



Sermon Growth Guide

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TO REACH THE LOST | Romans 15:14-22

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Key Verse: Romans 15:20 - "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation."

Big Idea: Paul's missionary footprint inspires us to embrace a pioneer heart to reach the lost.

Foundations

In Romans chapter 15, Paul focuses on Christian unity, urging believers to let the hope, peace, and joy of the Holy Spirit overflow so they can live as one body. Quoting Old Testament prophecies, he reminds them that God's plan has always included the Gentiles. The chapter concludes with the triumphs and hardships of Paul's missionary work.

Starting in verse 14, he praises the believers for their dedication and growth. Even so, he boldly reminds them of the important "priestly duty" to proclaim truth to the Gentiles. He gives all glory to Christ and the Holy Spirit who is miraculously working through him. Paul also explains his absence in Rome in light of his ambition "to preach the gospel where Christ was not known."

From the first chapter of this book to the conclusion, Paul is clear about this mandate! The ultimate goal is to see all nations come to the obedience of faith (see Rom 1:5, 16:26). God is glorified when our trust in Him produces an obedient life; His glory is displayed every time we obey, proclaiming the Good News to the lost.

As we discussed in Romans 10, Paul had an evangelistic strategy. See how he connects his core message of unity directly to his future vision as the letter comes to a close. This chapter prepares readers for the conclusion of the letter with final blessings, teaching, and expressions of community.

Understanding God's Word

Read Romans 15:20-21, Isaiah 52:13-15, and Acts 26:12-18.

In Romans 15:20, "someone else's foundation" explains Paul's commitment to frontier mission. He wants to prevent turf wars and redundancy. More importantly, he has been called by the Risen Lord to be a light to the Gentiles. How was his ambition fueled by the words of Isaiah? How does his address to King Agrippa further confirm Paul's clear missionary call?

Theologians point out how Paul's education as a Pharisee benefited his ministry. He often used Old Testament scriptures to show how Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. Why is this important? Extra credit: Find the 15+ Isaiah passages in Romans.

Applying God's Word

Paul's missionary journeys shed light on the places where Christ is still not known today. I invite you to go to joshuaproject.net. Identify and pray for a frontier people group. How does awareness of frontier mission encourage themes seen in Romans (i.e. unity, hope)?

Witnessing God's Word

Billions of people across the globe will live their entire lives without ever speaking with a Christian. In the U.S., this includes refugees, immigrants, and those from non-Christian households. Do you know someone who may not know Jesus? How will you witness to them this week?

Will I recently made my way over to the Colorado Pioneers Museum. This historic landmark is full of fascinating artifacts and beautiful artwork. I learned about soapbox derbies and the Western Street Breakfast; innovative healthcare, and grasshopper plagues. Throughout the museum, there are stories of survivors, philanthropists, and heroes.

I was struck by the pioneer spirit that is a part of this city's DNA. Pioneers are visionaries. They are resourceful and ambitious. Pioneers are not afraid to follow their hearts, go somewhere new, and forge a path for others. The museum made me pause and ask: What would Colorado Springs look like without the faith and fortitude of these courageous people? The apostle Paul was also a pioneer. His ministry left a missionary footprint that still inspires us to take steps into the unknown for the sake of the gospel. But this passage isn't really about Paul. It's about a God who still calls us into his plan for salvation and the Good News that continues to move outward to the people who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord.

Throughout this series, Paul has been leading a diverse and somewhat fractured community through a series of instructions on how to practice Life Together...how to truly be a people living in unity, practicing grace, and loving one another in a cultural pressure cooker. He wanted to provide guidance and help them stay focused on the work set before them, specifically, the call to reach the Gentiles.

He begins, "I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles." (Romans 15:14-16a)

Paul is doing a few things here. He is justifying a long instructional letter to a church he did not plant; he is showing respect for those who currently lead the church; and he is indicating a trust in their qualifications for ministry that will, most likely, coincide and with his.

Paul and the other apostles had been commissioned by Jesus and sent out to proclaim, heal, and teach. Rome was a strategic base for his work, a launching point toward Spain and the western edge of the empire. So, he shares with the Romans about his unique calling as the apostle to the Gentiles—who were the non-Jewish nations including the Greeks and the Romans.

