

**Romans 15:22 For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. 23 But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, 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. 25 But now I am going 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. 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. 28 Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. (NKJV)**

We are quickly working our way to the end of Romans. Paul has just described his ministry. Now he is talking about future plans.

His first explanation is about why it has taken him so long to get to see the church in Rome, clearly a church he wanted to come and visit.

Let's look at what he says.

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

For what reason? What reason could Paul have possibly had for not carrying out this thing that his heart longed to do? It is clear in context the reason he couldn't visit was that **he was busy carrying out the ministry** God had given him to do. He was to spread a gospel presence in the gentile world. Paul made it his aim to preach in those areas where there was no gospel presence. Judging from what he has said, it appears that Paul's ministry was a mixture of human goal setting and Divine Guidance.

I don't believe we are told anywhere in scripture where Christ told Paul what geography he should preach in. I am also not aware of Paul being told that he had to preach only those people who no one else had preached to. We are told that Paul was to be a minister to the Gentiles. But it would not surprise me at all to find out that Paul, once being sent out from the Antioch church for his evangelistic work, sat down at a map and worked out the area he planned to reach and how he planned to reach them. Paul made it his aim. He set goals. He didn't regard that as being something un-spiritual.

I have read authors that would have you believe that we should never set goals. We should never make plans. We should just wait until the Lord reveals exactly what He would have us to do. I don't think that is the Biblical model. We have a **very good idea** of what God wants done on our planet. It is good for us to care about that to the point that **we make plans** on how we will carry out **God's known will** with our lives. Think about this. When you think about God's will how do

most people phrase it? We ask, “what is God’s will **for our lives?**” What we mean is what are God’s plans for our lives so we can get in tune with them. But when we do that we miss the more important question. That question is, what is the Lord’s will period. Because when we know that, we know how to live. We might be missing some particulars He will want us to know. But we already know the most important things.

We know God’s will. God wants us involved in evangelism and discipleship. This begins in our church and our families and works its way out. So it is an honorable thing for us to care enough about it to make plans for how we will do it.

Now someone might object, “But what if we get it wrong? What if our plans are a mistake”? Well, let’s look at Paul’s life.

**Acts 16:6 Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.**

**7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. 8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. 11 Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next *day* came to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days.**

(NKJV)

I believe this is normally how God directs his children. Mike used to say that it is always easier to direct a moving object. Paul didn’t wait at the dock until God directed him which ship to take. He booked passage for the most likely target. He came up with a human plan to accomplish the goals that he had in mind based on God’s known direction. Then he stuck with them until they were blocked.

We don’t know how Paul and his coworkers were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach in Asia. We don’t know how they were blocked from Bithynia. But look at what happens. Paul keeps moving. And God does not rebuke Paul. God does not say, Paul you shouldn’t be leaning on your own understanding. No. In fact God communicates to his faithful servant, Paul, where God wanted Paul to go next.

Macedonia. And look at that. God didn’t even tell Paul which city. He only showed him which region. Paul just went to the first city he could reach in that area.

I believe Paul serves as a good example for us in this passage. You may not know God’s full will for your life. In fact, I can assure you that you don’t. You may not know what He has for you 2 or 3 years from now. But you know enough to know what is important to Him right now. So make plans. Plan to carry out those things

that you know are important. Don't worry that you might make a mistake. God will direct your path. Just make a plan and start moving. Don't wait for God to get you moving. He has already done the first part. He told you what He cares about. Do something about it.

Young men, set goals. This church will soon need new leadership. You young men need to rise up to fill our shoes. That won't just happen to you. Carry out a plan for how you will become better workmen in the word of God. Pay attention to the needs of the body and carry out a ministry to those you see who need it. And if God lays something on your heart to share with the rest of the congregation, do that work. Study the word, prepare the content, and then talk to the elders. We know that we are not the only people that God wants to use to communicate through.

Also, set goals for your marriages. Set goals for your families. If you never aim at anything you are very sure to hit it. Ask yourself, what am I here for? What does God want done in my sphere. And then ask, how can I do it. Don't worry about messing up. God will direct you as you faithfully commit your path to Him. You aren't big enough to mess up His plans for you.

So back to our text. **For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.**

The reason is that Paul has been carrying out his calling. He has been absorbed in things that matter to God. If you ever want a legitimate excuse for not doing something else, this is it.

It is frustrating when Jonathan comes to visit us. He gets here late Friday night. We get to spend most of Saturday with him. But then Saturday evening he starts gathering his stuff. Then we go through our little ritual. So you're not staying until tomorrow? No. I have responsibilities in the worship service at my church tomorrow. Now that is a case of ambivalence. I want him to stay, but I am proud of his choices and what he prioritizes.

Paul never visited the Roman church because he had work to do that prevented it. But now, finally he will have a chance to see this church.

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

Do you see what he is saying? He is saying that his work of spreading a gospel presence in his ministry area is done. He says he no longer has a place in these parts to spread the gospel. He has set up churches in all the areas he hoped to reach. Now he is free to prioritize things that might be more enjoyable but less of

a priority. That is how we should live, always prioritizing the highest things as the most important to finish.

