# Strive Together with Me

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[0:00] Well, last week, we were in Romans 12, and we were appealed to. We were urged on. We were exhorted. We considered how it was like Paul, putting his hands on our shoulders, grabbing our attention, helping us to see he means business as he appealed to us.

And the appeal there in Romans 12 was, present your bodies as a living sacrifice. To God. This wholehearted devotion.
And it was a wholehearted devotion that showed itself by not conforming to this world, but rather by being transformed by the renewal of our minds as we're in God's Word.
That was the appeal of Romans 12. And we also considered last week there are three appeals in the second half of Romans that Paul makes. The first in chapter 12, the second in chapter 15, and the third in chapter 16.
Today, we're going to look at that appeal in chapter 15. And Lord willing, in a future sermon, we'll look at Romans 16 as well. So kids, right off the bat, I need your help.
[1:15] I need you to do something with me. If we remember last week being in Romans 12, kids, we could remember it with one word or maybe a phrase. To be devoted.

Well, this week, kids, in Romans 15, we also could remember this appeal with just one word. To pray. And when we get to Romans 16, we could also just remember that with one word, which would be to guard.
And so kids, this is not very creative of me, but I still came up with some really simple hand motions that we could do together. And I want to do that with you right now to try to solidify in our brains what it is that we're being appealed to in God's Word.
So kids, put your eyes on me and let's do this together, okay? In Romans 12, we're appealed to be devoted. Can you guys do that with me, kids? Can you do devoted?
Yeah. I see some hands back there. Devoted. Devoted. And this week, we're going to see that the appeal is to pray. Kids, can you do that with me? To pray. I love that. I'm even seeing some adults doing this, too.
[2:17] You guys are getting into it. And then in Romans 16, down the road, Lord willing, we're going to see that we're appealed to be on guard. So devoted. To pray and to be on guard.

Maybe even do that with mom and dad or do it with grandma and grandpa today at lunch to solidify what is it that God calls us to here in His Word. So we have another appeal.
Romans 15. Now, this is a little different from Romans 12 because Romans 15 is a very personal appeal that Paul is making to the church in Rome.
Last week, we were in Romans 12 with a very general, very broad appeal. But today, we need to see this appeal is very particular. So maybe we're thinking, well, it was easy to move from what Paul was saying in Romans 12 to how we then ought to live.
We can see the relationship there pretty naturally. But what about here in Romans 15? This appeal is just as applicable to us as the appeal was in Romans 12.
[3:22] Because we always have to remember 2 Timothy 3, 16 to 17. It tells us that all of God's Word is breathed out by God. And it is that all of God's Word is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

That we might be complete. That we might be equipped for every good work. So here it is again. We're being equipped for every good work, even in Romans 15.
All of God's Word is for us. Doing good work in our hearts to grow us in grace. So we might need to do a little harder work this morning, maybe to see the connection from Romans 15 to us.
But it's absolutely there. We need to see this appeal as well. So we are dropping into a very particular situation that Paul is speaking about here in Romans 15.

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These are personal words that he's writing to the church in Rome. He's eager to visit them. He's eager to be with this church. Now he hasn't been able to up until this point in his ministry. [4:30] He has been busy in more the eastern region of the area doing good, groundbreaking gospel work there. It's work the Lord had given him.

He says from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum. Paul says, I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ. So that's where God had Paul according to his will.
God's plans for Paul were there. Remember, the book of Acts tells us of three missionary journeys that Paul took. And these missionary journeys were in the east.
They came to an end. And so Paul is writing near the end of his third missionary journey. And he's now looking forward to being able to travel west to go to Rome.
And we'll see here that Rome is a place where the gospel had already come. So because the gospel had already come to Rome, Paul hadn't needed to go there yet. He hadn't needed to go to Rome as he had needed to go to regions like Galatia and Cappadocia and Macedonia and Asia. [5:37] Those were places where the gospel had not yet been preached. And it was his job to go and to bring the gospel to people who hadn't heard it. Now the gospel had come to Rome.

