

Session 14

# Reach

*Believers must make every effort to share the gospel with everyone.*

Romans 15:14-21,30-33



**Why might a believer take a lone ranger approach to sharing the gospel with others?  
What are the dangers of failing to invite others to be part of sharing the gospel?**

John Reid—the name of the masked man known as “The Lone Ranger”—was rarely alone. He was “lone” in that he was the sole survivor of an ambush by outlaws, but he was far from alone because he had a companion. Sometimes we may think of Paul as a lone ranger, but his mission required him to depend on others. The sharing of the gospel requires a team effort, and Paul reminded the Roman believers of this in the closing section of the letter.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

As Paul closed his Letter to the Romans, he returned to the topic of salvation—but in a different context. While he had used the first part of the epistle to show that everyone needs a Savior, he now emphasized the responsibility Christians have to share that Savior with others.

Paul had a passionate desire to extend the reach of the gospel beyond Rome to areas outside the Empire. Instead of building on someone else’s foundation, he wanted to reach those who had never heard the name of Jesus (Rom. 15:20-29). Of course, the Great Commission included familiar places like Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, but it also pointed believers to wider regions—the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1:8). The residents of those areas were heaviest on Paul’s heart as he wrote this letter to the church in Rome.

The apostle knew that he could not succeed on his own, so he asked the believers in Rome for help (Rom. 15:30-33). This help might have included financial offerings, but Paul primarily requested their prayers on his behalf. He had other issues to resolve before he could realize his dream, and he asked that they pray for him in those matters.

Paul closed his letter with a long list of fellow believers who had been faithful partners with him through the years (16:1-16). While the apostle had not yet visited Rome, he apparently had met some members of the Roman church during his travels. He wanted them to know how much he appreciated them before he added one final warning (16:17-18) and one final blessing (16:19-27).

## ROMANS 15:14-21,30-33

**14** My brothers and sisters, I myself am convinced about you that you also are **full of goodness A**, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. **15** Nevertheless, I have written to remind you more boldly on some points because of the grace given me by God **16** to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving as a priest of the gospel of God. My purpose is that the Gentiles may be an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. **17** Therefore I have reason to **boast in Christ Jesus B** regarding what pertains to God. **18** For I would not dare say anything except what Christ has accomplished through me by word and deed for the obedience of the Gentiles, **19** by the power of miraculous **signs and wonders C**, and by the power of God's Spirit. As a result, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem all the way around to **Illyricum D**. **20** My aim is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, so that I will not build on someone else's foundation, **21** but, as it is written, Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand. [...] **30** Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in fervent prayers to God on my behalf. **31** Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, **32** and that, by God's will, I may come to you with joy and be refreshed together with you. **33** May the God of peace be with all of you. Amen.

### Passage Outline

Fulfill Your Calling  
(Rom. 15:14-16)

Boast About Jesus  
(Rom. 15:17-19)

Seek the Lost  
(Rom. 15:20-21)

Partner With Others  
(Rom. 15:30-33)

### Keywords

- A. While earlier Paul emphasized that all are sinners (Rom. 3:23), he was confident of their salvation through faith in Christ (Rom. 1:8-10) and pointed to what God has done in their lives.
- B. Paul wanted to boast in Christ so that the Romans would place their confidence in the Lord and not himself or humankind.
- C. The phrase is often used in the New Testament for Christian miracles (Matt. 24:24; John 4:48; Acts 2:43; 5:12; 7:36; 14:3; 2 Cor. 12:12; 2 Thess. 2:9.)
- D. The city of Illyricum was about 1,000 miles away from Jerusalem. The distance demonstrated Paul's commitment to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

Paul shared some kind words for the Roman believers—not as flattery, but because he was convinced they were spiritually healthy. Morally, they demonstrated *goodness*. They understood the difference between right and wrong, and they did their best to choose what was right. Nevertheless, Paul also knew that these believers still had things to learn. No one had it all together spiritually, but all of them had the potential to become more like Christ. He wrote them to fill in some gaps and to remind them of things they needed to remember.