He writes: "He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:16b)

This is quite bold. It's the only place in the New Testament where an apostle describes their own ministry in priestly terms. He uses it to help the readers see the work of evangelism as worship: presenting people to God so that He receives the glory.

Have you ever looked at proclaiming the gospel in this way? John Piper explains, "Consider the aim of world missions. It is, simply put, the worship of God. The reason the universe exists is that creatures might have the joy of worshipping God. Therefore, missions exist where worship doesn't." (John Piper, Let the Nations be Glad). Paul isn't presenting a new concept. In Exodus, God called Israel to be a "kingdom of priests." Isaiah saw a day when the news of God's glory would reach distant islands and people from every nation would stream to his holy mountain, brought as an offering the way Israel brought grain in clean vessels. God even promised to make some of these outsiders priests.

What this meant for the Gentiles was quite significant. Gentiles were excluded from temple worship in Jerusalem, literally contained in the Court of the Gentiles by a low stone wall, with signs warning them to come no closer to the Holy spaces. Paul, serving as a priest, now presents these very people to God as an offering, set apart by the Spirit and welcomed in Christ Jesus.

The inclusion of the Gentiles was always part of God's plan to unite the world in worship. What Isaiah saw from far off, Christ accomplished on the cross. Paul says it plainly in Ephesians 2: "You who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ... For he himself is our peace... and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility." (Ephesians 2:13-14) When Jesus died, the temple veil was torn in two, the Lamb of God gave himself once for all, and the way into God's presence was opened to every nation. The barrier was destroyed. The Gentiles became a holy and acceptable offering, and it was only possible through Christ's sacrifice.

Paul's priestly language in THIS chapter builds on chapter 12: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." (Romans 12:1)

Paul has spent eleven chapters telling the story of what God has done: our sin, our justification by faith, and an inseparable, eternal love. Only then does he ask anything of us. Our offering is simply a thankful response to a love we could never earn.

And when our lives are offered in worship, people notice. The neighbor who sees how we care, the coworker who sees how we handle a hard week, the friend who sees our hope, patience, and joy. God uses our lives to draw them to himself.

Last Friday, I sang in the CityWide worship choir. Looking out at hundreds of people, I thought about this passage. I thanked the Lord for generations of living sacrifices, who gave their time, love, and knowledge so that people from all over our city could come to the Lord in worship. A great cloud of witnesses was definitely singing along, giving God the glory right there with us.

Paul gives God the glory in everything. He writes, "Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God." (Romans 15:17) This verse links the worship and the witness.

Through worship, we celebrate what God has done and are sent out to share the gospel; and when the gospel is shared, people are brought to Christ. The cycle continues as they are then sent out to participate in the ministry of evangelism.

I saw that movement in Nepal in 2013, when I led a group of young adults. We were serving with Koinonia Patan Church who had a bold goal of planting 500 churches by 2020, and they were well on their way to reaching it. Our favorite Nepali hymn traced a path: the gospel going from a person to a family, a family to a village, a village to a province, a province to Nepal, and from Nepal to the world.

I hear that hymn when I look at Paul's map from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum (Ill-EER-ih-come), and on to the ends of the earth.

Paul writes, "I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ." (Romans 15:18-19)

It is only by the power of the Spirit that all may know Christ. Pastor Tim reminded us of Paul's blessing and benediction in verse 13 last week: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." He asked how we are plugged in to that power; and I think the connector is faith and trust. Full power Faith and trust is what it will take to reach the lost who are down the hall, down the street, or down in the Javari Valley of Brazil. This again, is only possible through the Spirit's wonder-working power. Before Jesus ascended, he told his disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8). There are places where the power of the Holy Spirit has been plugged in and is being channeled...it is still being utilized to the ends of the earth!

Did you hear about the 200 people who came to Christ at RoofCon, a convention for those in the roofing industry in Oklahoma City? Or the small group of teens in Sweden who saw visions of Jesus while they were praying? They decided to start an annual evangelism conference for Gen Z. There are continual reports from missionaries in northern Mozambique where deaf and blind villagers have been healed, leading to conversions, baptisms, and church plants.

