted them all to realize – we are all in this together. We are all now one LARGE family of God, and this gift symbolized that reality!

28 Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.

The words “performed this” and “sealed to them” has the sense of safely delivering it to them. Paul did not do this alone. There were messengers from the churches who accompanied him. There was strict accountability all along the way.

Slide # 21**2 Corinthians 8:21 (NKJV)**

21 providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

Everything was done in a very transparent manner in the plain sight of everyone which is how all things financial in ministry should be handled.

And it was wise to have a good-sized delegation go, even for safety's sake. In 2 Cor. 11, Paul speaks of all he went through, including "perils of robbers" (v. 26). When you are carrying a large sum of money, you want accountability, and you want safety.

Notice that Paul calls these collected funds "fruit". Fruit takes different forms. Paul anticipated bearing spiritual fruit in Rome once he got there, saying in chapter one that as much as was in him, he was ready to preach the gospel (Rom. 1:13-15). So, spiritual fruit can take the form of converts or spiritual development in the lives of God's people.

Slide # 22**Philippians 1:22 (NKJV)**

22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.

However, financial giving towards the cause of Christ in the furthering of His Church is also said to be fruit.

Slide # 23**Philippians 4:15–17 (NKJV)**

15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only.

16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.

17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

The fruit in the case of supporting the work of the Lord is the eternal reward that is put to the account of those who give.

The fruit in Romans 15:28 was the offerings freely given by the Gentiles to support the saints in Jerusalem. This was their fruit for all eternity. It definitely has eternal ramifications, as Paul spelled out in 2 Cor. 9:6.

Slide # 24

2 Corinthians 9:6 (NKJV)

6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Paul is very clear about his plans here. After he has safely delivered the collected offerings to the saints in Jerusalem, he plans to go through Rome on his way to Spain.

Again, we don't know if he ever got to Spain or not. The Bible does not tell us. The book of Acts ends with Paul imprisoned in Rome. But some think that Paul was then released and had a fourth missionary journey which took him to Spain. They think he was then again arrested and taken back to Rome where he was martyred. There are some extra-biblical hints that this he may have made it to Spain.

Clement of Rome (writing in 95 A.D.) says that Paul had traveled and preached in "the farthest limits of the West" (1 Clement 5:5-7). This sort of language could possibly be a description of Spain which was commonly considered to the western limits of the known world.

There is a fragment called the ***Muratorian fragment*** (written in about 170 A.D.), which seems to indicate Paul's made a missionary journey to Spain. This of course proves nothing, but it does show that church tradition was handing this idea down. However, this shows that church tradition was handing this down through the generations. Also, Paul's missionary trip to Spain is was mentioned by Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386) and John Chrysostom (347-407).

But again, this is not proof and we are not sure about this. We do know that Paul's clear intention was to go to Spain, and if indeed he was released from his first Roman imprisonment, it is very possible that it happened.

But note this: Paul did make it to Rome, but NOT as planned. Paul made his plans but God in His sovereignty worked it a completely different way – a way that Paul did not see coming. God often works this way as His ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8-9).

What actually happened was this. When Paul was in Jerusalem a Jewish mob threatened to kill Paul and the Roman army intervened and arrested him trying to figure out what was going on. The Romans in the process of things tried to put Paul on trial before the Jewish leaders, but Paul appealed his case to Caesar. And thus began his “free all expenses paid” trip to Rome (cf. Acts 21-28).

Paul in writing the letter of Romans anticipated coming to Rome as apostolic missionary, but he ended up being brought there as a Roman prisoner. We make our plans, but the outcome is in God’s hands. Often things don’t go according to our plan, but God is sovereign.

When Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, Christ came to him in prison and revealed this to him.

Slide # 25

Acts 23:11 (NKJV)

11 But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “***Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.***”

Yes, God’s plan was for Paul to go to Rome, but not in the way that Paul had envisioned. Plans are good but we should always give plenty of space for God’s revision. Continually, as James says we should say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” (Ja. 4:15).

