

# Plans, Prayers, and Providence

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[ 0 : 00 ] And I'd like you to open up your copy of the Scriptures to Romans chapter 15.

! We're going to be finishing this chapter this morning. And next week, moving on ahead into the last chapter of this great letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome.

And so this morning we're landing on the second half of chapter 15 and going to cover all of verses 22 down through verse 33 as we consider what Paul's plans were.

He lays them out for us here at the end of this chapter, tells us what he longs to do and what he wants to do. And we'll look at those plans and look at them in the context of some other things that we read elsewhere in the New Testament to try to learn how should we go about viewing the plans that we make in our lives.

How should we go about planning for the future and thinking about the future and in what ways would God lead us and guide us and redirect our courses in the midst of that.

[ 1 : 13 ] And so if you found your place there in the Scriptures, I'd ask you to stand with me as we read the last part of this chapter. Verse 22. This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.

But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and to be helped on my journey there by you once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem, bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them.

For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they also ought to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, 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 blessing of Christ. I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

[ 2 : 37 ] May the God of peace be with you all. Amen. Father, thank you for this word. Thank you for preserving for us in writings the plans of the Apostle Paul and his earnest pleas for the prayers of God's people.

Teach us from this, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. Amen. Amen. In 1792, William Carey, who would go on to become a world-famous and world-renowned missionary to the country of India, preached a sermon to a group of pastors and other church leaders that had gathered together for the purpose of discussing what they ought to do in order to reach the lost people around the world.

He had already, William Carey had already written his most famous book by that point in time, arguing the same point that we have an obligation as believers to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Now that may seem like standard fare to you. You may think, well, of course, that's what we always teach. That's what the church has always done. And yet, Carey was facing opposition from church leaders all around him.

The idea of taking the gospel to these dangerous lands, the idea of taking the gospel to people that up to this point in time, God had not sent the gospel to, that up to this point in time, no missionary had been there, that idea seemed radical to them.

[ 4 : 08 ] They weren't opposed to the preaching of the gospel. They were engaged in the preaching of the gospel. But when you look at their historical context, only a little more than 150 years, 200 years removed from the Reformation, from the recovery of the gospel itself, most of the labors of the church for the last couple of hundred years had been spent in converting those who lived within countries that broadly considered themselves to be Christianized in Europe.

So that the idea of going to these far away places was difficult to fathom. It's not that they were unwilling to travel there. They were willing to travel there.

In fact, India at that point in time was considered a part of the British Empire. But for the church to go there specifically with the task of converting the natives, the people who lived in those countries, it just it seems strange and radical to many people.

And so Carey wrote wrote a book with a very catchy title, An Inquiry Concerning the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen.

It's a catchy title, but it ended up selling a lot of copies and he became famous. And he came to preach this famous sermon there in 1792 in which he made his most famous pronouncement.

[ 5 : 26 ] And he charged his fellow ministers, his fellow preachers of the gospel, he charged them with a very simple task. He said that they ought to expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.

To expect great things from God and attempt great things for God. And that certainly characterized William Carey's life. He would leave little more than a year after preaching that sermon to go to India.

He would go illegally. He would go without the blessing of his country. In fact, he would have to settle in a colony in India owned by another country because he was not legally allowed to enter into the British parts of India at that time.

And he would suffer much and he would risk much for the sake of taking the gospel to the people of India. And he would remain in India for 41 years, never making a return trip home.

He gave his life to the preaching of the gospel among unreached peoples. He attempted great things for God. And in order for him to do that, he had to expect God to do great things.

[ 6 : 31 ] And in many ways, his attitude and his commitment to reaching unreached peoples, for me, mirrors the attitude that we've been seeing from the Apostle Paul, not only in Romans chapter 15, but throughout the book of Romans.

And if we look more broadly at the book of Acts and the letters of Paul, we can see that Paul had a driving passion to take the gospel to people who had not yet heard and been told of the gospel. And in doing that, Paul frequently made plans. He planned to sail to this city and to go to this place. He had a very clearly laid out formula in his mind for how he would go about reaching these unreached peoples.