So how do we plug in to the miraculous events we are hearing about? How do we support these movements and encourage the missionaries on the front lines? Paul closes by explaining his commitment to frontier mission. His ambition flows from something bigger than himself: God's plan to bring salvation to the nations.

He writes, "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written:

'Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.'

This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you." (Romans 15:20-22)

Paul's pioneering heart beats with the words of the prophets. In taking the gospel where Christ was not yet known, he was living out Isaiah's vision. And he doesn't just share about his work, he invites the Roman church into it, hoping, as he indicates later in the letter, that they will help send him on to Spain.

Brothers and sisters, we talk about the frontier in global terms, but the frontier is also right where we are. I experienced this eighteen years ago, when I was serving at a small church plant on Pittsburgh's south side – the frontier, where people only went

to party, get tattoos, or buy drugs. For years, the pastors years prayer walked, built relationships, and took creative leaps of faith before they saw any fruit from their labors. But they persevered. And once the church was officially established, they decided that at the end of every service, as a reminder of our calling to reach the city for Jesus, we would join hands and recite Hebrews 12: verses 1 through 3 because we needed to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Author is the more common translation, and it isn't wrong. But the word can also be translated pioneer. Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter, the Alpha and the Omega, our beginning and our end. He went before us, for our sake and for the sake of all nations.

The early church in Rome followed that path. THEY became great pioneers, rejecting pagan culture and standing firm in their faith in a resurrected Messiah. In time, they helped reshape the moral and social fabric of the Western world. They walked their pathway for the glory of God to be known among all nations.

Today we are called to continue that same work by directing our eyes, prayers, and resources toward the unreached and frontier people groups--those with little or no access to the gospel; those who are on the margins; those who have different world views and values than ours. This includes our Jewish neighbors scattered across more than 30 countries; the 62 million Brahmin in India alone; and the diaspora communities and Muslims here in our city.

The pioneering spirit is part of the DNA of this city, and of First Presbyterian Church of Colorado Springs. Our founder, Sheldon Jackson, was described by his biographer as "one of the most exciting and courageous men of all those who worked on the American frontier." In his reports to the mission board, Jackson said it was the responsibility of every Christian to expect great things from God and to attempt great things for God; a motto he adopted from the great missions trailblazer, William Carey.

We have a part in that story...through our mission partnerships. As Pastor Tim shared last week, our partners have active ministries in their own neighborhoods and countries. Mongolia Cru has access to unreached groups

in their nation and Kazakhstan. The Bible Society of Egypt and Heliopolis Evangelical Church provide resources for villages where Christians are a minority. Our friends in Guatemala inspire young adults to use their God-given gifts in their hometowns, resulting in lives that reflect hope.

We give thanks for their work and for the collaboration we share for the Kingdom. But there are still places where no one is doing this work; places where people have never heard the name of Jesus.

This frontier mission work is underfunded and under-resourced today, but perhaps we can be part of shifting the tide. I invite you to pray about how God is calling us, not just to come alongside this work, but perhaps to trailblaze something as a congregation.

But pioneering isn't only about what we are being called to do. The apostle Paul and Sheldon Jackson would say it's about who Christ is calling us to see, and what he is asking us to sacrifice. If we want to be serious about it, we must consider the cost. Every one of us has something that would be hard to let go of: comfort, safety... planned vacations, club memberships, or season tickets.

As a church, we hold tightly to things as well: our traditions, our budgets, our schedules, and comfortable spaces. And the more tightly we hold on to them, the harder it is to leave the familiar for the unknown; the easier it is to wait for someone else to go...some other church to do the work.

Looking at the lives of the apostle Paul, Sheldon Jackson and so many more trailblazers like them, I think we need to ask: What great things are we attempting for God? What great things are we expecting from God? And what are we laying at the cross for the sake of those who have not heard the name of Jesus?

The footprints of Paul inspire our own mission pathway: a call to obey, to sacrifice, to rely on the Holy Spirit, and to look beyond our own lives to those who still need to know Jesus.

Let us step into our pioneering history, as living sacrifices. And let us run the race marked out for us, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the pioneer of our faith, who lived a life of sacrifice so that he could become the sacrifice for us, and so that people from every nation would come and worship the Lord forever. To God be the Glory.