Perhaps it had come after Pentecost in Acts 2 when Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem became Christians and some returned to Rome. Perhaps it was then that a church was begun in Rome.
It wasn't Paul's doing. He had never been there. But the gospel had. So Paul was eager now to come to the church in Rome. It was part of a larger journey, though, that Paul had in mind.
A journey that was to start in Jerusalem, lead him then to Rome, and finally conclude all the way in Spain. As we read the text this morning, we heard a mention of all four of those places.
So first, going to Jerusalem. Paul is going there to deliver this financial collection that had been taken up among many churches that Paul had been heavily involved in, in planting and investing in. [6:45] And these were Gentile churches. He took up this collection for the saints in Jerusalem.
But then from Jerusalem, Paul had every intention to continue on to Rome, to come and visit this church, to be refreshed with them in the gospel, and then to go on to Spain.

As he says in verse 25, that he would be helped on his way to Spain by these Roman Christians. And how was that help to come to him?
It was by the enjoying company with one another, the fellowship they would have, the refreshment they would experience with one another. So Paul's ambition, Paul's eager hope, it's to come to Rome.
But he's not there yet. In fact, Paul is writing right now from Corinth. And he's looking forward to this journey. So as he's looking forward, as he's writing, he makes this appeal.
Now we're going to break this appeal down into three different parts. Three different parts. The basis of the appeal, the heart of the appeal, and the hope of the appeal.
[7:54] So first we see the basis, which is this. With authority and with love. Paul grounds his appeal in these two things. Authority and love.

Look at verse 30 again, beginning at the very start. I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit.
By the Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit. Now when Paul says here, by the Lord Jesus Christ, he means with the authority that the Lord Jesus Christ has given me.
Based on Christ's authority, this is what I say. If you remember in 1 Corinthians, I know we have taken a long hiatus from 1 Corinthians in our evening services.
That was unintentional. A birth of a baby will do things like that. We'll get back there. But if you remember way back in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 10, Paul made a really similar appeal.
[8:53] Nearly word for word. And this is what Paul says way back there in 1 Corinthians 1, 10. I write to you, I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree.

So there's another appeal in 1 Corinthians. And what does Paul appeal on the basis of in those verses? By the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
By the name. Now that's not said here in Romans 15, but it's implied. Paul is bringing the authority of Christ to mind. Remember Christ's authority with which I write.
Remember Christ's authority over your lives. His rightful claim over us. That should fuel our obedience to Him. So there's a strength here that Paul is speaking to the Romans with.
And there is a strength here that the Lord is speaking to us with. We too need to remember the Lord's authority over our lives. Our obedience should flow from this healthy habit of remembering

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Jesus Christ is Lord of my life.
[10:02] I belong to Him. He purchased me with His blood. So I do as He says. I follow His marching orders. That alone is basis enough to heed the appeal.

Christ is my Master. I serve Him with my life. Paul writes with His authority. So I want to give myself to do as He says. Romans 12. I want to offer my body as a living sacrifice.
Here's a practical outworking of that sacrificial living. That service to God. It's the appeal of Romans 15. Which is to pray. And the appeal here is to pray for brothers and sisters.
To pray for one like Paul. A brother in Christ. As he's serving the Lord. So Paul is bringing this to mind. Here is our Lord. We have the same Lord. The captain of our lives.
We heed His command. There's no other need for another basis. on which we then obey. But God gives us another. He gives us now a second basis.
[11:04] In these words written by Paul. By our Lord Jesus Christ. And by the love of the Spirit. Romans 5.5 says, So the love that God has for us.

Poured into our hearts. The love that we have for God. Poured into our hearts. The love that we have for one another. Poured into our hearts.
And it comes to us through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit who was given to us. Romans 5.5 says. And the Spirit who was given to us.
Is the same Spirit who has given to us life. The one who has made us alive. He's now filled us with love that only a Christian can have.
Only one born of the Spirit. Can have this biblical love. This love that is unique to Christians. So Paul appeals to us by that love.
[12:11] The love of the Spirit. It's a love that we ought to have for one another. Because we've been united together. By this Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12.13 says.

