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Romans Road to Recovery / Romans 15:22–33

Because believers are recipients of an unearned spiritual blessing, true body life demands that we actively unite with frontline ministry through sacrificial financial support and agonizing, warfare-level prayer.

Notes

Romans 15:22-33

Title: "The High Stakes of Gospel Partnership"

Subtitle: Trading Passive Spectatorship for Active Investment in the Kingdom

Main Idea: Because believers are recipients of an unearned spiritual inheritance, true body life demands that we actively unite with frontline ministry through sacrificial financial support and agonizing, warfare-level corporate prayer.

Companion Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 (or consider Philippians 4:14-19, which beautifully mirrors the "fragrant offering" aspect of giving)

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Ultimately, we are to step into the trenches of agonizing prayer and sacrificial giving

Introduction: The Danger of Settling in Basecamp

- If you want to summit Mount Everest, you have to start at Basecamp. But nobody moves into Basecamp permanently. It isn't a destination; it's a staging ground. It is a place to gather supplies, to get acclimated to the altitude, and to prepare your body and your gear for the final, grueling push to the peak.
- Yet, if we are honest, many believers treat the local church as a final destination. We treat it like a spiritual Basecamp where we can just pitch our tents, settle in, and get comfortable. We enjoy the fellowship, we consume the teaching, but we never actually make the climb.
- For the Apostle Paul, the church in Rome was never meant to be a retirement

community. It was a staging ground. He was writing to them to equip him for the unreached summit of Spain. And as we look at Romans 15:22-33 today, Paul is going to show us that gospel partnership isn't just agreeing on a doctrinal statement. It is high-stakes. True body life demands that we trade our passive spectatorship for active investment, which is going to cost us our resources, our radical generosity, and our blood-sweat-and-tears prayers.

- If we are going to partner in the gospel the way the New Testament demands, we have to make three significant shifts.

Shift 1: True Spiritual Family Binds Us in a Sacred Obligation of Trading the Comfort of Basecamp for the Exertion of the Climb. (vv. 22-24)

Look at verses 22 through 24. Paul writes Romans 15:22–24 *"22 For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you; 23 but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you 24 whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while—"*

- Paul's desire to reach Spain is an open invitation for the Romans to trade their passive spectatorship for active participation, from simple focus on their own needs and ministry, to that of others.
- Notice in verse 22, Paul says he has been "hindered." In the original language, that is a violent word meaning to be cut into, or a trench dug across a path. This wasn't a mere scheduling conflict; it was an active roadblock. **The urgent lostness of the world kept interrupting Paul's schedule.**
- But look at how he views his upcoming stop in Rome. He says he wants to "enjoy their company." The root word he uses there literally means "to be satiated" or "filled up."
- Paul is exhausted. He needs a refueling station.
- We gather on Sundays to have our tanks filled, not so we can sit back and rest with full spiritual stomachs, but so we can endure the exertion of the climb that the Lord has called us to.
- If you are in a season of waiting or delay right now, understand that it might not be a dead end, but rather a Basecamp preparing you for the next mission.

- But Paul doesn't just want a meal and a hug. He says he expects them to "help him on his journey." That phrase was a technical missionary term in the first century. It meant providing the logistics, the supplies, and the money for the next leg of the mission, including the needs of those he planned to minister to. He isn't asking for a farewell wave or a parting gift for himself; he's asking them to fund the expedition.
- The stakes for this expedition are apocalyptic. In the first-century Roman mind, Spain was the westernmost boundary of the known world.
- As New Testament scholar Thomas Schreiner notes,

"Paul's ambition is driven by a redemptive-historical framework... he must reach the ends of the earth." — Thomas Schreiner

- He isn't just asking them to fund an expedition to another city; he is asking them to fund a mission to the absolute edge of the known world to fulfill the Great Commission.

So the first shift is to "Trade Comfort for Exertion."

If true spiritual family binds us in a sacred obligation, we also must provide supporting Love for each other as we climb.

Shift 2: True Spiritual Family Binds Us in a Sacred Obligation of Supporting Love as we climb. (vv. 25-29)

Romans 15:25–27 "25 but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things."

- Because we are recipients of an unearned spiritual blessing, our wallets must open to also support the physical needs of our Kingdom family. In verse 27, Paul says the Gentiles **owe a debt**. But this isn't a legalistic tax; it is a sacred family obligation.
- Think about it: The Gentile believers were outsiders. But God grafted them in to partake in the eternal, spiritual blessings that flowed through Israel—the Scriptures, the covenants, and the Messiah Himself.
- When you realize you were spiritually bankrupt and brought to the table entirely by grace, you are bound by a sacred obligation for mutual support with the family that brought you the gospel.

- When Paul describes this bag of money in verse 26, he uses the word *koinōnia*—fellowship or communion. He shatters our modern concept of detached charity.
 - Many believers treat the church like a consumer product, operating under the assumption that they are entitled customers.
 - We give to the church like we donate to a GoFundMe.
 - But because we share the same spiritual bloodline, a believer's physical poverty on the other side of this room, on the other end of the camera in the back, or the other side of the world is our family's problem.
- So I have to ask: Do you give like a debtor or like a donor?
 - A donor gives casually from their surplus
 - A debtor gives out of delightful obligation—an obligation that ultimately transforms into the delight of worship.
- Paul actually uses a temple word in verse 27 for "serving" them with material blessings.
 - Meeting the physical needs of the frontline mission isn't just a budget line item; it is a liturgical act of worship.
 - It is one more practical example of "...reasonable acts of worship," back in Romans 12:1-2.
 - As Paul tells the Philippians, when your giving is driven by supporting love for your spiritual family, your bank account is transformed into "a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God."
- But this money wasn't just about buying food; it was Paul's deliberate strategy to prevent a permanent racial split in the early church.
 - As John Stott writes:

"The collection was much more than a relief fund; it was a symbol of Gentile solidarity with the Jewish Christian church... a deliberate attempt to cement Jew-Gentile unity." —John Stott
- Giving to the Lord's ministry is an act of unity
 - It brings unity
 - It preserves unity
 - It is a reflection of unity
- And because the stakes of that unity were so high, Paul needed more than their money. He needed their grit. Which leads to our final shift.

