

Strive Together With Us

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[0 : 0 0] So, please turn to Romans chapter 15, and I'll read verses 14 through 33.

Yeah, please stand. Romans 15, starting in verses 14 through 33.

So, here Paul is explaining his ministry plans. I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.

But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum, I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.

[1 : 4 7] And thus, I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ already has been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation.

But as it is written, those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand. 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 ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.

[3 : 0 1] 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.

May the God of peace be with you all. Amen. And all God's people said, Amen. So, the epistle of Paul to the Romans was written around 56 AD.

Paul was in Corinth, in modern-day Greece, and as we just read, he is on his third missionary journey, and he's already thinking of new destinations.

He wants to go west. He wants to go to Spain. But he has things to do first. He needs to go east to Jerusalem. So, remember, he just explained in this passage that he has an obligation to go to Jerusalem to take an offering that he's collecting to the saints there.

[4 : 35] Because remember, when he was in Jerusalem before, they asked him to remember the poor. Remember the poor saints in Jerusalem. And he said he would be glad to do that. And he even said in this passage that he read, that we just read, that the Gentiles, in a sense, have an obligation, right, to share with them who they've received so much blessing from.

And so, that's his main thought as he's writing this epistle. The main occasion for writing it is that he is making his plans.

He's going to Jerusalem, but he'll eventually be back, and he wants to go through Rome on his way to Spain. And he mentions this, but when we think of Romans, we usually don't think of missionary journeys and planning, right?

When we think of Romans, what do we think of? We think of the righteousness of God. We think of how Paul explains in such depth this great theme of God's righteousness and how God justifies sinners by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul develops this theme, and he discusses many of its practical implications through the whole body of this letter. But then at the end, he wraps it up with this section.

[5 : 55] So we're going to focus on this section, and we're going to focus specifically on verses 30 through 32. Because in this section, we see that Paul, he stopped being a theologian and teacher.

He stopped discussing his plans, and he makes a very personal plea. He urges them as strongly as he can to be praying for him.

He won't see them for, who knows, a year or two. I don't know how long he's thinking it'll take him to get to Jerusalem and back to them, but it'll be a while. And in that time, he doesn't want them to just, you know, forget him.

Instead, he wants them to be urgently. He's urgently appealing for them to be praying for him from the time they receive this letter until he arrives, basically. So let's look at these verses.

And what we'll see is, first, we're going to look at four observations. So I'll draw out four observations that'll sort of guide us through the passage and help us understand the key points.

[7 : 07] And then we'll turn and look at three applications for our lives. So there'll be four observations and three applications. So let's look at the first observation.

That's great. Good. So the first is that Paul urges the believers in Rome to pray for him. He's discussing his travels.

He's discussing the gift. He's concerned about different things happening. But in this section, he's focused in on one thing, prayer. That's what this passage is about.

It's what, if I asked you afterwards, what was it about? What's it all about? Just one word. Prayer. Daisy, just one word. Say prayer. Okay? One word.

This is all Paul is concerned about in this passage. Prayer. He desperately wants prayer. And this isn't new for Paul. He opens his gospel, I'm sorry, his epistle, by mentioning that he's praying for them.

[8 : 09] He does this often in his epistles. He'll tell those that he's writing that he's been praying for them. And he does the same in his epistle to the Romans. He says in chapter 1, verse 9, Unceasingly, I made mention of you always in my prayers making requests.

If perhaps now at last, by the will of God, I may succeed in coming to you. So Paul constantly remembered them in his prayers. And now in these verses, he's urging them to pray for him and to remember him in their prayers.

And it's interesting to note how he says this. He begins by saying, I appeal to you, brothers. I appeal to you.

He doesn't just say, now pray for me. Now he does that in other epistles. For example, in 1 Thessalonians and in 2 Thessalonians also, he concludes those epistles.

1 Thessalonians 5.25, he simply says, pray for me. Or 2 Thessalonians 3.1, he says, pray for us. So that's not uncommon for Paul to just write in his epistles, pray for me.

[9 : 24] And in Romans 13.50, he also says, now I urge you, brethren. So sometimes he urges them and sometimes he just asks them to pray for him.

But in this section, we see that he is urging, but he doesn't stop with urging. He doesn't just urge, say, I urge you to pray and he gives the reasons.

