

ROMANS 12-16: Putting Your Faith into Action

The Secret to Paul's Longevity

Rough Transcript

Patrick Morley

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Hello men. How's everybody doing today? Good. Good to see you.

If you would, turn in your bibles to Romans chapter 15, verse 23. The title of today's message is the secret of Paul's longevity. Who is the person that you would most like to emulate, in terms of their passion, their attitude, their impact, their resilience? We come to the close of Romans chapter 15 today.

It's really the close of the book. Chapter 16 is going to be about some personal remarks, but Paul gives us this wonderful window into his personal life in this particular chapter. And I can't think of anybody that would be more worthy to try to emulate than this man, the apostle Paul. And the thing that makes him so extraordinary is not just what he did, but how consistently he did it, and for how long he did it.

And so, we're going to look at that this morning. Chapter 15, verse 23. Let's read together, "But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions. And since I have been longing for many years to visit you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through, and to have you assist me on my journey there after I have enjoyed your company for a while."

Well, this is a real mouthful that he's giving us, of information here. Here's the situation. You've been hearing it repetitively over the last few weeks, but there's been this division and the church in Rome, Paul has written to them about it. Seeking to bring unity between the ethnos. Different ethnicities, different races. The Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians.

And now he comes to this restitution of his personal plans, and let's take a look at this a little closer and, because bottom line here, is what we see, is a man who has no quit in him. A man who has no quit in him. He says, "But now that there's no more place for me to work in these regions." We know from the book of Acts that he has, basically it says that, "Everyone in the province of Asia has now heard about Jesus Christ."

He spread the gospel through the entire known world, except in the western most portions, west of Italy. And so, he's like the Johnny Cash. I mean, "I've been everywhere." "And since I've been longing for many years to visit you." It's very interesting. We can appreciate that a little more in the COVID era.

Just in the last two or three weeks my wife Patsy and I, we've been able to go to St. Louis to see our tow grandchildren there. And then to Alabama to see our other grandchildren there, and it's been wonderful. Unbelievable. And we were only longing to see them for about 14 or 15 months. Can't imagine what it would be like to be separated from people for years, and years, and years.

It's very interesting, I looked it up this morning. It's only a two hour flight from, let's see, Paul's writing this from, probably Corinth. It's a two hour flight from Rome to Athens, and then about a one hour drive over to Corinth. Today it doesn't mean anything to us to want to visit somebody in Rome, if you lived in Corinth. But in that day it would have taken forever and ever to do it, and that's why it's been many years that he says he's wanted to do this.

He says, "I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you when I'm passing through and have you assist me on my journey after I have enjoyed your company for a while." Paul has stated that he doesn't want to build on other people's foundations. He wants to go to new places. That's his calling. That's what he wants to do.

Nobody's been preaching the gospel yet over in Spain. We don't know if he actually ever made it to Spain. We do know that at this particular point he's actually on his way to Jerusalem. Reading on. Verse 25, "Now, however I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people." He's actually on his way to Jerusalem.

This is a guy now, who has been at this for decades and just doesn't have any quit in him. When he was in front of King Agrippa giving his defense after he had been arrested and brought to Rome. He said, "I was not disobedient to the vision of heaven." And he said in second Timothy, he writes to Timothy, in second Timothy four, seven, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith."

THE MAN HAD NO QUIT IN HIM

The characteristic of this man's life, particularly at this point, is resilience. Just the resilience to keep coming at it. The man had no quit, and the question is, why did he have no quit? And the answer goes all the way back to his original calling. It was dramatic. You remember, those of you who know the story, he was on his way to Damascus to arrest some Christians.

He was a bad dude. And Jesus appeared to him and he said, "Paul." Or he said, "Saul." Saul at the time, "Why are you persecuting me?" And God struck him blind in a dramatic conversion experience, and told Paul that he was going to be a witness to the Gentiles. That God was going to send him, Jesus was going to send him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

And so, the bottom line is, is that the reason that Paul is doing all this, he didn't have any choice. He did not have any choice. JFK, when he was in the navy as a young officer assigned to a PT boat. Was it 108 or 109? All right. PTO 109. And a Japanese destroyer went right through the middle of the PT boat and he was proclaimed a hero and they asked him, "How did you become a hero?" He said, "Well, it was involuntary. They sank my boat."

And that's what's going on here with Paul. Paul's passion here, it's involuntary. He didn't have a choice, because God had come to him so dramatically and so powerfully. There's no quit in him, because he really didn't have much of a choice. And that was Paul's secret. The secret of his longevity.

The secret of his longevity is that he had a conviction so strong, that he couldn't quit, he wouldn't shrink away from any hardship or any disaster that came on him, and he refused to play it safe. That's just the way that Paul lived his life. He said, "I am compelled to preach the gospel. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel."