Typically, he would go into a city and he would first find the synagogue of that city. He would find the Jews in that city and he would preach the gospel to the Jews. And then he would turn his attention to the Gentiles.

Once he had won as many converts among the Jews as he could, he would turn his attention to the Gentiles and begin to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. And once his work was done in one particular city and he had a church that was functioning and healthy, he would move on to the next city.

[ 7 : 41 ] And he did that throughout the Roman Empire. But now the time had come, at least in Paul's mind, to move further, to go further.

Because he says in our passage that his work in these regions is done. He's gone to all the cities that he believes he needs to go to. So Christianity is well established in this part of the Roman Empire, the main parts of the empire.

It's well established. So now Paul, feeling called to preach the gospel to those who have never heard the gospel, begins to plan to go further. I want you to take a look at the passage here.

I want you to see the plans that Paul has in mind. First, he speaks directly to the Romans and he tells them that he has not been able to come to them. He has not been able to see them.

He has not been able to make it to the city of Rome. He says, this is the reason why I've been so often hindered. What's the reason? He still had work to do in those other regions. But now he's finished.

[ 8 : 38 ] But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain.

That's his plan. He's got a clear plan. He's going to Spain, which may not sound like a very big deal to you guys, but that's the edge of the world for the Apostle Paul. And for the greater Greco-Roman world, for the people that Paul was familiar with and among whom he had traveled and among whom he had relationships, Spain was the edge of the world.

I mean, beyond Spain, you just have endless ocean. And so Paul's plan is to go as far as he can to take the gospel in his mind to the ends of the earth in that direction.

That's his plan. But along the way, he wants to stop in the city of Rome, and he really has a twofold purpose. He first wants to win their support. He wants them to help him to get to Spain, which makes sense, because Rome is a good stopping point from where Paul is in the eastern half of the empire to travel to Rome, to the midpoint, and then on to Spain.

Rome is a good stopping point for Paul to stop and be refreshed and be supported by them, whether it's monetarily or simply by their prayers or simply being allowed to stay with them and prepare for the final leg of his journey.

[ 10 : 00 ] Rome is a great place for him to stop. But he also wants to preach in Rome. He also wants to be able to encourage the believers in Rome and to help them to grow up and mature.

We know that because this is not the first place in Romans that he has mentioned his desire to go to the city of Rome. I want you to hold your place there in chapter 15 and turn all the way back to chapter 1.

I know it's been almost three years since we've been in chapter 1, so some of you may have forgotten what Paul said about his desire to go to Rome back in chapter 1. But I want you to listen carefully to Paul's words.

We can jump in in verse 11. He says, I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you.

That is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. And then he says, I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you, but thus far have been prevented, in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

[ 11 : 05 ] So Paul's desire to go to Rome is twofold. He wants their support, but he also wants to preach the gospel in Rome. He wants to encourage the believers in Rome and he wants to win more converts in Rome.

That's Paul's goal everywhere that he goes. So Rome is not just a stopping off point. It's not just a launch point. It's not just a preparation place. It's also a place of gospel ministry for the Apostle Paul.

And he has desired for quite some time to get to Rome. That's a part of his plan. On to Rome and then to Spain, where the gospel has not yet been preached.

And where he can continue to fulfill his calling to preach the gospel where Christ has not yet been named. But there's more to the plan. He has some other things that he has to take care of.

He has some loose ends that he needs to deal with. Take a look down at verse 25. He says, At present, however, in other words, I'm not coming straight to see you. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem, bringing aid to the saints.

[ 12 : 07 ] Now we know from the end of the book of 1 Corinthians that Paul had been collecting an offering for the church in Jerusalem as he traveled around and checked on some of the churches that he had previously already begun and started and set about their way.

He was traveling back through many of those churches, collecting this offering to help out members of the church of Jerusalem. They were in a bad time in Jerusalem. The believers there were suffering from poverty and from a famine that had just occurred recently.

And so Paul had it on his mind to gather an offering from the Christians scattered throughout the empire, take that offering to Jerusalem. And hopefully with that, once again, prove to the believers in Jerusalem that these Gentile believers scattered now all throughout the empire were one body with them and greatly desired to support them and help them and love them.