## **How did Paul’s understanding of his ministry follow Jesus’ commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8?**

Paul had suffered much, preached a great deal, and established churches all over the map. But he never bragged about his accomplishments. He was too busy bragging about Jesus.

## **How can a believer overcome the temptation of taking the credit instead of pointing to Christ?**

Paul’s strategy was to *preach the gospel* where Jesus was unknown rather than to preach where *someone else’s foundation* had been laid.

## **What are the dangers of preaching the gospel only to the people who have already heard it? What are the dangers of going only to places where people have never heard Jesus’ name? Where is the balance?**

### **BIBLE SKILL: Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.** – In

Romans 15:21, Paul quoted the second half of Isaiah 52:15, which was part of Isaiah’s fourth Servant Song (52:13–53:12). Read and outline the entire passage.

Notice the tone set at the beginning of the passage (52:13-14): exaltation in the midst of humiliation. In what ways does understanding this Old Testament passage help you understand Paul’s church planting strategy?

Instead of asking for financial support, Paul requested the Roman believers’ *ferve*nt prayers. Paul’s experience told him that difficult times lay ahead, and he would need partners willing to pray with him and for him.

## **What do Paul’s prayer requests reveal about his priorities? How are his requests consistent with the rest of the letter to the Romans?**

**KEY DOCTRINE: Cooperation** – Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ’s Kingdom (1 Cor. 1:10-17).

# APPLY THE TEXT

- God calls believers to share the gospel with others.
- Believers are to be careful to point others to Jesus.
- Believers are to intentionally go and engage with people who have not heard the gospel message.
- Believers must partner with others to more effectively share the gospel.

**Who has God placed in your life who needs to hear the gospel? What do you need to do to make sure they hear it?**

**How can you and the members of your Bible study group point others to Jesus? What will you need to change to get the spotlight off yourselves and on to Him?**

**Along with prayers, what are some other ways you and the members of your Bible study group can partner with other believers? What steps do you need to take to build those partnerships?**

## Prayer Requests

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# DAILY EXPLORATION

## Day 1: Our goal should be to become more like Jesus.

**Read Romans 15:14-16, identifying why Paul felt called to write to the Romans.**

Paul confessed that he wrote *more boldly* to a church he did not plant than one might expect, but his authority as an apostle made it possible. In addition, the *grace* of God—the unmerited gift he had received through Christ—pushed him to be as clear as possible about these important matters. Whether he was sharing a doctrine that was new to them or simply restating an important truth they had forgotten, it was all part of drawing them closer to Jesus. And it was all part of his goal of helping them to become more like Jesus.

God had called Paul to be a *minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles*. While Peter and others were working among the Jews, Paul had a heart and passion for non-Jewish people. Many Roman Christians were Gentiles, and Paul felt a special urgency toward them. He also saw himself as a *priest of the gospel*. In the Old Testament, priests spoke on God's behalf. They shared His words with His people. Paul saw his responsibility in a similar way. He proclaimed God's truths to others. But priests also presented offerings, and Paul embraced that metaphor. He wanted to present as many Gentile believers as possible to God as *an acceptable offering*.

**How did Paul's understanding of his ministry follow Jesus' commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8? How would you describe your ministry?**

## Day 2: Christ accomplishes His work through us.

**Read Romans 15:17-19, underlining the phrase boast in Christ Jesus.**

Paul had reason to boast in Christ. The fact is, he knew he had no power of his own. Anything that had been done for God and His kingdom was accomplished through him by Christ. Paul wanted the Romans to know that if they chose to support him, they would be supporting Christ's work. Paul was doing God's work, not promoting his own agenda.

Paul demonstrated incredible humility and a keen understanding of what the Christian life is all about. He knew it would be foolish to dare say anything about his own achievements. Paul realized that Christ alone accomplished this work through him. Paul could say, *I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum*. This didn't mean that everyone had heard about Jesus, but that he had completely fulfilled his calling to that point. Jerusalem represents the birthplace of Christianity, while Illyricum was a Roman province between Greece and Italy. Christ's ministry through Paul had reached from the heart of Judaism to the proverbial outskirts of Rome.

