

## **Always on My Mind**

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Unashamed: Paul's Magnum Opus / Romans 1:8–15

In the first chapter of Romans, Paul's constant prayers reveal a love that refuses to fade—it persists, intercedes, and longs for others' spiritual good. On a day that honors mothers, it reminds us that one of the most powerful ways to love is to carry someone to the Lord again and again...without ceasing.

### **Introduction**

- I don't remember much about my younger elementary years.
  - Earlier this week, I actually pulled out my yearbooks from elementary school to try to refresh some of my memories.
  - But we didn't do yearbooks until I was in second grade.
  - But, since I know you are all wanting to see it, here's my second grade yearbook photo.
  - I do have scattered memories of First Grade.
  - I remember our teacher, Mrs. Powell, was a very strict teacher.
    - I distinctly remember thinking she was the meanest woman on the planet when I was in First Grade.
      - Fortunately for her, I didn't know that many women on the planet.
      - I have since changed my mind and know that there are LOTS of meaner ladies on the planet than Mrs. Powell.
    - During lunch, she would always make the boys sit together and the girls sit together, and whoever was the loudest got some kind of punishment after lunch.
    - Most of the time, you had to sit with your head down on your desk and not talk immediately after lunch.

- I even remember a couple of times where kids were given the option of either sitting quietly after lunch... or taking a smack on the hand with a ruler.
- I'm sure in my mind, she was much meaner than she actually was.
- But I'll be honest - there are two things about first grade that stand out to me the most in my memory.
  - Every single day before we would go to lunch, Mrs. Powell would have us line up in the class and to get us ready to walk down the hall to the cafeteria.
  - And right before we walked out the door, she would pray...each and every day.
  - She'd probably get fired or sued today, but in 1987, I'm not sure anybody was looking to pick a fight with a first grade teacher.
  - At the time, it didn't mean much to me.
  - But looking back, I can see how the Lord was using those lunchtime prayers to soften my heart.
- Not only did she make prayer a daily part of our first grade experience, near the end of first grade, Mrs. Powell invited us all to come to her house once we were out of school.
  - She hosted a backyard bible club every morning for a week.
  - We played in her yard.
  - I remember she fixed fresh lemonade and fed us chocolate chip cookies.
  - We did crafts.
  - But most importantly, she opened her bible and taught us the Scriptures.
- It would be several more years before I gave my life to Christ, but I can't help but wonder how much of an impact Mrs. Powell's influence would have on my faith journey.

- Looking back now, I realize Mrs. Powell was doing far more than teaching first grade.
- She was investing spiritually in the lives of children.
  - She prayed for us.
  - She taught us Scripture.
  - She intentionally looked for opportunities to point us toward Christ.
  - And as mean as she was, she was secretly instilling discipline in a bunch of feral, GEN-X first graders.
- And honestly, there's no telling how many young lives she influenced over the years.
- Last week, we took a look at Paul's introductory remarks.
  - The first 7 verses in [Romans 1](#) would equate to a modern letter or email with "Dear So-and-So."
  - But Paul didn't waste any ink before getting down to the business of Romans.
  - He's writing to a church he's never visited in a city he's never seen.
  - And he's writing a thorough introduction of what he believes about the Gospel.
  - This letter of introduction becomes the most thorough explanation of the Gospel in the New Testament.
- After his introduction, he immediately moves into a section where he expresses his honest, heartfelt thoughts about the church.
  - And though he's never been to the church and has very little personal connections, his affections toward this church are genuine.
  - Though he doesn't know these people, he does love these people.
  - That can almost sound foreign to us, but we need to understand something.

- While Paul is explaining the Gospel in this letter, we also see the Gospel is continuing to do its work in Paul.
- And his love for the church is an overflow of the Gospel shaping his life.
- And as we dig into this next section, we will hopefully see how that same affection is demonstrated in our lives as well.

### **Scripture Reading**

#### **Romans 1:8–15 ESV**

<sup>8</sup> First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

<sup>9</sup> For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you

<sup>10</sup> always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

<sup>11</sup> For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—

<sup>12</sup> that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.

<sup>13</sup> I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

<sup>14</sup> I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

<sup>15</sup> So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

- In our ancient letter writing class, we typically see this kind of benediction immediately following the greeting.

- Particularly in Paul's letters, we see some kind of prayer or expression of gratitude.
- Here, we see Paul talking a little about his plans and how the church in Rome fits into that conversation.
- It isn't necessarily theologically dense, but it is still relevant and good for us to consider.
- It is particularly helpful for us because we can see how Paul's affection for the church is making itself known in this letter.
- So what do we note when we consider the overflow of Paul's heart in these verses?