So Paul's got a grand plan here. Collect an offering for the saints in Jerusalem, take that offering to Jerusalem, spend some time there, be refreshed there, and then sail for Rome and from Rome make it a staging point, a launching point to go to Spain to preach the gospel where Christ has not

yet been named.

It's a grand plan. It's a good plan. But Paul knows that it comes with great danger. It comes, it's fraught with difficulty.

[13:26] Back in Romans chapter 15, you'll notice that he requests that they would pray for him. He asks that they pray in verse 31 that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, that's the region in which Jerusalem is found, be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints.

He knows that there is danger. He knows that to go back to Jerusalem, to go back to Judea, is to put himself in a very dangerous situation.

And he doesn't know that because of speculation. He knows that because God has revealed that specifically to him. In fact, one of the things I want to do before we jump back to Romans is I want us to go to the book of Acts and I want us to track with Paul.

I want us to follow Paul along this trip to Jerusalem and then from Jerusalem finally to Rome. I want us to follow him so that we can see how Paul's plans, how they interact with God's plans.

Because we can make all of the plans in the world. In fact, we can attempt great things for God. We can desire to do great and mighty things for the Lord, but we have to reckon with his plans.

[14:43] Because he's the sovereign one. He's the one who sets up kings and nations. He's the one who controls all things. He's the one about whom the Apostle Paul writes, all things, all things he works according to the counsel of his will.

And so we can plan, we can even plan to do great and mighty things in the name of the Lord, but we must always reckon with God's plans. And that's what Paul has been doing all along.

Back in Acts chapter 19, we see Paul's desire to go to Rome. Verse 21, After these events, Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia.

Those are the places that he mentions in chapter 15, where he had been taking up an offering. He resolved to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, now listen to this, After I've been there, I must also see Rome.

So already, he feels this sense of a plan to Jerusalem and then on to Rome. Then jump to chapter 20. He's moved on to another city. He's traveling on this route and he stops off to speak with the elders, the pastors of the church of Ephesus.

[15:59] And among the many things that he tells them, he says this in chapter 20, verse 22. He says, Now behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there.

At this point, he's not quite sure what's going to happen, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

Why does he ask for prayer in Romans 15? Because the Spirit has already testified to Paul. In Jerusalem, afflictions and imprisonment await you.

But he's already said in verse 19 that he's resolved in the Spirit, that is by the Holy Spirit, that he needs to go to Jerusalem. So this is not just some idea that Paul had.

Paul is deeply convicted and has been convicted by the Spirit of God that he's to go to Jerusalem and then on to Rome. But the Spirit has also revealed to him that when he goes to Jerusalem, affliction and imprisonment await him.

[17:02] Danger lies in front of him. And he can't ignore that danger. In fact, it seems like as you read through the rest of Acts, everywhere Paul goes, there are warnings.

This is what's going to happen in Jerusalem. And yet there is a resolve, because he's been moved by the Spirit, to nevertheless go. Turn over to chapter 21. I'll show you what I mean. Chapter 21, verse 3.

When we had come inside of Cyprus, leaving on the left side, we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre. For there the ship was to unload its cargo. And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days.

And through the Spirit, they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. Now what does that mean? If the Spirit has already led Paul to go to Jerusalem, why would these people being led by the Spirit tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem?

Because just as the Holy Spirit revealed to Paul that he would experience affliction and imprisonment there, so the Spirit has now revealed to these believers that Paul would experience those things there. And in response, they're saying, don't go, Paul.

[ 18 : 05 ] We know what's waiting you. And Paul is probably saying back to them, I already know. I appreciate your concern, but he's already told me as well. I know what awaits me.

It gets even more intense. Further down in chapter 21, verse 8. On the next day, this is Luke writing, On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the Evangelist, who was one of seven, and stayed with him.

And he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. And while we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, Thus says the Holy Spirit, This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

When we heard this, Luke says, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Then Paul answered, What are you doing weeping and breaking my heart?