His passion was related to the depth and the strength of his calling. And so, the application for you and for me, do you have the sense of a calling on your life so powerful that it can fuel your passion? And I would encourage you, if you don't have that kind of conviction, that kind of passion, I would encourage you to pray and ask God to give it to you.

And it doesn't have to be something that you do, that you're the entrepreneur like Paul is the spiritual entrepreneur of entrepreneurs. Right? It might be that you get impassioned by the vision of your church or some organization, and you attach yourself to them. That's okay.

But to go through like, "Oh, I just don't know what God wants me to do." What a waste. The reason this man had no quit, is because of the passion of his calling. His secret, and it's the **Big Idea** today, **Paul's secret, never quit, never shrink, never play it safe**, and we're going to see exactly how he did that.

The next thing I want us to look at starts in verse 26, "For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews spiritual blessings, then they owe it to the Jews to share with them in their material blessings. After I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ."

Paul is still at it. He's still trying to give the Romans a greater vision for why there needs to be unity. We have these poor Jews down in Jerusalem, and these Gentiles are doing okay over here in Macedonia and Achaia. They're sending a gift down there. They're working on the unity that I've been talking to you about working on the unity. That didn't make any sense, but anyway. You know what I mean.

HE HAD A UNIQUE VIEW OF STRUGGLES

And then the next thing I want us to see here, is that Paul had a unique view of struggles. He had a unique view of struggles. He had a unique view of the struggles of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, and he wanted to be part of that action. And when you see something around you, anything around you, it was at the Jerusalem Counsel, I think in, I can't remember where it was in the bible. But Paul went up to Jerusalem to appear before Peter and the apostles, and he reported in and they asked him to make sure that he would take care of the poor. And he said, "It was the very thing that I was eager to do."

He was a servant. He saw the struggles of other peoples. He had a unique view of other people. He would see the struggles of other people and he would engage. He just didn't say, "Oh, that's terrible. Somebody needs to take care of that. Please somebody call Washington DC." He got involved. He engaged himself in these people's problems.

And here he's given us a great example of his view of struggles, because he actually was the person who was collecting the money from these Christians in Macedonia and Achaia to take to Jerusalem. I had an interesting encounter this week. We went to Alabama. We took our camper. We have a trailer. Many of you guys know that.

And so, when we set up camp on the halfway mark back there was a guy across the way from us who had the same kind of trailer. And he came over and he said a couple things, and he said like two sentences. And then he said, "Yeah, my wife just died last year. And so, I sold everything and I'm just going to do what she and I thought that we would do. Travel together."

And I was in the middle of setting up. I was hooking up the electricity, and all the water and putting down the stabilizers, and all that. And if you're mechanical that's easy to do, but if you're me, it's just, you got one little interruption like that, the next thing you know you're up in the middle of the night with the propane filling up. Anyway.

I said, "Well, that's great. About your wife and everything, but I really need to set up the camp here." No, that's not what I said. But I did cut it really short. Well, then the spirit began to work on me. Nudging me. Nudging me. Nudging me. When you see someone else's struggle, someone else's problem, what it means to be a servant, is to go and meet the need of anyone whose need you see, whose need you are in a position to meet.

And I knew that I was in a position to meet that need. Nudge one, nudge two, nudge three, nudge four came about midnight, so the next morning I went over and we sat down and I just said, "Hey." I said, "Richard." I said, "Would you tell me about your wife?" And he said, "Well, she's dead. You know?" I said, "I know, but would you just tell me about her?"

And so, we just sat there for about 30, 45 minutes and had a wonderful visit. We made a real connection. I think we'll, who knows, we might see him here some day. But we made a connection and it

was exactly, apparently what he needed, because he needed to have somebody that he could talk to on that particular day.

He probably needed it the day before when I was too busy. But anyway. But that's the unique view of struggles that Paul had. We see more in verse 30. We see in verse 30, "I urge you brothers and sisters by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the spirit to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea, and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there so that I may come to you with joy by God's will. And in your company be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen."

Paul knew what was coming. He already had been warned a number of times in Acts chapter 20, verse 22, "And now compelled by the spirit, I am going to Jerusalem. Not knowing what will happen to me there, I only know that in every city the holy spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me." He knew what he was getting into, but he didn't play it safe.

That was part of his unique view of struggles, is that he didn't try to get out of hard things, he kept going in Acts 21. On the way to Jerusalem he stopped in Caesarea and met with some of the believers there. One of the prophets came and took Paul's belt and tied his own hands and feet with it. And the prophet said, "The holy spirit says in this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt, and will hand him over to the Gentiles."