Shift 3: True Spiritual Family Binds Us in a Sacred Obligation to Step into the Trenches Through Agonizing Prayer. (vv. 30-33)

- Look at verse 30:

Romans 15:30 *"30 Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,"*

- Paul begs them to "strive together."

- The Greek word is *sunagōnistasthai*.
- It is built on the word for agonizing, wrestling, and fighting in the arena.

Prayer is not a polite closing exercise before we go to lunch, it is the moment in which we enter into spiritual warfare to win the battle.

- Paul is asking the Roman church to get down in the mud with him and throw a spiritual punch on his behalf.
- We need to be clear about who we are fighting.
 - When we step into the trenches of prayer, we are not trying to overcome God's reluctance or wrestle Him into changing His mind.
 - As Robert Mounce points out,

This is a "spiritual struggle against the forces of evil." —Robert Mounce
 - We are fighting the spiritual forces actively trying to fracture the church and stop the mission.
- Why did Paul ask this of the Roman church? Why is it so important for us?
 - It is important for both because the cultural stakes are incredibly high.
 - Paul asks them to pray that the offering will be "acceptable" to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem.
 - He is terrified they will reject Gentile money due to deep cultural prejudice.
 - He needs agonizing prayer for horizontal unity.
 - And here is the beauty of gospel partnership: while Paul prays the gift is acceptable to the saints on earth, he knows from Philippians 4 that this sacrifice is acceptable and pleasing to God in heaven.

The Crescendo is this. Ultimately Paul is asking the Roman believers and us to:

Surrender to God's Sovereign Itinerary and follow it God's way for God's glory and our joy

- This brings us to the climax of the text—the place where the high stakes of partnership hit our actual lives, the way in which we are to engage and pray.
- What happens when God answers our agonizing prayers, but through a terrifying, alternate route?
- Look exactly at what Paul asks them to pray for in verses 31 and 32.

Romans 15:31–32 "31 that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; 32 so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company."

Two things Paul asks them and us to pray for:

1. Rescue of unbelievers
 2. Joyful presence.
- God answered both of those prayers, but He did answer them differently than Paul pictured in his own mind.
 - Paul was rescued from the murderous Judean mob... by being arrested by Roman soldiers.
 - Paul did make it to Rome... but only after spending two years in prison, surviving a violent storm, enduring a literal shipwreck, and arriving in chains.
 - **Did the plan fail?**
 - No. In verse 29, Paul boldly promised he would arrive in the "fullness of the blessing".

The blessing of Christ is not depleted by delays, diminished by chains, or redirected by prison, it is directed by the express will of our Heavenly Father.

- When we

Step into the trenches of agonizing prayer and sacrificial giving

...we aren't buying a predictable outcome. We are handing God a blank check.

True partnership means surrendering our comfort to God's sovereign itinerary.

- The irony of Paul's journey is the ultimate case study in God's mysterious providence.

Tim Keller famously summarized this dynamic of prayer:

"God will either give us what we ask for in prayer or give us what we would have asked for if we knew everything He knows." —**Tim Keller**

Some of you pray for healing, for a restored family, or for a specific career path.

God hears you.

But the path He lays before you to get to that promise might look drastically different than the itinerary you envision.

Yet, even when God alters your itinerary and you arrive at your destination battered, delayed, or in chains, you will still arrive carrying the complete, overflowing abundance of Christ's blessing.

Will you trust God when the itinerary changes?

1. ++Identify one specific way you have been treating this local church as a consumer destination rather than a staging ground. Step out of the tent this week by signing up to serve, joining a ministry team, or intentionally joining a Quest group.
 2. ++Transform your budget into an altar. Shift your giving from a casual "donor" mentality—tipping God from your surplus—to a deliberate, sacrificial investment in the frontline mission of God's church and the urgent needs of our spiritual family.
 3. ++Choose one specific missionary, church leader, or ministry leader to agonize for in the trenches of prayer this week. Each week pick a different one to pray for. Pray specifically for their spiritual protection, cultural breakthroughs, and relational unity.
 4. ++Write down or at least think about the specific area of your life where God has altered your plans, delayed your timeline, or allowed a "shipwreck." Consciously pray over those moments, surrendering them back to God and trusting His sovereign route.
- Because Jesus surrendered His comfort, agonized for us in the trenches of Gethsemane, and embraced the cross to pay our ultimate spiritual debt, we can trust Him when our road takes a turn and twists unexpectedly.
 - God held nothing back from us, so we should hold nothing back from Him.

In these verses, Paul stresses:

Main Idea: Because believers are recipients of an unearned spiritual blessing, true body life demands that we actively unite with frontline ministry through sacrificial financial support and agonizing, warfare-level prayer.