For I am ready not only to be in prison, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, Let the will of the Lord be done.

[ 19 : 17 ] After these days we got ready and went to Jerusalem. So there is this pleading and urging by other believers with Paul continually as he is on this trip, Don't go, don't go.

We know what is coming. And Paul is saying, I know what is coming too. And yet I have to go. And they resolved themselves. If that is what the will of the Lord is, then that is what the will of the Lord is.

And they sailed on to Jerusalem. Paul understands that his plans are superseded by the providential plans of God.

We don't use that word providence as often as it was once used. And it's a word that I think that we need to recover into our regular vocabulary. When we speak of providence, we speak of God in His work of ruling over the affairs of mankind.

We speak of God in His work of ordering all things after the counsel of His will. And Paul always, always submits his plans to God's providence.

[ 20 : 26 ] And here Paul knows that while his plan is to go to Jerusalem and then sail to Rome and on to Spain, God has another plan that supersedes that. God's plan is when He arrives at Jerusalem, there He will be imprisoned.

There He will suffer. And beyond that, we cannot say what Paul knew. Beyond that, we cannot really with any certainty say whether or not Paul had hope that he would be allowed to go to Rome and then on to Spain.

Because he says, I'm willing to die in Jerusalem if that's the case. So at least at this point, in Acts chapter 21, Paul holds out the possibility that it might be God's plan that He die in Jerusalem for the sake of the gospel.

And he's okay with that. He has plans, but the providence of God stands above those plans. Paul is ready to attempt great things for God.

He's ready. He's always ready. And yet he submits all of his desires and plans to the providence of God. If I must die there and the rest of my journey does not happen, I will die there.

[ 21 : 41 ] Now as it so happens, as we continue to read through the story in Acts, Paul is arrested in Jerusalem. He's arrested by the Jewish religious leaders accused of bringing Gentiles into the temple areas where Gentiles were not allowed to go.

He wasn't guilty of it. People know that he's not guilty of it, but they charge him with that. He's arrested. And he stands on trial before them. He's shipped up north to Caesarea where he stands before the Roman governor Felix.

Felix then has Agrippa, the Roman appointed half-Jewish leader there in the land of Palestine, to hear Paul's case yet again. Paul spends more than two years imprisoned in Palestine between Judea and Caesarea.

He spends more than two years in prison. He suffers greatly during that time, just as God said he would. And yet in the midst of that, God is working in such a way that Paul will indeed be allowed to go to Rome.

He will. While he's in prison, eventually Paul makes it known that he is a Roman citizen. And he appeals to Caesar, which means he says to Felix, the governor, and Agrippa the king, I want to be tried in Rome.

[ 22 : 57 ] I want to go before Caesar himself and have my case heard. A right that belonged to all Roman citizens, but it was a right that few people were willing to use because it's a dangerous thing

to go to Rome and be tried there.

It's a dangerous thing to appeal to Caesar. You have special rights as a Roman citizen everywhere else in the empire, but if you use the ultimate right to appeal to Caesar, you place yourself at the mercy and whim of Caesar.

And Caesar can execute a Roman as easily as he can execute anyone else. Paul could not be executed in Palestine, not as a Roman citizen, but in Rome he can.

But he so greatly desires to continue this journey and move on that he appeals to Caesar as a citizen. In fact, even Herod and Felix, as they're consulting with one another, they say, we could have released him.

He was innocent. We all knew he was innocent. We were ready to release him and yet now we can't because he's appealed to Caesar and now we're bound by law to send him to Rome. So off Paul is shipped to Rome.

[ 24 : 06 ] And yet that's not an easy journey because providence intervenes once again. It's a difficult journey to Rome. They face very difficult weather, dark skies and choppy seas and storms.

They are forced to pull into port at an unknown island where Paul is able to preach the gospel. They are shipwrecked at another island where Paul is able to preach the gospel.

Finally, after a long journey of several months, and so now we're coming up around three years that Paul has been, since he arrived in Jerusalem, it's almost three years now and he's still not in Rome, but finally, finally they arrive in Rome after a lot of pain and heartache and affliction just as God had promised him.