In one Spirit. We were all baptized. Into one body. And this one body. Ephesians 4 says. Is to build itself up. In love.
So that's love for one another. That God is showing us. Should have tangible impact on how we live. Our love should drive us to do things. Such as. Pray for one another.
And so as Paul says. I appeal to you to pray for me. He says. By the love of the Spirit. Pray for me. Out of your love for God. Out of your love for me. Pray for me. So we could capture this by saying. Christ's lordship. And Christian love. Beautifully brought together. In this verse. God's authority. And God's love. Brought together in this verse.
[13:12] To form the basis. For our obedience. The basis for now. The heart of the appeal. And let's look at that heart of the appeal together. Let's read again. Starting 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. And that my service for Jerusalem. May be acceptable to the saints. So Paul earnestly desires the Roman Christians to pray for him.
And he's grounding this request in Christ's lordship. And our Christian love. He's saying because we share the same Lord. Because we share the same love.
Strive together with me. Or perhaps your translation says. Struggle. Join me in my struggle. So we're partners.
[14:13] Because of our bond in Christ. Paul says we're partners. We're partners in ministry. We're partners in seeing the gospel spread. We're partners in seeking to see God's kingdom advanced.

We're joined together in this common effort. Now Paul doesn't expect the Roman Christians to come to him. He's not saying that when he's writing in this letter.
As if joining him or striving together with him means you need to be with me and do ministry right here alongside of me. Sometimes he does say that. He's said that in other letters.
He's requested that people come to him. That they would be most useful to him physically with him. But not so with the Roman Christians. He's not asking that they would come to him.
In fact he's hoping and anticipating that he will be able to go to them. To make that journey to Rome. So he's saying in the meantime. Until then.
[15:12] Join with me. In the gospel efforts. Join with me. Through prayer. Join with me. Join with me by striving together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf.

So Paul's effort to take the truth about Jesus to unbelievers. Paul's effort to build up and to edify the church. He's saying this isn't easy work.

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He's saying this is not a walk in the park. That word that's translated as strive or struggle. He gets at the idea of engaging in conflict.
Paul knows this. He's reminding the Romans. He's reminding us. There are forces of evil at work in this world. And the forces of evil at work in this world.
They want to bring to a screeching halt. The advancement of the gospel. As we read in another of Paul's letters. His letter to the Ephesians.
[16:13] Chapter 6. Beginning in verse 12. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. But against the rulers. Against the authorities. Against the cosmic powers over this present darkness.

Against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. And it's for that reason that Paul then goes on to say. Put on the armor of God. And he lists out the armor of God.
We've studied through it in Sunday school recently. The belt of truth. The breastplate of righteousness. The shoes of peace given by the gospel. The shield of faith. The helmet of salvation. The sword of the spirit. Which is the word of God. And he finishes. He finishes with these instructions. By saying. Praying. At all times in the spirit.
With all prayer. And supplication. And supplication. By saying that we ought to do this. Pray. We're reminded who it is that we're struggling against.
[17:14] And then he gets very personal. There in Ephesians. Just like he does in Romans 15. He says. And also. For me. Meaning. Pray for me too.

Pray that words may be given to me. In opening my mouth boldly. To proclaim the mystery of the gospel. All of this is driving home the point. This is hard labor.
I'm fighting. Not against men. But against the spiritual forces of evil. All hell is against us. Satan wants to undo us. He wants to unravel us. He wants to see our efforts fail.
He wants the eyes of unbelievers to remain spiritually blind. He will do everything that he can to stop me. Is what Paul is communicating. And he'll do whatever he can to stop all others.
Who are sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. So Paul says. Pray for me. Pray for my labors. Because it is hard labor.
[18:16] Pray for me. So that's what Paul is now saying here as well. In Romans chapter 15. This is a struggle. I'm striving. Join with me.

In prayer. So what did that struggle for Paul look like? What was he particularly wanting them to be praying about for him? How were they to bring him before God in prayer?
Two requests. Very specific. Given in verse 31. That he might be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea. And that his service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints.
So remember. Paul is going to Jerusalem first. Before he continues on as he hopes to come to Rome. And Paul is very aware. The unbelievers in Judea.
Which is where Jerusalem is. Especially these Jewish authorities in the city of Jerusalem. They don't like him. That is an understatement. They would love to kill him. Those in Jerusalem have already tried to kill him once before.
[19:20] Soon after his conversion. Paul was there in Jerusalem. And the Greek speaking Jews there. Called Hellenus. They tried to take his life. We see in Acts 9 verse 29.