And when they heard that, the people pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem. But because of his unique view of struggles here's what he said, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready, not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." There was no quit in this man. He had this very unique, and he had already suffered a lot.

I don't think we've got time to go into all of the details of that, but some of you know he was beaten, he was shipwrecked. They stoned him, they drug him outside one of the communities and left him there to die. And he was often hungry, and thirsty, and naked, and homeless. Treated notoriously bad by the people in Philippi. He just had this unique set of attitudes though, about his struggles and the result of that is, is that because of the way that he viewed these things, it didn't dampen his passion.

My question for us, and the application for you and for me, are you letting the struggles, the hardships that you have to go through, and here's the thing. You're going to go through these hardships. You're going to go through these struggles whether you have Jesus or not, whether you do it his way or not you're going to have them. But the question for us, the application for us is, will we try to play it safe? Will we shrink back from these struggles, these hardships, these sufferings?

Will we quit? Will we give up? Or will we live in the view of the high calling that we have received and let the passion that comes from the conviction that we have lead us to the same kind of life that Paul is leading? The Big Idea today, **Paul's secret, never quit, never shrink, never play it safe.** Never quit, never shrink, never play it safe.

HOW YOU CAN BECOME A NEVER QUIT KIND OF GUY

And then the last thing to look at today. How you can become a never quit kind of guy. How I can become a never quit kind of guy. Everybody wants to quit every day. Okay. Let's get that out there. Right? If you don't want to quit every day, that means you're not doing anything. The first thing here on becoming a never quit kind of guy, we get from Paul, it's know where you are going and why. Know where you're going and why.

I was out hiking at the Wekiva State Park and I came up to a trail intersection, and there were two women there and they looked a little confused. I said, "Hey, how you all doing? What's going on? Anything I can do to help?" And they said, "Well, we don't know which of these two trails to take." And I

said, "Well, where are you going?" She said, "Well, we don't really know." And I said, "Well, then either one of them will get you there."

Know where you are going and why. And in order to do that, you have to go back to this previous question that I mentioned. This application of praying and asking God to give you a calling so certain, that you have an absolute confidence that you know what God is calling you to do. Something that you could say, "I feel compelled to disciple men. I feel compelled to help Jim Long in his food ministry."

They distributed 400,000 pounds of food here in Central Florida last month. That's our own Jim Long. One of our leaders. The food ministry. The food distribution ministry, "I feel compelled to help Jim Long distribute food. I feel compelled to help widows with their car repairs." Whatever it is that your calling is to do, it's that you would know exactly what you were supposed to be doing and why.

And then secondly, that you would expect struggles. That you would expect struggles, if you want to be a never quit kind of guy you have to expect struggles. You can't think that you're going to somehow Christianize your way out of struggles. Paul, when he was in Ephesus he said, "I want to stay here for a couple more years, because there is a great door for effective work that has opened up to me. And there is much opposition."

The opportunity comes with opposition. Paul said in Acts 14:22, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of heaven." And second Timothy chapter three, verse 12, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Have an expectation of struggles.

And then, if you want to be a never quit kind of guy, know exactly where you're going and why, expect struggles, and then have an unwavering faith that God will provide. Paul had it. Three times he asked God to take away the thorn in his flesh, and in second Corinthians chapter 12, verse nine Jesus said, "My grace is sufficient for you. For my power is made perfect in weakness."

Paul said, "Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that Christ's power might rest on me." He just had an absolute faith that God would provide this grace. And then, don't play it safe. Guys, don't play not to lose. There are so many studies that have been done over the last few years about people at the end of their lives, what they wish they would have done differently.

The first such study that I became aware of that was a scholarly research study, was referenced by a man by the name of Tony Campolo. When I came out of college he was the biggest deal on the Christian speaking circuit. He cites this study of people, elderly people, "If I had it to do over again I would reflect more. If I had it to do over again I would risk more. If I had it to do over again I would do more things that would live on after I am dead."

It sounds like Paul. To become that never quit kind of guy go ahead and take the risk. Don't play it safe. So what if you die? I mean, honestly. Life is an inch. So what if you die? Paul's secret to longevity, he didn't care, "I'm going to go up to Jerusalem and if I die, I die."

Paul's secret to longevity, never quit, never shrink, never play it safe. Let's pray. Our dearest father, as Paul, just opens his personal life up to us here, he really does show us Lord, the secret of his longevity. He's making plans, he knows why, he knows where he's going, what he's supposed to do. He was expecting opposition, he had a very unique approach to anticipating, expecting struggles.

And he had an absolute unwavering faith that you were going to take care of him, and because of that he was willing to take the risks that you put in front of him. God, give us that kind of longevity. Give us that kind of resilience. We ask this in Jesus's name. Amen.