And yet God in his kindness allowed Paul to arrive at Rome. But he had a path for Paul to take, a path that involved Paul preaching Christ in some places where Christ had not yet been preached. Remember, that's always Paul's goal. And all along in what we call modern day Turkey and in Palestine, in all of those areas, Paul had preached the gospel everywhere that he could, so much so that he felt like he was done.

[ 25 : 19 ] He felt like there was no more room. And yet there are these islands out there that need the gospel preached to them. So God sends him to those islands. Preach here. I wreck your ship here.

Preach here. Now, you can go to Rome. Paul does eventually arrive in Rome and when you get to the end of the book of Acts, you find Paul. Turn to Acts chapter 28.

It's almost humorous. If you have an idea of who Paul is and what Paul is like, it's almost humorous because you realize that it doesn't matter where Paul is.

Shipwrecked on an island? In the city of Corinth? Or Ephesus? Or in Jerusalem? Or imprisoned in Rome? It doesn't matter where Paul is.

He just keeps doing the same thing. Verse 16 of chapter 28 just tells us that they arrived. It says, When we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier that guarded him. So he's under house arrest.

[ 26 : 16 ] They found a place for him to stay, probably provided by the believers in Rome because by now they would have received the letter to the Romans that we're reading and they would have been aware that Paul would need accommodations.

So probably a place provided by the believers in Rome, but he's under house arrest. He's in prison. He has a Roman soldier guarding him at all times. Verse 30, right at the end of Acts.

He lived there for two whole years at his own expense. So he's in prison, but he's got to pay for all of his own stuff. He lived there for two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

It just doesn't seem to matter to Paul. It doesn't matter where he is. It doesn't matter where providence takes him. He has grand designs. Preach the gospel to those who've never heard and he will do it regardless of where God takes him.

There's a little bit more insight. One other place and then we'll come back to Romans. Turn over to Philippians chapter 1. Paul wrote Philippians when he was under house arrest in Rome. And I want you to hear what he says about his time there.

[ 27 : 28 ] He says in verse 12 of chapter 1, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me... Now, just pause there for a moment. That's a nice way of summarizing it.

Two years imprisoned in Palestine, shipwrecked in the middle of the Mediterranean, finally now under house arrest in Rome. He just says, what's happened to me? I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. What was it that Paul wanted to do, according to the book of Romans, when he got to Rome?

What did he want to do? Two things. He wanted to encourage and strengthen the believers of the church in Rome, and he wanted to preach the gospel to the Gentiles in Rome who hadn't yet heard the gospel.

What does he do when he's in Rome? He preaches the gospel to the imperial guard, to those guards assigned to him, and to any other Gentiles willing to come and hear him.

[ 28 : 38 ] He preaches the gospel to them, and the gospel, he says, is advanced. And what's the result for the church of Rome? The church of Rome is encouraged and built up, and they are now more confident, and now they are more willing to go out and preach the gospel.

The things that Paul wanted to do, the grand vision and the grand plan that Paul had, so far, it's happening, just not the way that Paul had in mind.

And I think that one of the things that we're going to find, if we attempt great things for God, we can expect Him to do great things, but they won't always be done in the ways that we would want them to be done.

The road map to where we think that we ought to go is not always going to take all of the twists and turns that we want it to. It's going to go to some unexpected locations, and we're going to find ourselves in some unexpected situations.

Places that we would probably never choose. Paul would never choose to be shipwrecked on an island, and yet there, people hear the gospel who would have never heard it otherwise. Paul would have never wanted to be imprisoned in Jerusalem.

[ 29 : 54 ] He was just willing to be imprisoned. And while there, he proclaims the gospel to Felix, to Herod Agrippa, to the Pharisees and the Sadducees in Jerusalem.

Everywhere he goes, he remains laser-like focused upon his calling, the grand calling of God upon Paul's life to preach the gospel.

And yet, in the pursuit of that calling, he finds himself in all of these unwanted, unwelcome situations. And I think we're going to find the same thing to be true for us.