Paul spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. In fact it was for this very reason. They were after his life. That he got out of Jerusalem.
The believers there. Wanted to see that his life was spared. And so they got him out of the city. So that he wouldn't be killed by the Jewish people. Who were looking to take his life.
And so he went to Antioch. So Paul knows. I've got enemies in Judea. The unbelievers there are opposed to the message of the gospel. They want to take my life. They're lying in wait for me. They would welcome an opportunity for me to fall into their hands. So Paul asked the church in Rome. Pray for my deliverance. From those who oppose the gospel.
[20:21] Ask the Lord to keep me. From their scheming murderous intentions. Because Paul had no intention himself of staying away from Jerusalem. He didn't say I plan to avoid Jerusalem because people there opposed me.

He said I'm going there. So pray that the work would be done. And he's going there to deliver this financial gift. Which relates to the second request.
Paul has a delivery to make. For the last 25 years. Paul has been journeying throughout the Gentile regions. Bringing the gospel to the Gentiles.

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And Paul in the midst of that ministry. Had taken up this collection. To help the saints in Jerusalem. Jerusalem had been hit by a famine. Christians there were suffering.
They were impoverished. And so these Christians in Gentile regions. Not hit by the famine. Were well often able to then help these Christians in Jerusalem. So Paul is wanting the Romans to pray.
[21:24] That the gift would be received. That the gift would be acceptable. Not just because it would be an opportunity for these Gentile Christians to just help out.

And to bless the Jewish Christians. But because in receiving this gift. Gift the Jewish Christians would be symbolically receiving the Gentiles.
They would be acknowledging. Yes. The spiritual blessings that belong to us. They share in them as well. It's what Paul had just said earlier in chapter 15.
So Paul is greatly concerned about the unity of the church. Paul had been commissioned by God to go to the Gentiles. And now he is symbolically bringing those Gentiles to the Jewish Christians.
And he's saying receive them. You're one in Christ. The dividing wall of hostility. It's been torn down. So this isn't praying just that they would take the money.
[22:23] This is praying that the manifold wisdom of God would be on display in the one people of God. So it's all about the unity of the church.

So two requests that Paul is making. Very particular requests in this letter. And they are no small thing. Not that we can't or we shouldn't ask the Lord for small things.
But Paul is keeping perspective here on the mission. He's keeping perspective on seeing the gospel advanced. Seeing the opposition to the gospel thwarted.
Seeing the church being built up in love and unity. And Paul is saying pray for these things. We may not be in the exact same circumstances as Paul.
We may not have brothers and sisters in the exact same circumstances as Paul. But has the God-given kingdom mission changed?
[23:20] We should want to see the gospel advanced. We should want to see the opposition to the gospel thwarted. We should want to see the church built up and growing in its unity.

And so we should do the very thing that Paul appealed to the Romans to do. We should heed that appeal. We should pray. We should strive together. We should join our brothers and sisters in their struggle.
So how are you joining in this great mission? Are you remembering those near and far in prayer? Those far like missionaries.
Are you praying for missionaries as they work to bring the gospel to those in distant lands from us? Praying that God would be saving sinners around the world.
That he would be establishing churches in places that maybe you and I will never get to in our lives. Are you praying for those who are there doing that work?
[24:21] Praying that the Lord would uphold them. Praying that the Lord would give them strength. Praying that the Lord would give them words to boldly proclaim what they ought. Which is the gospel.

Praying that the Lord would give them strength. Are you praying for your brothers and sisters far from here? Are you praying for your brothers and sisters near? Are you praying for your brothers and sisters as they seek to share the gospel right here in Bremen or Napanee or Plymouth?
Are you praying for your brothers and sisters sitting right next to you? Not just praying for those far off, but praying for those near. Praying for those that you can check in with.
Praying for those that you can lock eyes with and ask, How is it going in sharing your faith? How is it going in building up this brother that you've been meeting with? It's already been said, so let me just add on.
It's a wonderful reason to join us on Wednesday nights. Tailor-made opportunity to pray for those far. To pray for those near.
[25:24] To pray for the advancement of God's kingdom. To pray for the building up of God's church. To hear about what the Lord is doing through missionaries' work. To hear requests that missionaries are particularly making of us.

To hear requests from your brothers and sisters in this church sitting right next to you. We heard those requests just this last Wednesday night. And we went right to the Lord in prayer with those very requests.