He's going to try to make this stronger. He's going to make an appeal. He's going to give them two reasons. So let's look at that. That's the next point to observe, that Paul urges the believers to pray.

Because of their common Lord and their common love. Look at what he says there. He says, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit.

So he's strengthening his appeal. He says first, by our Lord Jesus Christ. So he's basically saying that because we have a common Lord, pray for me.

[10 : 29] Whatever concern you have for Christ, whatever desire to see his cause prosper. I have that same concern. I have that same desire. We have the same Lord.

So that should move you to pray. Because we have the same Lord Jesus Christ. But he adds to that by the love of the Spirit. So he's referring to the love that believers have for one another that comes from and through the Holy Spirit.

And Paul is saying, in effect, since we have that same love in our hearts, from that same Spirit working in our hearts, that binds our hearts together, let that move you to pray for me.

So when we look at Paul's urging here and his appeal to these reasons, this is unusual for Paul. Something is moving him to urge even stronger than he normally urges people.

In fact, 14 times, Paul urges believers to do things. So for example, even in the next chapter, in chapter 16, verse 17, he urges them.

[11 : 40] He says, Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions. So even there, he urges them. But he doesn't give them two reasons like he does here.

He just says, I urge you. Now there are three cases where Paul makes an appeal and he strengthens it by referring to Jesus Christ or God the Father.

So for example, in Romans 12, 1, he urges them by the mercies of God. And in 1 Corinthians 1, 10, he urges them by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then in 2 Corinthians 10, 1, he urges them by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. But in this verse, Paul does something he hasn't done before.

He urges them and he gives them two reasons, two reasons to pray for him. So something must be really significant. Something's really burdening him.

[12 : 41] He really needs prayer. But he doesn't ask for prayer. This is the really striking thing about this passage. He just doesn't move right into prayer. He moves into asking them to do something first.

Let's look at the next observation. Paul urges the believers to strive together with him. To strive together with him in prayer. I remember years ago, we were back on furlough.

And, you know, your first day, a few days back on furlough are great because all the couches are so soft. The coffee is so good in the morning. Everything is so fresh and new.

And I was sitting one morning reading this passage. And this just really struck me that he wanted them to strive with him because every missionary wants prayer.

But he doesn't say, I urge you to pray. He says, I urge you to strive with me in prayer. So what does this mean? So the word here, strive, simply means struggle or fight.

[13 : 49] Fight with me. Struggle with me. And Paul often uses this word. So, for example, in Colossians 129 and also in 1 Timothy 4.10, he describes his ministry as labor and striving.

Labor and striving. He sees what he's doing, his ministry, as a struggle. It's a spiritual struggle. It's a spiritual battle. He is striving.

He is fighting. And he wants them to strive as well and he says, strive together with me. Strive with me.

Fight with me. Join me. Make common cause with me. I love what one of the Puritan commentators said. He said, he would have them ply the same oar.

Think of a rowboat. Think of an oar. You know, you're pulling that oar and that can get really difficult to pull. He wants someone to pull with him. Some of you may have watched Ben-Hur when you were young.

[14 : 53] When I was young, that was my favorite movie. I'm bathing myself. I know. I don't know if kids watch Ben-Hur anymore. But it's a great movie and there's a scene in it where they're in the Roman gallery rowing.

Remember that scene? And every oar has two men and they're rowing for all their lives because they know if they don't row fast enough, they're going to sink with that ship. And so that's this commentator says Paul would have them ply the same oar, join him in fighting, pulling as hard as they could.

So that's what Paul has in mind. And this is just an incredible thought. Paul is drawing their attention and our attention to this idea that though physically separated, we can be pulling together on the same team.

We can be fighting together side by side as it were, even though we are separated by thousands of miles. And Paul wants them fighting with him in their prayers.

And then finally, he gets to his prayer requests, his topics of prayer. Let's look at those. That's the fourth observation is that Paul provides them with three prayer requests.

[16 : 06] So let's look at those. First, he urges them to pray for his safety. He asks that they would pray that God would deliver him from the disobedience in Jerusalem, in Judea.

He's referring to the Jews who are seeking his life. And he knows that something terrible is awaiting him. He is going to suffer terribly in Jerusalem.