Slide # 26

Proverbs 16:9 (NKJV)

9 A man’s heart **plans his way**, But **the LORD directs his steps**.

Proverbs 20:24 (NKJV)

24 A **man’s steps are of the LORD**; How then can a man understand his own way?

God’s ways are so above us that we really don’t understand our own way and the way that God is leading us. We take it one step at a time and leave plenty of room for surprises.

Slide # 27



Slide # 28

My entire life can be summed up in one sentence...

"Well that didn't go as planned."

Very often, that is the case. It doesn't mean we shouldn't plan – we just shouldn't be surprised if there is a lot of editing along the way. This causes us to BOW and let God be God. He is the guide, not us! His ways are not our ways – they are above us, and they are better!

29 But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

Paul was very confident that he would come to Rome and he believed that when he did it would be “in the fullness of the blessing of Christ”. The older manuscripts leave out the word “gospel” here. Certainly, from Paul's earlier statement he was intending to preach the gospel with everything in him and so it fits but probably this word was a scribal insert.

Again, this PLAN was fulfilled but not as Paul intended. He came in chains – not in freedom. But he was right in that he came in the fullness of Christ's blessing as God used him mightily there.

One of the evidences of this is seen in the fact that he wrote what is called “The Prison Epistles” there – namely Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Paul from his position of imprisonment preached the gospel to the highest levels of Roman society which then trickled down to society in general and also to the church.

Slide # 29

Philippians 1:12–14 (NKJV)

12 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the **furtherance of the gospel**,

13 so that it has become evident to the **whole palace guard**, and to **all the rest**, that my chains are in Christ;

14 and most of **the brethren** in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Indeed, Paul did come to Rome “in the fullness of the blessing of Christ”.

Paul was a man of PURPOSE, PLANS, AND PRIORITIES all centered in the gospel and the body of Christ. This is what drove him as apostle separated to the gospel (Rom. 1:1).

God works through people of purpose, plans, and priorities when they are oriented to the gospel. Yes, at certainly places and in certain times it goes a whole different direction than what we are initially thinking, but through it all God works out His sovereign purposes.

This is a fascinating study in human responsibility and God’s sovereignty. God sovereignly works through our plans – even as He adjusts them as we go along. Every step we seek to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, but we want to be active in moving forward.

David Livingstone lived in the 1800s. He was a long time missionary in Africa. When he applied to be a missionary with the London Missionary Society they asked him where he wanted to go. He said, ***“Anywhere, so long as it is forward.”***

It is often stated that it is easier to steer a moving object than a stationary one. God has a way of directing us when our heart is filled with gospel purpose, plans, and priorities.

Show me a person's purpose, plans, and priorities and I will show you what the person is all about! This what defined the apostle Paul!

In *Don't Waste Your Life* ([Crossway], pp. 45-46), John Piper contrasts two stories. The first story is about two women, one over eighty, the other in her late seventies, who had given their lives to make Jesus Christ known among the unreached people of Cameroon. In April, 2000, their brakes failed, their car went over a cliff, and they were both killed instantly. Piper asks, "Was that a tragedy?" He answers, "No, that is not a tragedy. That is a glory. These lives were not wasted. And these lives were not lost. 'Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it' ([Mark 8:35](#))."

The second story shows how to waste your life. The *Reader's Digest*, told of a couple who took early retirement when he was 59 and she was 51. They moved to Florida where they cruise on their boat, play softball, and collect shells. At first Piper thought that the story was a spoof on the American Dream, but then he realized that *this is the dream*: "Come to the end of your life—your one and only precious, God-given life—and let the last great work of your life, before you give an account to your Creator, be this: playing softball and collecting shells." "That," says Piper, "is a tragedy."

– ***Shared by pastor Steven Cole***

Let me ask you: What is your purpose, plans, and priorities. I submit to you if they are not centered in the gospel and the body of Christ that in the end is a tragedy!

God help us to go forth in the fullness of the blessing of Christ!