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We have lists of people that we're praying for. Names that were shared because we're seeking to share the gospel with those people. So we need to listen to Paul's appeal here in Romans 15.
One practical way. Join us Wednesdays. Pray for one another. Join us this afternoon. Small groups. This evening in small groups. Pray for one another. So we need to pray for others as they labor for the Lord.
So are you doing this? Doing it in corporate ways like we just said. Doing this in our individual lives. On a regular basis. Going and shutting the door in our private area. And praying.
[26:30] Asking the Lord to do a good work through your brothers and sisters. As they seek to advance the gospel. Interceding for others. This is something of what it means.

To be a living sacrifice. Giving of ourselves. Serving the Lord by praying for his people. So we must heed this appeal.
And pray for others. But there's something else for us here as well. Something else. Paul appeals to us. But Paul also models for us.
He models how we should be asking others to pray for us. So yes, we should be praying for others. But others should be praying for you.
Others should be praying that you would be upheld. Others should be praying that you would be bold. That God would give to you words in opening your mouth.
[27:29] To proclaim the mystery of the gospel. That's not just something that we pray for others. That we should follow Paul's example here. And we should appeal to others. Pray for me. If Paul, of all people, needed the prayers of God's people.

How much more so should we? Are you sharing with others about opportunities that you have? And are you asking them? Are you bringing particular requests to them and saying, Would you remember me before the throne of grace?
So when's the last time you made that same kind of appeal that Paul does here in Romans 15? An appeal to strive together with you in your own gospel opportunities.
To join with you in your struggle to share Christ with the lost. To join with you in your struggle to encourage and to build up the church. And you know, as you talk about an opportunity that the Lord has given to you to, say, share your faith.
As you ask a brother or a sister to remember you in your prayers. There's this wonderful effect. God, your request to them emboldens and encourages them.
[28:49] God uses you to then stir up others. God uses you to spur them on, to encourage and to challenge them. They hear you sharing your request and they think, I need to speak with more boldness.

They hear your request and they think, I need to be an encouragement to my brothers and my sisters. We even glean wisdom from one another as we get into those specifics of the requests.
So maybe you come to me and you ask me to pray for you as you seek to point your child to Christ. And in sharing that request, you're giving me the backstory. How you had entered into a conversation about the gospel with your child just last week.
And I'm finding, as I'm listening to you, the way that you talked with your child about Christ, there's much that I can learn from you in that. And I need to bring that into my conversations with my kids about Christ.
Or you're sharing with me about a co-worker that you're seeking to be an encouragement to. That spurs me on. I need to be an encouragement to my co-workers too. And the way you encouraged your co-worker, that's a help to me.
[29:55] I've been struggling to know, how can I encourage them? So we help each other. Or even the way that you're phrasing your requests. You are helping me to think more biblically about how I ought to phrase my requests when I come to the Lord in prayer.

So do you see how God is using us to sharpen and to spur on one another in our efforts? In asking me to pray for you, you are encouraging and blessing me as well.
And vice versa. So we need to heed Paul's appeal. We need to intercede for others in their labors for the kingdom. But we also need to be appealing to others ourselves.
We should do that. Pray for me. I need courage to share my faith. Pray for me. I need grace to be patient with my brother. Pray for me.
I want to be a living sacrifice unto the Lord. And every one of those requests that we share with our brother or with our sister, it's a gracious gift to the Lord for them.

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[31:03] Putting fresh wind in their sails to live with the same kind of devotion to the Lord. So we need each other in this way. We need each other to spur one another on to love and good deeds.

So bring your brothers and your sisters before the Lord. Join in their struggle. Join in their striving. That's the heart of the appeal in our passage. Now let's look at the hope of the appeal.
Mutual refreshment in the Lord. And we see this hope in verses 32 and 33. 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. So Paul wants to enjoy fellowship with this church in Rome. And he's not satisfied with just writing a letter to them.
He wants to come to them and to be mutually encouraged. What is it that might bring about the joy that he hopes to share with them? What is it that might bring about that mutual refreshment that he wants to share?
[32:07] At least in part, it is God's answer to these prayers. In Paul's deliverance from the unbelievers in Judea. In the collection being accepted by the church in Jerusalem.