He's been warned by the Holy Spirit. And he'll be even warned later by the prophet Agabus. But we read in Acts 20, when Paul is traveling to Jerusalem, he stops and meets with the elders from Ephesus.

And in Acts 20, there's this really poignant scene. They meet together and he tells them, I'll never see you again. And so he gives them his final words to them.

And this is one of the things he tells them in Acts 20, verses 22 through 23. He says, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

[17 : 22] Think about that. The Holy Spirit is testifying to him in every city, every stop along the way. He's being reminded by the Holy Spirit that bonds and afflictions await him.

And so what does he do? Does he stop? Does he go back? No. He realizes he needs to ask the brothers and sisters to pray for him about this. And so he asks, even in this letter to the Romans, pray for me.

Pray that I get safely to Jerusalem and I am spared. I'm rescued. I'm safe from these, the ones who would seek his life.

And second, he asks for prayer for his, what he calls his service for Jerusalem. And he explained it earlier in the chapter that we read, that he's been collecting gifts from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia.

And as he's been collecting these gifts, he's making plans to take this money to Jerusalem. And he wants this to be received, not only for the money to get there, but for the believers there to really see it as a blessing and for them to receive it and to be encouraged by what God is doing among the Gentiles.

[18 : 42] And finally, he urges them to pray for his safe arrival in Rome. So he mentions earlier, remember the whole occasion for this book, for the epistle to the Romans, is that someone's traveling to Rome and he's going to send this letter to tell them I'm coming.

So please, pray for me that I eventually arrive safely in Rome and can be refreshed by my time with you. Now what's wonderful about scripture is that scripture interprets scripture.

Scripture fills out scripture. You know what? We have these three prayer requests here and guess what? We have the answers. We know what happened. We actually know how God answered each of those prayer requests.

So, let's look at that. I'm going to, I don't want you to feel like you have to look up every verse in Acts that I referred to. That would take a couple hours for us to read through and discuss every passage.

So I'm going to sort of skim through and then we'll spend a little bit of time in Acts 28. But the first thing to note is Paul did arrive in Jerusalem and the leaders there did receive the offering.

[20 : 02] They were greatly encouraged with what the Lord was doing through Paul and his ministry and we read about this in Acts 21 verses 17 through 20. So we know that that prayer was answered.

Paul did get to Jerusalem. They did receive the gift. The saints were encouraged by that. And second, as the Spirit of God had told Paul, he did suffer bondage and affliction in Judea.

he was attacked in the temple. He was dragged outside, almost stoned to death, but rescued by the Roman soldiers.

And then in Acts 21 through Acts 26, we have the account of how his life is saved. There was even 40 Jews who made a pact.

They were going to fast, not eat or drink until they killed Paul. And God preserved him from those 40 men. And he was eventually taken down to Caesarea on the coast.

[21 : 09] And eventually he's taken, put on a ship on his way to Rome. So he is saved from those attempts on his life. And what about his request for prayer that he would arrive safely in Rome?

Did he arrive safely in Rome? Yes. In fact, we read in Acts 27 and 28 about their long, difficult voyage. They even had a terrible storm at sea.

Their ship is crashed on the island of Malta, but God spared everyone on that ship. And God even used Paul to preach the gospel on the island of Malta. And then they eventually arrive in Rome.

And let's look at Acts 28, because there's a beautiful passage there that is so easy to read right by. But Acts 28.

I'll start reading in verse 15. Let's see. Actually, let me start in verse 11.

[22 : 21] So Acts 28, verse 11. After three months, so they were in Malta, we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead.

Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from there we made a circuit and arrived at region. And after one day, a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Peteoli.

There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. So I think, I think that those seven days, that gave news time to reach Rome, that Paul was nearby.

Because look what happens next. And so we came to Rome. And the brothers, there, when they heard about us, came as far as the forum of Appius, and two taverns to meet us.

And seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. And when we came to Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him. Now it's so easy to read by those verses and not think about the significance.

[23 : 39] It says there in verse 15, the brothers there, when they heard about us, so they got news that Paul was pretty close. What did they do?

They came as far as the forum of Appius and the three taverns to meet us. Now we can read that and just think, okay, they met them. How far did they go to meet them?