**Paul's love expresses itself through gratitude (v. 8)**

- If this were a sermon particularly for mother's on this day we recognize them, then this point might not need a whole lot of explanation.
  - I think gratitude is kind of baked into the motherhood recipe.
  - I think that Christian mothers, in particular, can look at their children and echo Paul's opening prayer, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you..."
  - Any parent can tell you that children can make life hard sometimes.
    - They can make decision that grieve you.
    - Their lives can take unexpected, frustrating...even heartbreaking turns.
    - And even through tears, a Christian mother will still echo that same word of thanks.
  - But this isn't a sermon particularly for mothers...it's for all of us.
- And the lesson for all of us is to remember that gratitude always has an object.
  - Paul understands that every good thing ultimately comes from the hand of God.

- Paul here makes it very clear - his gratitude is directed to God through Jesus Christ.

- **The Apostle James said it this way:**

**James 1:17 ESV**

<sup>17</sup> Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

- All the good gifts are from God and the church in Rome is a good gift and for that Paul's gratitude is godward in its direction.
- The believers in Rome were evidence of God's grace.
  - Their faith was being proclaimed throughout the world.
    - God was at work among them.
    - And when Paul sees evidence of God's grace in their lives, his response is gratitude directed toward God.
- That's an important reminder for us.
  - One of the ways love expresses itself is through thanksgiving to God for what He is doing in the lives of other people.
  - Mature believers learn to rejoice when they see the grace of God at work in others.
- And that rejoicing, that gratitude - that tends to show up in our prayer lives.

**Paul's love is expressed through persistent prayer (vv. 9-10)**

- I think it's easy to get discouraged when we encounter these kind of statements in the bible about praying without ceasing.
  - You're apt to think, "I've got other stuff I have to do."
  - I can't be in a 24/7 prayer meeting.
  - Does this mean that you'll never be what you're supposed to be?

- Thankfully, when the bible talks about praying without ceasing, it isn't what we first think.
- When Paul says that he remembers the Romans "constantly" in his prayers, he doesn't mean that he spent every waking second verbally praying for the church in Rome.
  - In the same way, when Paul tells the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing," he isn't talking about nonstop religious chatter every moment of the day.
  - He's describing a life where prayer becomes the continual reflex of the heart.
  - Prayer becomes something you return to again and again throughout the course of life.
- And honestly, most of us understand this instinctively, even if it isn't reflected in how we actually pray.
  - There are people who naturally come to mind throughout your day.
  - You hear something and think about them.
  - You see something and remember them.
  - You go through a difficult moment and suddenly feel burdened to pray for them.
  - That's the picture here.
  - Paul's relationship with God was so active and alive that prayer was woven into the normal rhythm of his life.
  - He carried people before the Lord repeatedly and regularly.
- And I think there's something deeper happening here than simply "remembering to pray."
  - Prayer reveals dependence.
  - People who rarely pray often live as though they are self-sufficient.

- But people who pray persistently understand that they desperately need the Lord's help, wisdom, strength, and grace.
- Persistent prayer is one of the clearest signs of genuine spiritual dependence.
- And Paul's prayers also reveal the orientation of his heart.
  - His mind continually drifted toward God.
  - That doesn't mean he spent every moment isolated in a prayer closet.
    - Paul traveled.
    - Paul preached.
    - Paul worked.
    - Paul endured hardship and persecution.
  - But through all of it, his heart continually returned to communion with God.
  - Prayer wasn't merely an activity Paul practiced.
  - It was part of the atmosphere in which he lived.
- And there's one more thing worth noticing here:
  - Persistent prayer means you never stop bringing people before the Lord.
  - You never reach the point where you conclude: "Well, I guess prayer isn't doing anything."
  - You keep praying.
  - You keep asking.
  - You keep trusting.
  - You keep carrying people before God.
- And honestly, this kind of persistent prayer is often one of the clearest expressions of genuine love.