That's going to be reason for Paul to come with joy. That's going to be reason for Paul to be refreshed with these believers. Look how God answered your prayers. We strove together.
You joined me in my struggle. You prayed for me. And look at how God answered. That's life-giving. That stirs us up to joy.
It's like when we've been praying for the salvation of the lost. Week in and week out. Doing that together. And then we see the Lord saving sinners.
Saving those people we were praying for. For years. Perhaps saving young people as we've seen in our own church. We prayed for them for years. And then the Lord brings about their salvation.
[33:02] That's reason to be refreshed. That's reason to rejoice. When a missionary asks for a particular need. And maybe from where we are, our vantage point, we're thinking, how would that ever happen?

How could that need be met? But we pray. We trust the Lord. And then we hear how the Lord answered that need. Miles and miles away. That's reason for us to rejoice.
To be refreshed. That's the hope that's embedded here in Paul's appeal. That as God answers the requests at the heart of his appeal, that he will be able to come to the Romans.
And he'll come with joy. And he'll be refreshed. So what did happen? How did God answer each of these requests that Paul made? Well, the book of Acts tells us.
The book of Acts gives us the answers. After Paul wrote this letter, he made that trip to Jerusalem. In Acts 21, he was warned by many not to go.
[34:01] He was warned that enemies awaited in Jerusalem. And yet, Paul still went. Because he needed to deliver that collection that had been taken up for the church.

And the church received it. The church accepted it. God answered as Paul had requested. His service for Jerusalem was acceptable to the saints there.
And not only was the money received. But even more than that, the Jewish church in Jerusalem was glad to hear of the Gentiles' conversion. Acts 21, beginning in verse 17.
When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers gladly received us. On the following day, Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.
And when they heard it, they glorified God. So the second request from Romans 15 answered. The collection of money was received well.
[35:03] What about the first request? That request for deliverance from the unbelievers in Judea. Also in Acts 21, the Jewish authorities seized Paul.

And they had every intention to kill him. It doesn't seem like things are going well. It seems that the Lord is answering in a way that Paul wouldn't expect. Perhaps he is going to lose his life.
Perhaps he's going to be not delivered from death, but maybe then delivered through death. But then the Roman authorities, not the Roman church, but the Roman authorities stepped in. And they actually arrested Paul, keeping the Jews from killing him.
So yes, Paul was delivered from the opposition in Judea, but in kind of an unexpected way. Probably not the way that Paul was thinking would happen. He was delivered from the Jews by being arrested by the Romans.
But that's what the Lord had for Paul. God answered Paul's prayer request, but not as he might have naturally expected. Even so, Paul was not let down.

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[36:10] Paul was not disappointed. Paul wasn't saying, God, I asked for this. Why didn't you give me this? He wasn't even surprised that God might answer differently than he had requested.

Because here in Romans 15, before Paul had even left Corinth to make that journey to Jerusalem, Paul said these words, By God's will. Right there, verse 32.
By God's will. Meaning, here's my plan. Here's my desire. But God may have other plans for me. God may choose to answer your prayers for me very differently than I would expect.
He may decide to keep me from coming to Rome altogether. So here's my plan, Paul says. But I recognize God may sovereignly bring something else to pass.
Very different from what I planned. And God did. He brought about something different. Not altogether different. Paul did travel to Rome eventually, but not in the way that he intended.
[37:14] He intended to come as a free man, but he came as a man in chains. He did meet with the Roman church, but not in their homes, perhaps for a worship service as he expected.

Rather, they met him on the road with this Roman guard, also with Paul. We read of this in Acts 28.15. And the brothers there, that's the Roman Christians, when they heard about us, that's Paul and his companions being escorted by the Roman soldiers, they came as far as the Forum of Appius and three taverns to meet us.
So did Paul see the Roman church? At least some of the Christians that he had written to? Yes. But under very different circumstances. Paul wasn't moping, though.
He wasn't thinking, this wasn't how it was supposed to go. This is not the happy meeting that I had in mind. He wasn't despairing when he came and he met with them.
Because Acts 28.15 continues and tells us how he responded. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.
[38:24] I can't help but think that Paul had his words that he had written to the Romans in chapter 15 on his mind as he saw the Roman believers face to face.