**How do you overcome the temptation of taking the credit instead of pointing to Christ?**

### Day 3: Spread the gospel to the ends of the earth.

**Read Romans 15:20-21, noticing Paul's aim.**

In Acts 1:8, Jesus outlined the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Paul recognized that God was using him to fulfill that mission. His *aim* was to evangelize areas where Christ had not been preached. This motivated Paul and gave him a sense of urgency.

As he often did, Paul quoted the Old Testament to underscore the logic—and importance—of his plan. Turning to Isaiah, he noted that individuals who didn't know God will see and those who had never heard will understand (Isa. 52:15). Many would respond to the gospel if given the opportunity, and Paul wanted to be God's instrument for giving them that opportunity.

Paul had spent his ministry breaking new ground for the gospel. In fact, one reason he had not yet visited Rome was that he was busy planting churches where none had existed before. So, this was the next reasonable step for him. While we should never downplay the importance of discipling believers, we also should never shy away from proclaiming Him to those who have never heard.

**What are the dangers of preaching the gospel only to the people who have already heard it? What are the dangers of going only to places where people have never heard Jesus' name? How do you find a balance in your life?**

### Day 4: Your prayers reveal your priorities.

**Read Romans 15:30-32, considering Paul's requests.**

Paul specifically asked the Romans to pray about three challenges he knew he would be facing. First, he asked them to pray that he would be *rescued from the unbelievers in Judea*. Many Jews in Jerusalem considered him a traitor to their faith, which could have put his life in danger. Second, he asked the Romans to pray that the financial gift he was bringing on behalf of Gentile believers for hurting Christians in Judea would *be acceptable to the saints*. His ministry to the Gentiles could raise concerns among a primarily Jewish audience. So, he asked that their hearts would be warmed toward the mission God had given him. Finally, he asked them to pray that he would soon be able to visit them personally. Paul had been delayed in the past by other obligations, but he sincerely wanted to connect with the Romans and to be refreshed together with them. He longed for an opportunity to encourage them and be encouraged by them face-to-face. The Book of Acts reveals that Paul's prayers were answered, though maybe not as he expected. The Jewish Christians did welcome him (Acts 21:17-20a). He was protected from his enemies—by being arrested by the Romans (Acts 21:31-34). And he did make it to Rome—as a prisoner to stand trial before Caesar (Acts 25:9-12; 28:11-31).

**What do your prayer requests reveal about your priorities?**

## Day 5: God provides peace that passes understanding.

**Read Romans 15:33, noting Paul's hope that they would experience peace.**

After requesting a partnership of prayer from the believers in Rome, Paul offered a brief prayer on their behalf. He asked that they would experience the presence of *the God of peace*.

The leaders of the Roman Empire took pride in what was known as the Pax Romana, the “Roman peace.” But while this peace brought a degree of security to the Empire, it was maintained through an iron fist of military might. It drew its power from fear and intimidation. The Roman Christians could draw from a deeper peace, a peace Paul told the Philippians goes beyond all understanding (Phil. 4:7).

Paul's *Amen* concluded his primary teaching in this letter. Chapter 16 essentially includes a long list of Romans who had blessed him and others who wanted to bless the Romans. Again, he focused on the power of partnerships, which should encourage us to follow that example today.

**What can partnerships achieve that a single person alone cannot do, when it comes to sharing the gospel?**



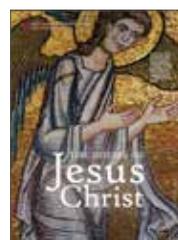
## TALK IT OUT

**Reflect on the truths found in Romans 15, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.**

As believers, what has God called us to do?

What's the difference in boasting in ourselves and boasting in Jesus?  
How are we strongest when we boast in Jesus?

Where can we intentionally go to share the gospel?



For additional context, read “The Gospel of Jesus Christ” in the Spring 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).