- When someone consistently shows up before the throne of God on behalf of another person, love has moved beyond shallow sentiment and become spiritual investment.
- George Müller is best known for founding orphanages in England during the 19th century.
- He is well-known for having an unwavering reliance on prayer.
- Müller famously kept a list of people he was praying for to come to Christ.
  - One friend came to faith after 5 years
  - Another after 10 years
  - Another after 25 years
  - And one man?
  - Müller prayed for him for **over 50 years**... and never saw him come to Christ in his lifetime.
  - But after Müller died... that man *finally* came to faith.
- He carried that man to the Lord for half a century, and even death didn't stop the answer from coming
- Looking back now, one of the things I appreciate most about Mrs. Powell was the consistency of it all.
  - Every single day before lunch, she prayed.
  - At the time, it just felt routine.
  - But years later, I can still remember it.
  - That's often how persistent prayer works.
  - It quietly shapes people over time.
- Paul isn't content by simply keeping his affections in the prayer closet.
  - He recognizes that we have a responsibility toward one another beyond our prayer.

### **Paul's love leads him to seek to strengthen others (vv. 11-12)**

- The Christian life is an interesting thing.
  - On one hand, it is deeply private and personal.
    - We should spend much time in our own as we commune with the Savior.
    - Our prayer times, our bible study time - those happen in the quiet when no one else is around.
  - At the same time, it is very much a community experience.
    - We worship together.
    - We study the Bible together.
    - We pray together.
  - We saw Jesus model this for us...
    - There were times when Jesus went to the mountain top to pray.
    - And there were times when Jesus did life with his disciples.
- And here in Paul's opening remarks, we see both is private prayer life expressed...but he's not content to simply leave his affections in the prayer closet.
  - He knows that there is good to be found in the fellowship of the body of Christ.
  - And that fellowship isn't just about sitting around the table breaking bread and shooting the bull.
- Paul wants to go to Rome because he knows that he has some gifts that can be of much use to the church there.
  - We don't necessarily know what he has in mind there.
  - Honestly, v. 11 suggests that Paul's not even sure how he will best be able to be used by the church in Rome.

- But he does understand that he has gifts and God can put those gifts to work for the church.
- But don't miss the second part...
  - It's not just Paul investing in the church.
  - It is very clear that Paul expected the church to strengthen him as well.
  - It would be easy to say, "Oh, Paul's just going to go preach and teach and tell them what they need to know."
  - But Paul fully expects for them to strengthen and sustain him as well.
- We need to hear this today.
  - The church is meant to be a place of mutual encouragement.
  - It's meant to be a place where you give and where you grow.
  - You give of yourself so the people around you can grow.
  - And the people around you give so that you are able to grow.
  - Paul will eventually tell the church at Rome:
    - [Rom. 12:10](#)
    - **Romans 12:10 ESV**
    - <sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.
  - That's how this thing is supposed to work.
    - It's a community where everybody consistently seeks to invest in the community.
    - And as a result, everybody is strengthened.
- We need to be mindful, however, that this isn't just a byproduct of Christians being together.
  - It is very easy to drift into consumer mode.

- You're reaping the benefits without investing any of your own strengths, gifts, and time.
- But it's never meant to be a one-sided, transactional relationship.
- The Body of Christ is intended to be a place of mutual strengthening and encouraging.
- As he works toward Rome, we know that this will be a pillar of his time there.
- And that naturally leads Paul into the next part of the passage.
  - Because Paul doesn't merely see ministry as an opportunity.
  - He sees it as an obligation.
  - Paul understands that God has entrusted him with gifts, truth, experience, and a calling that were never intended to terminate on himself.
  - They were given to him for the good of others.
  - We may not like the idea of obligation because it sounds like something I have to do.
  - But if God has given us his commission and also given us gifts to make the commission possible, then you tell me how that's anything less than an obligation.
- And that's why Paul's love for these believers expresses itself through a deep sense of responsibility toward them.

**Paul's love expresses itself through a sense of responsibility. (vv. 13–15)**

- In [Acts 9](#), the Apostle Paul is given his specific commission to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.
  - That didn't mean he didn't share the Gospel with the Jews.
  - I'm convinced Paul would have shared the Gospel with a signpost if he felt like there was an opportunity to win somebody to Christ.

- But his Gentile mission was the driving purpose of his life.
- So when Paul writes to Rome, you can feel the weight of that calling all over these verses.
  - He speaks like a man carrying a burden for people who need Christ.
  - Of course, Paul understands that only God can save sinners.
  - But knowing God is sovereign never made Paul passive.
  - It fueled his sense of responsibility.
  - Paul understood that God had entrusted him with the Gospel, and because of that, he felt a deep obligation to take that Gospel to others.
- Have you ever asked yourself the question, “For whom am I responsible?”
  - That doesn’t mean you’re a failure if somebody you feel a burden for never comes to Christ.
  - There were plenty of people Paul preached to that didn’t get saved.
  - That didn’t make Paul a failure, and it didn’t stop him from preaching.
  - He knew if he shared and they rejected, then the outcome was their responsibility, not his.
    - It’s kind of like going to the doctor.
    - If the doctor prescribes medicine that will make you better and you choose not to take it, it isn’t the doctor’s fault.
  - Obviously, as our hearts are inclined to think about family today, we certainly have a Gospel-responsibility to our family.
    - Parents, you should be making the most of every opportunity to invest in the spiritual health of your children.
    - We invest untold amounts of time and money into sports and music and academics and all of the other things.