Maybe if you have a study Bible, you'll see in the notes, but let me give you the quick answer. They went 43 miles to the market of Appius, 43 miles, probably walking.

They traveled two days. They were probably prepared to go all the way to, was it Petulium or Regium where he had been, where he spent seven days, oh, Petulia.

They may have been prepared to go all seven, you know, all the way to that town to meet them, but they went as far as the market of Appius, 43 miles. And then there was a second group of them coming behind that made it only as far as the three, three ends.

[24 : 45] That was 33 miles. So the believers in Rome organized themselves quickly and said, let's send some people to meet Paul because they knew he was a prisoner.

What did he need? He probably needed some fresh sandals, some food, maybe some clothes. Most of all, he needed to be encouraged and they were ready to do it. They sent a team out.

Then he got a second team together and they sent them out and they met him. What did Paul do? It says here, Paul thanked God and took courage. If we could see that, if we could have had that on TikTok, you know, it would have, I'm sure the words don't capture the amount of gratitude Paul had and the amount of encouragement he received.

Imagine writing a letter to Rome, and it's almost three and a half years. You don't even know if it got there. You don't even know if they remember you. And here they send this group to meet you.

And then they send another group to meet you. And so I'm sure he was greatly encouraged by this. So what does this mean for us today?

[25 : 57] How should we apply this? I think there's three things we could take away. First, don't neglect prayer. Don't neglect prayer.

In this passage and throughout his epistles, Paul was always exhorting us to pray. I'm sure these are very familiar verses. First, Thessalonians 5:17, pray without ceasing.

Colossians 4:2, devote yourselves to prayer. Ephesians 6:8, with all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the spirit and with this in view, be on the alert with perseverance and petition for all the saints.

And Paul was simply exhorting the believers as our Lord and Savior had exhorted the first believers, the apostles. Jesus says in Matthew 7-7, Ask and it will be given to you.

Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be open to you. We are to be continually, earnestly seeking the Lord in prayer. This is what John Calvin said about that verse.

[27 : 13] Nothing is better adapted to excite us to prayer than a full conviction that we shall be heard. I mean, why pray if you're not going to be heard, right?

A full conviction that we shall be heard. Christ, in order to excite us powerfully to this part of our duty, not only enjoins what we ought to do, but promises that our prayer shall not be fruitless.

Again, whenever we engage in prayer, or whenever we feel that our ardor in prayer is not sufficiently strong, we ought to remember the gentle invitation by which Christ assures us of God's fatherly kindness.

Each of us, trusting to the grace of Christ, will thus attain confidence in prayer and will venture freely to call upon God. So, we should remember our Father's kindness awaits, our fatherly kindness awaits us, so we should not neglect prayer.

And another point is that we should strive together in prayer. This is what really struck me about what Paul wrote. He didn't just say pray, he said strive, strive, strive together in prayer.

[28 : 37] As brothers and sisters in Christ, having the same Lord, having a common love, we strive together in our prayers for each other. This is what Carl's Hodge in his commentary on this verse wrote, we shall pray for others in such a way as really to enter into their trials and conflicts and believe that our prayers, when sincere, are a real and great assistance to them.

So, do you think your prayers are a real and great assistance? I know for myself, I can pray for someone because I don't want them to feel bad, or I want them to know that I care about them, but am I praying because I think my prayer is a real and great assistance?

It's easy to focus on the individual, but we have to remember that we have our God, our Heavenly Father's kindness awaiting, and so we pray realizing that our prayers are real and great assistance.

Several years ago when we were in Cameroon, there was a period when I was traveling back and forth, and I left Susan and the girls at the provincial capital, Marowa, and I traveled out to where we were building our home, and the phone service on that trip was really bad.

I wasn't able to call her, so I wasn't able to do the usual check-in and say I arrived safely. And so several days went by, and she was becoming more and more concerned. And this wonderful missionary named Marty, Marty Giger, she's Swiss-German, Swiss-German missionaries are great, everyone needs a Swiss-German missionary in their life.

[30 : 32] She came by to see Susan, and she had such a gentle spirit, she sat down with Susan and said, how are you doing? And Susan said, Aaron's out, and I haven't heard from him.

And so she said, let's pray. And as they were praying, the Lord heard their prayers, because right then the phone went off, and I was able to tell Susan, you know, I'm okay, and I should be home today.