I think that we're going to find that when we attempt great things for God, God's going to do great things. He's going to do incredible things. They're just not always going to be the things we thought He was going to do.

And things aren't always going to work out the way that we thought they were going to work out. So what is it that God might be calling you to do? We know the Apostle Paul's call. He lays it out for us very, very clearly in Romans chapter 15.

[ 30 : 56 ] He is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named. He is to go to places where no one has been. That's His calling. What has God called you to do?

Uniquely in the pursuit of evangelizing the world. I mean, the general calling is the same. We saw that last week. The Great Commission is for all of us.

Make disciples of all nations. Whoever is around you and wherever you can go, make disciples of those people. Preach the gospel to them and begin to teach them all that Christ commanded us. That is for all of us. We are to obey that. But in what great grand way is God calling you to fulfill the Great Commission?

Because it's not going to be the same in all of our lives. I don't feel compelled to get on a ship and sail to unknown parts of the world. But Paul did.

[ 31 : 51 ] But we are under the same basic obligation of the Great Commission just as you are. So what is it that He's calling you to do? It may be that you've never really thought about that question.

It may be that you've never really thought, what grand things should I be trying to do for God? But all of us should be willing to attempt great things for God. It may be that God has called you to be a family and to be a parent who takes in children that don't have a place to go, whether through adoption or foster care.

And there you have bringing into your home people from wherever the case may be. And you have the opportunity now to disciple them and preach the gospel to them. That could be the grand calling of God upon your life.

And I promise you it will not go according to your plan. Providence will intervene. Sometimes in painful ways. And yet you will be in pursuit of something great and beyond yourself.

And you can be assured that God is doing great things in the midst of that. Or your calling may be to help support those who go to far away places.

[ 33 : 01 ] Or your calling might be to be the person in your school or among your homeschool group who's willing to stand out and say, here's the gospel. Here's what the scriptures say about what we're supposed to do and what we're supposed to believe and how we're supposed to live.

Maybe your calling is to stand out among your peers and among your friends and be willing, no matter where you are, to take a stand for Christ. To attempt something great and grand for Him and say to others, hey, I need you to know about Christ.

I need you to know what Jesus has done. I believe that all of us are called to attempt great things for God. And for some people, those are going to be things that everybody would define as great and grand.

For other people, they will be great and grand for them, but look small in the eyes of others. But God is calling us to do things. He's calling us to step out and find ways to carry out the Great Commission in our own lives.

But as I said last week, though Paul has great ambition and he plans to do great things, I don't think that that means that every moment of the way, Paul was engaged in things that would appear to be great.

[ 34 : 22 ] I don't. He was a tent maker. There's nothing grand and glorious about packing up your tent making supplies and carrying them to the next town. That's not impressive to anyone.

That doesn't sound like a big deal to anyone. And probably the day-to-day of parenting your children doesn't sound great and grand because you have to fix breakfast and you have to pack lunches and you've got to do all of these things that in and of themselves are small things and yet it's part of a great, grand calling to disciple your children and point them to the Lord.

Most of the things that we do will seem small in the pursuit of greater ends. In fact, William Carey once said in one of his sermons, he said, I can plod.

In other words, I can do menial tasks. He was, after all, a shoemaker by trade before he went into the ministry. That's what he did. While he was making shoes, he taught himself Greek and Latin. No big deal, right?

He said, I can plod. I can do little things. But then he followed that up by saying, I can persevere in the pursuit of some great end.

[ 35 : 42 ] In other words, he can do all the little daily things as long as he's looking ultimately ahead at some big, grand, great plan that God has and some great ambition and desire for the sake of the gospel.

And that's the kind of attitude that we need to take upon ourselves. We need to be willing to say, I can plod. I can fix breakfast. I can pack lunches. I can go to work and do all the things that I've got to do at work even though they're not exciting.

I can do all of those things because they're just a means by which I can get to this big goal in mind of preaching the gospel to those around me.

I can plod. And I can persevere. As long as I can see in front of me something grand. It's one thing to say that. It's one thing to say, I want to attempt great things for God.

But to actually pursue it rather than to get muddled down in the plotting and focus only on the plotting or rather than to be sidetracked by sinful desires.