- We shouldn't assume that spiritual health is going to come naturally.
- If anything, as we will see later on in this chapter, our natural condition will push us away from spiritual health.
- But beyond that - who is in your circle?
  - Who is it that God has burdened you with?
  - What coworker? What classmate? What friend? What neighbor?
  - You need to hear again - you aren't responsible for their response, but if God has placed them in your life, for such a time as this, you at least have a responsibility to tell them what it means to follow Christ, with love, clarity and urgency.
- We get to v. 15 and he says it about as clearly as possible, "I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome."
  - Obviously, Paul's preaching ministry is different from our day-to-day responsibility to our neighbors and friends.
  - But preaching the Gospel doesn't have to be a sermon from the pulpit.
  - There's a quote that likes to make its way around the church from time to time.
  - We're not 100% sure who said it - but whoever said it couldn't be more wrong.
- "Preach the Gospel. Use words when necessary."
  - Let me tell you something important about that quote...
  - Please don't ever, never, ever, ever use that quote in a serious tone.
  - Paul doesn't merely say to model the Gospel. He clearly says to preach the Gospel.
- Our witness should absolutely include:
  - Integrity

- Compassion
- Service
- Visible Holiness.
- But the Gospel itself is a message that must be spoken.
  - Nobody accidentally discovers the cross and resurrection because you're a nice person.
  - Nobody is going to repent because you've got a pleasant disposition.
- That's why Paul's love doesn't just move him to serve people, it moves him to speak the Gospel to them.
  - And the same must be true for us today.

### **Invitation**

- You know, when I was sitting in Mrs. Powell's first grade classroom, I had no idea what kind of impact she was having on my life.
- At six years old, I wasn't thinking about spiritual investment.
  - I wasn't thinking about Gospel responsibility.
  - I wasn't thinking about faithful consistency.
  - I just thought she was strict.
- But looking back now, I can see that God was using ordinary acts of faithfulness in ways I never understood at the time.
  - Daily prayers.
  - Simple conversations.
  - Opening the Scriptures.
  - Investing in children.
- And honestly, there's a good chance many of us are sitting here today because somebody loved us that way.

- A mother.
- A father.
- A Sunday School teacher.
- A pastor.
- A grandparent.
- A friend.
- A teacher.
- Somebody who prayed for you.
- Somebody who invested in you.
- Somebody who carried a sense of spiritual responsibility for your life.
- And now the question becomes:
- Who has God placed in your life for you to love that way?
  - Who are you thanking God for?
  - Who are you persistently praying for?
  - Who are you intentionally trying to strengthen?
  - Who has God burdened your heart to reach with the Gospel?
  - Because the Christian life was never meant to terminate on ourselves.
  - The Gospel comes into our lives and then begins flowing outward into the lives of others.
- And maybe this morning, God is pressing someone onto your heart even now.
  - A child.
  - A grandchild.
  - A coworker.
  - A neighbor.

- A friend who is far from Christ.
- You may not be able to change their heart.  
Only God can do that.
- But you can pray.
- You can invest.
- You can encourage.
- You can speak the truth of the Gospel.
- And maybe today, for some of us, the invitation is simply this:
  - Stop assuming somebody else will carry the spiritual burden for the people God has placed in your life.
- And perhaps there are others here this morning who realize something else entirely.
  - As we've talked about people investing spiritually in others, you realize that nobody can point you to a moment where you personally responded to the Gospel.
  - You've heard about Christ.
  - You've been around church.
  - But you've never actually repented of your sin and trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord.
- Today can be the day that changes.
  - The Gospel Paul was eager to preach is the same Gospel that still saves sinners today.
  - Christ lived the life we failed to live.
  - He died the death we deserved to die.
  - And He rose again in victory over sin and death.
- And anyone who turns from sin and trusts in Him will be saved.

- So this morning, as we pray together:
- Who is God calling you to invest in?
- And have you personally trusted in the Christ we proclaim?