And when I got back, I learned that they had been praying at that very moment. So Marty understood that her prayers were a real assistance. presence. And we need to remember that.

Lifting each other up, striving together in prayer. And finally, this is the Apostle Paul, a missionary, making his missionary plans, asking the church to pray for him.

So I think the third application is to strive together in your prayers for your missionaries. Paul gives us this insight.

[31 : 33] He sees prayer as a way for others to stand side by side with him in his ministry. And he desperately needed their prayer. He wanted their prayer. He urged them as strongly as he could.

He doesn't urge anyone in any of his writings like he does here to pray for him. He wanted their prayers. prayers. And so I think we all should take this to heart.

We need to be striving in prayer with our missionaries. I'm really encouraged that your church is praying for your missionaries. And I just want to encourage you to excel still more. Continue to lift them up in prayer and encourage them through that.

And you can even take a little step further if you want. After you pray for them, send them a text message. We pray. The church we go to in Florida, they have twice a month we meet together and pray for the missionaries from our church.

And one thing that they do at the end of the meeting, you can't leave until you texted one of the missionaries and said, we prayed for you. And sometimes I even get a text, especially if I didn't make the meeting.

[32 : 42] They'll text me and say, Aaron, we prayed for you too. So pray for your missionaries. Encourage them. Let them know. And when they come back, when they walk in, this is the best way to greet them.

Say, welcome back, Sam and Amanda. We've been praying for you. Don't say anything else. They'll be so shocked. Let them just sink in. Welcome back, Chris and Liz.

We've been praying for you. Don't say anything else. Just let that encourage their hearts. Kyle and Hannah, welcome back. We've been praying for you. They'll be really blessed by that.

And if you haven't been praying for any missionaries, now's the day. You can start praying. Your church has four couples.

Maybe there's even another missionary in your life. Maybe you have an uncle or an aunt, a nephew, someone else. Maybe someone, the Lord brought a missionary in your life before you came here.

[33 : 39] And even now, the Spirit's brought them to your mind. I've told so-and-so I'd be praying for them. Their prayer card fell behind the refrigerator and I just never have gotten it out.

Let today be that day where you begin praying for them again. Strive together with them in your prayers to God for them.

Last night, I mentioned William Carey. People call him the father of modern missions. He appears in so many textbooks and so many sermons.

He encouraged so many people in mission work. You may have heard of Agnard Judson, the American missionary who went to Burma. Do you know why he went to Burma?

Because of William Carey. He went and William Carey helped save him from the British authorities. The British authorities at that time loved to capture missionaries and send them back home.

[34 : 40] And so there's nothing better than the British, what was it, East India Company. They did not want missionaries there. In fact, William Carey lived in a Danish colony in order to fulfill his ministry.

So he helped Adoniram Judson escape the British and get safely on to Burma and begin his ministry. Everyone has heard of William Carey, but very few people have heard of his sister.

Did you know that he had a sister, Polly? And Polly is probably better remembered in heaven because of all her prayers. She prayed for him regularly.

In fact, she was bedridden and she would write him regularly and pray for him regularly. And when groups would visit her, she would have them pray for her brother overseas.

And she was continually lifting him up in prayer. And that's what every missionary wants. They want a Polly behind them, praying for them.

[35 : 44] Even Paul wanted that. He urged them, strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf. So I encourage you, brothers and sisters, let's follow the example of Paul, his exhortation, and strive with those who are serving and even strive with one another coming together and praying for each other.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this passage. We thank you for your spirit moving Paul to write these words where he's very vulnerable in a way, sharing how much he needed prayer, how much he wanted the believers in Rome to remember him.

And we thank you, Lord, that you answered those prayers and even moved Luke to record how you worked through your people to continue the ministry of Paul.

And we just pray that you would use this in our hearts to stir us to pray even more that you, your purposes would be accomplished in our day through your servants.

And we pray for Sam and Amanda, that you would encourage them today and bless them and Chris and Liz as they minister in their mission field in North Africa.

[37 : 11] And we pray for Kyle and Hannah in the southern tip of Africa. You bless them as well today. And we thank you for all those that you've led to the ends of the earth to proclaim your greatness.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.