[ 36 : 55 ] How can we remain focused? How can we, if we know that providence is going to take us down difficult paths and painful paths, how can we ensure that we're not going to give up and walk away at that point in time?

The answer is right here in our passage. Paul doesn't hide it. Notice what he says in verse 30. I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

In other words, Paul says, I want these things to happen. I see the hand of providence moving ahead of me and I know that trouble awaits me and so I need you to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf.

What is the secret and what is the key to walking down the rocky path that providence plans for us without losing sight of the grand calling that He gives us?

It is to strive together in prayer. Which tells me at least two things. It tells me, number one, that we can't do it on our own.

[ 38 : 23 ] That you can't fix all the mistakes that you're going to make on your own and you can't avoid all of the temptations that are going to come your way on your own.

You can't do that. You can't endure. You can't continue along this path by yourself. It's not the way God has designed things. It's not the way that He's set things up. You need others to strive together with you.

You need them with you and in it. You need help. You need other believers walking beside you and helping you and picking you up when you fall and encouraging you when you're down.

And then you also need to be saturated in your own prayers and the prayers of those around you.

We are tempted, I think, at most times, to think of a concept like providence and come to the conclusion that it doesn't matter what we do.

God had a course mapped out for Paul. He was going to end up in Jerusalem. He was going to end up in prison in Jerusalem. Nothing he could do about it. So why would He bother asking the Romans to strive with Him in prayer about that very issue?

[ 39 : 40 ] Because He doesn't see it all and He doesn't know it all and He doesn't know everything that's going to happen. Because He's willing to die in Jerusalem but doesn't want to die in Jerusalem.

And so He says, Plead. Go to God on my behalf. Pray together with me. Ask that I might be delivered from these unbelievers in Judea.

I know they're waiting for me and I know they're going to get me. But ask that I might ultimately be delivered to them so that I can come to you and I can experience joy with you in your presence.

That's what He asks them to pray for.

And a part of our problem is that we either want God to be in control or we want Him to be hands off so that we can steer the ship in any direction that we want.

And yet God has said, I am sovereign and I am in control. And I control which way the winds blow and I control the direction that your ship goes. I'm in charge. Now come to me and plead with me that this boat might go where you want it to go and that you might arrive at the place where you want it to be.

[ 40 : 47 ] The prayers of God's people for God to act are not at odds with the providence of God. They are the means by which God accomplishes His plans.

You know, we don't ultimately know whether or not the Apostle Paul made it to Spain. We don't know because the Bible is silent about that. But there are some indications in some of the writings of early Christian leaders outside the New Testament that Paul did indeed eventually make it to Spain.

There are some indications that he went there and that he had some ministry there and that he then came back to Rome. We know that he was martyred in Rome. There's a lot of evidence for that outside the New Testament that he was eventually killed in Rome in the mid-60s within 10 years of writing the book of Romans.

We don't know whether he had any success in Spain or whether he really made it there. We don't know everything that he did because Paul didn't know all the details of what lay before him.

And we don't know the details of what is out in front of us. Yeah, Paul had an advantage. He had God telling him some of the things that were going to happen in the future and God speaking through prophets and telling him some of the things that were going to happen in the future.

[ 42 : 07 ] Paul had a bit of an advantage but he didn't know everything that was going to happen. He just submitted himself to the will of God and looked ahead at the great plans that he had made and he prayed and he pursued them.

Which is why he says at the end that their prayer ought to be in verse 32 so that by God's will I may come to you and be refreshed in your company.

So that by God's will I may come. That's Paul's prayer. He has an ambition. He has a grand design. He has great things he's attempting for the Lord. And he has the providential hand of God moving him. Changing his course at times. And so he says strive with me and pray that God's will would allow me to come to you. And that's how we ought to pursue things. Never taking our eyes off of the calling that God has given us even as we plod in the midst of daily life. Never being distraught or distracted when providence takes us along rocky paths or choppy seas. [ 43 : 19 ] And never failing to say to God that's where I want to go. Would you take me there? Let's pray. Let's pray.