And look at the next phrase. Paul had a great desire for many years to do something. But he didn't do it because he was doing something more important. Mike used to always want to go out west elk hunting. I would ask him why he didn't go. He would say it was too expensive. As we talked I knew what it really boiled down to. It wasn't that he couldn't afford it. It was that his money was being used for a lot of ministries that were more important than this pleasure he desired. He couldn't afford to support these ministries **and** to send himself out west. So he picked the higher of the two until the opportunity fit into his priorities. That is the right way to live.

As I am working on this study there are trout fisherman lined up on the banks of my favorite local fishing spot. So in a very very small way I get to apply this principle.

It is easy for us to prioritize our pleasures above everything else. Our world pretty much lives by that model. But that is not how Paul lived and that isn't how we are told to live. Jesus was talking about things, not just that **we want** but things that **we need to survive** and he said: Matthew 6:33 **But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (NKJV)** That is the ultimate statement of priority. Another way of saying this would be, make sure the most important things get done first. Make sure the most important things are paid for first. Make sure the most important things get top priority. Most of our failures can be tracked back to this very thing. We allowed what **we desire**, what we **like**, what **gives us pleasure**, to squeeze out the things that are most important. And then gradually we deal with the consequences of those decisions. And they are painful. It may be easiest to see the effects of that in our families. But we can also see it in our church life as well. We cannot have our spiritual resources be the last resort. They must be our first priority. If they are not, it is no mystery when things fall apart.

Paul serves as an excellent example to follow in prioritizing the most important things at the expense of his pleasure.

But note too, that Paul did not just drop the thing he desired. He didn't say, oh, I would like this so I better hide this from God because if He ever finds out I will never get it. No. He just hung on to the idea. And eventually it fit into the priorities that he had. It is **just like** God to give us our hearts desires when we trust those desires into His hand.

**Romans 15:24** **whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you.** Here we see even more of Paul's planning. He wanted to expand his ministry area. He knew that the area of Spain was unreached. So he came up with a plan that would cover Spain. Again, we know of no communication from God telling Paul that he

needed to do this. Paul was still making it his aim to spread the gospel to those who have never heard.

Paul was speaking of what he planned to do. He was doing what **we** would do. Even Paul, the great evangelism and someone that God used mightily, was not given a complete roadmap of his travels through this life. It turns out his plans were hindered by his arrest in Jerusalem. It didn't work out like he figured. Does that make Paul a false prophet? No. Paul was not speaking for God here. He was speaking as a man about his future plans. He never attributes God as the source of these plans. They were a man's plans regarding how to do God's work. As such they are subject to change.

Paul had no idea that when he actually visited the church in Rome it would be as a prisoner of the Roman government. He would see them. But not like he had hoped.

**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. (NKJV)**

Paul is straightforward with these folks. He doesn't beat around the bush. What he was hoping for was help. And this word for help is a very specific one. They would have known exactly what he meant.

The word means to conduct, to escort, to send forward. It usually meant to defray the costs of a journey. He is essentially telling them that he hopes that he will essentially launch his ministry to Spain from Rome and that they would underwrite the costs of the trip.

If this were a Paul of Tarsus vacation plan, Paul would have never been so assuming. But this is a ministry that is central to the heart of God. And Paul is an Apostle. So he may have a few liberties that your common missionary would not have. Whatever the case, Paul expected that these folks would want to support his trip. Maybe they have already pledged as much. We don't know.

Notice here too that God has provided helpers and help-ees in specific ventures.

The people at Rome were not called to go to Spain. But they were called to **help Paul** go to Rome. Other places in scripture we see that **those who provide for a ministry** share in its rewards. It truly is a mutual participation. God didn't call every believer to be a Paul. But he has called us all to serve in His kingdom however we can. Often that means showing up at a job every day so we have money to share. That is not a nothing. That is honorable and it can even be holy and spiritual in some senses. It is often a piece that we can play in the Kingdom....a very important piece that allows other people to fulfill **what they** are called to do.

But we can see that this trip isn't all about money.

He says **if first I may enjoy your *company* for a while.**

Isn't that a wonderful thing? I think about all of you here and I think of the times I have enjoyed your company. How sweet that can be, when I mention that I need something and you reach out to meet that need. I find that when my back is really up against the wall I want my friends at Ferndale with me. I am not a very social person, but when we are in the middle of most conversations, I truly enjoy your company. I may not initiate it as much as I should, but **when I have it** I enjoy it. And that is good. It is expected. I really like hearing about how Jarrod views Sunday mornings. He just genuinely likes them. He wants to be here. And it is more than just because Suz is here. He enjoys the company of this unlikely group of believers. That is as it should be. How sad it must be for those who attend church but don't feel this way, at least from time to time.

Paul saw these people as more than sources of funds for his mission. They were **that**. But they were **more than that**. They were precious brothers and sisters. The word for **enjoy** is interesting here. It means to take one's fill of, glut one's desire for, implying one's contact or companionship.