As he met them, his desire to come and to be refreshed in their company, he thanked God. He took courage. And courage was needed because he was going to live there in Rome under house arrest for the next two years.
He's not going to Spain anytime soon. And so the book of Acts ends by saying, That is not a man who is moping.
That is not a man who is disappointed in how God answered his prayers. That's not a man who is frustrated and thinking, I'm supposed to be in Spain now, but I'm stuck here for who knows how long the Lord will have me.
This is a man who is just continuing in the labors that God had given to him, just under different circumstances. But he's filled with joy. While Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he wrote several letters.
[39:42] And one of those letters is the letter to the Philippian church. And in that letter, Paul said, 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. And then later he said, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.
Oh, I want to come to you Romans with joy. And Paul is writing to the Philippians as he's in Rome, I'm filled with joy in my imprisonment.
Strange as that may be. This is Paul submitting himself and rejoicing in God's will. Not how I would have planned it, Lord.
Not what I expected to happen. But this is what you had for me, and I gladly bow to your plans. I see the good that you're bringing about in your perfect way.
[40:52] I see your wisdom in what you've done. So Paul can joyfully write those words to the Philippians from Rome. He can say, Yes, and I will rejoice.

For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance. No, that's not me quoting Romans 15.
That's Paul and Philippians. The same drumbeat. He's an unchanged man. He sees God's will. He rejoices and he says, Let's keep up the good work. Let's keep praying.

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Pray for my deliverance just as the Romans did once before, and I'm going to see how God answers this time in His good and perfect plan. The circumstances had changed, but not much else.
So there's no time for a pity party for Paul. There's work to be done. Good gospel work that God had given to him. So whether in chains or not, he submits to God's will.
[41:53] He gets to work. Depending on the prayers of God's people to do the work, to do that work. So he says in Ephesians, another letter that he wrote from Rome.

He says, Pray for me, that I may have the words to share. He says, Pray for me, that I may share them with boldness. You see, Paul is still an ambassador for Christ, but now he's just an ambassador for Christ in physical chains.
But the gospel is unhindered. The gospel is unbound. And Paul rejoices in that. This was God's will for him, and he embraced God's will. Can we say the same in our lives?
Joyfully submitting ourselves to God's plan, no matter what his plan for us may be? Because like Paul, we trust in the goodness of God, we trust in the wisdom of God, and we are looking to see his goodness and his wisdom.
We're looking to identify it. Not because we doubt that it's there, but because we are eager to see and rejoice in the good work that God is doing. It reminds us, yes, the gospel goes forth.
[43:01] Yes, the church is being built, and I am delighted that whatever circumstance I'm in, this is how God is going to use me to further his kingdom, embracing his will.

No matter what the circumstances may be, there's good gospel work to be done. So let's heed Paul's appeal. Let's pray for each other. Let's follow Paul's example by submitting to God's will.
And you know, Paul followed the example of another, the Lord Jesus Christ. As Christ submitted his will to the Father, even as he, unlike Paul, unlike any of us, he knew exactly what God's will for his future on this earth would be.
He knew every detail, what was to happen, and he joyfully received what God had for him. He wasn't caught off guard by any of it.
It wasn't unexpected. The circumstances didn't turn out differently than Jesus had initially thought. It went according to plan. The very plan that he knew was to take place, and he obediently submitted himself, going to the cross, bearing our sins, dying in our place.
[44:22] That was God's will for him. And he willingly offered himself up for us. Have you trusted in Christ? Do you know this Savior who offered himself up for the sins of his people?

He's one who willingly went to the cross and who gladly receives those who come to him by faith. Look to Jesus today. Find salvation in him, and then devote yourself to live for him.
Live a life devoted to him. Live a life of prayer for his people, and see his gospel advance, even as you submit yourself to his will. Let's pray together.
Heavenly Father, we can come to you with joyful hearts. We don't know what you have for us the rest of today.
We don't know what you have for us tomorrow, if we will have tomorrow. But Father, we know that all that you plan is good, that you are wise, that you have perfectly laid out our days to do with us just as you would to see your kingdom advance.
[45:36] So Father, we pray that you would give us submissive hearts. We pray that you would give us a great desire to come to you in prayer for your people.

And we would come to you in prayer for your people far from here. We would come to you in prayer for people near to us, and that we would rejoice as we see you answer in your perfect wisdom and goodness, in your perfect power, as you ensure that everything happens just as you intend.
So give us peace in you. Help us to trust you and help us to submit to your will. We pray all of this in Christ's name. Amen.

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