I only see my brother once in a while. But when I do I usually try to have at least a few hours to catch up with him. I want to hear what is going on with him and tell him what I have been up to lately. I want to get my fill of him in a good sense. I want to feel caught up. That is the kind of thing that Paul is describing here.

**Romans 15:25 But now I am going 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**

Those of you who were here for our Acts study know that this did not work out well at all for Paul. The Jews in Jerusalem were having hard times. They needed financial help. They were truly needy. So Paul was doing fundraising for them everywhere he went. Then he went through and collected for this mission and sought to deliver it to Jerusalem. Mike made the point that Paul may have been following his heart here and that it was very likely a mistake. God even sent Agabus, the prophet, to tell Paul how it would end. We have every evidence that Paul believed the prophesy delivered by Agabus but he would not be dissuaded. He was a very stubborn man. Mike thought that Paul was probably being idealistic. He hoped for the hearts of his fellow Jews to soften when he delivered this gift to Jerusalem.

What he found was exactly what Agabus said would happen. He left Jerusalem in chains.

**. 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. (NKJV)**

Paul lays out the reasoning here that the gospel **began** with the saints at Jerusalem. The Gentiles knew the history. They knew that the gospel they were hearing **began there**. The spiritual things they were partaking of were **provided by others**. So it pleased the Gentile audience to help out their fellow believers in Jerusalem. They understood they owed these brothers their very spiritual existence.

There are a couple of things to notice here.

**First**, there is no such thing as a free lunch. One of my pet peeves is hearing it said that the government is giving something away for free. Frankly, that would require magic. It would mean that the government can create things out of thin air that cost no one anything.

What they really mean is the people who are actually paying for this good or service **are not going to be identified** and you can have it now at no cost since other people have already worked for and paid for it. And it is likely that some smiling politician will try to take the credit for it like they have actually worked hard to provide it for you.

Everything you get costs somebody something.

Children often have very little concept of this. All they know is that they show up at the table and there is food on it. They need to be taught an appreciation for the work it takes for that food to mysteriously show up prepared and paid for and on the table. That appreciation does not come naturally.

Everything of value costs somebody something.

Maturity causes people to grow in their appreciation of that fact. And that gratitude eventually turns into reciprocity. First our kids have no appreciation of the food that turns up on their plate. Then they become involved in its preparation. Then they become involved in its purchase. Then they begin to purchase it on their own. Then they provide it all for themselves. And then they invite you over to enjoy that food with them and you appreciate their provision. (And if Jeremiah wants to take a hint here, that's ok, but that isn't the point I am really shooting for) What Paul is talking about here is the maturity of understanding that the ministry we receive costs someone something. And we, in turn, want to pay that debt. We want to support the source of our blessing. We don't want to be like children, just taking everything for granted. We want to bless those who have blessed us.

The second thing to notice is that we live in a real world. The spiritual stuff is real. At the same time the material stuff is necessary. So when we receive a spiritual benefit, a material response is appropriate. Paul never presented some kind of mystical spiritual world like eastern mysticism creates. No. Paul was somewhat of a pragmatist. He essentially preached if you receive a spiritual benefit, it is worthy

of material support. We covered this a while ago when we were talking about the purchase of property for the church. While I cannot say that tithing is an absolute requirement in the New Testament, I can say that a material response to a spiritual blessing is a sign of true appreciation of the spiritual blessing. That is consistent across all the pages of the New Testament. That is what Paul assumed and expected and taught. Paul used the word “duty”. This is a strong word. It means to be under obligation for. It is an obligation imposed by reason. It really only makes sense.

**Romans 15:28 Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. (NKJV)**

So Paul concludes that once he has taken this gift to Jerusalem and has sealed to them this fruit, he will come to the Romans. This word sealed very likely means that Paul has given authoritative assurance that this money was collected for their use. So Paul lets them know this money is officially given to them to meet their need. These gentiles truly love you and want to help you out. He also can account to those who have given it that it was delivered as promised.

Once that is done I will come back this way. I will stop here. And you will help me spread the Gospel in Spain.

**Romans 15:29 But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. (NKJV)**

Paul is basically saying that when he comes, he will be expecting something. But he will also be bringing something. We see in **Romans 1:11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established-- (NKJV)**

Paul believed that he would come with something the Romans both wanted and needed. Ministers eventually come to understand that if they are faithfully and accurately presenting the Gospel, they are delivering a blessing. And it isn't a blessing that comes from anything about them. In fact, they may wonder about the fact that God would use such a flawed vessel to bring such a wonderful gift. But they know God will provide through his Word those things that perfectly provide for the needs of the hearers. And that is a wonderful thing.

We will end here this morning and double back on some of this next week, Lord willing.

As for application-

What do you know of God's will? What are your plans to carry it out? Could you commit to more specific plans that would be more likely to assure that God's will is carried out first, above those things that are for your pleasure? What are some things that you could do? Even Paul didn't just wait for God to move. He got actively involved in what God wants done.



Young men, especially, are you prepared for leadership? If not, why not? What do you need to do to begin to prepare yourselves? If there is any way that Brad or I can help you, we are all ears.

There is more homework to be had in the application of this text, but I think this will give us at least enough to apply for now.