

# The Church on Mission

## Romans 1:8-15

Today, I must ask you a very important question: Are you a person who longs to impact your world? Think about that question for a moment. Is there something within you that yearns to join a cause that makes a difference in this life and reverberates throughout eternity? Are you tired of going through the motions at church? Do you feel restless in your occupation? Is there something within you that senses there must be something more to life? I'm convinced that the Lord is looking for a few good men and women who yearn to make an impact.<sup>1</sup> If you are teachable, available, and faithful God will use you in a powerful way. God seeks ordinary believers to join an extraordinary mission.

Paul is still introducing his letter to the Roman Church, most of whom he has never met. He knew that due to his enemies, he was sometimes portrayed as a radical who was teaching all sorts of dangerous things (Rom. 3:8; Acts 17:6; 21:28). But he longed to visit these fellow believers in Rome and share together in the things of God. So he begins by sharing his heart and why he wants to visit them and preach the gospel there.

So he shares how he has heard of their faith and how frequently he prays for them. He shares his heart about wanting to come and spend time with them, both strengthening their faith and also being encouraged himself by them in the things of the gospel. He lets them know that he has often desired to come, but thus far has been prevented. But now he hopes to come and find opportunities to preach there. So Paul wants to use his gifts to serve these people he does not yet know, and he wants to benefit from them using their gifts to serve him, as together they labor to see the gospel expand in Rome. This little snapshot of Paul and the church at Rome gives us a picture of a church on mission.

Rom 1:8-15 explains how we can join a mission that will change the world. In 1:1-7 we looked at Paul's greeting and summary of the gospel; now in 1:8-15 we will study his thanksgiving and prayer.

Follow along in your Bibles as I read Romans 1:8-15:

**8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.**

**9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,**

**10 making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.**

**11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established--**

**12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.**

**13 Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.**

**14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.**

**15 So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.**

In these verses Paul provides three evidences of a church on mission.

### **1. A Church On Mission Is Thankful and Prayerful (1:8-10).**

In verse 8 Paul writes, **“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all.”** Paul says “first” because he is telling them what is a priority, what is first, for him and the church. And that priority is thankfulness and prayer. One of the greatest indicators of a Church on mission is thankfulness, particularly for other believers. The verb translated “I thank” (eucharisto) is in the present tense and has the effect of saying: “I thank God over and over!” Paul loved his fellow believers. His gratitude to God is expressed “through Jesus Christ.” He understood that Christ’s work on the cross brought believers into union with each other.

Why is Paul so thankful? The end of verse 8 gives the reason: **“that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”** What was it about this church that everyone was talking about? Their famous preacher? Their wonderful music? Their church growth? Their magnificent building? These are things you might hear about a “successful” church today. Paul, however, indicates that it is their “faith” that was being reported all around the world.

In a sin-saturated society these Roman believers were living out their faith so much that everyone was talking about them. They had vibrant testimonies of how God had changed their lives through the gospel. These believers were living advertisements for Jesus. The fervent faith of these believers was so contrary to the societal norm of their day that all who observed them couldn’t help spreading the word about them. As people heard of what God was doing in Rome and talked to others, the word spread, so that Paul heard about them, even though he had yet to visit Rome. And so his heart rejoiced.

Let me give you a couple questions to think about: What is the Christian community saying about New Covenant Baptist Church? Do they recognize our faith and our faithfulness? What are unbelievers in Mesa County saying about us? What do people hear about us, anything? Let’s give them something to talk about!

The faith of the Roman church was being proclaimed throughout the whole empire. We have the opportunity to literally impact the entire world. How do we do that? By faith. When we believe God through Jesus Christ our lives will point to Him. God wants to take ordinary believers like us and accomplish His extraordinary mission of reaching the world for Christ.

Next we see that a thankful church becomes a prayerful church. Look at verse 9, **“For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.”** Paul calls on God as his witness that he always prays for the Roman believers unceasingly. He prayed fervently for the church at Rome in the same way that he prayed for the churches that God used him to plant. Paul had not been to the church at Rome, yet he thanked God

for them and prayed for them. A church on mission thanks God for the faith of others and also prays for God's work in others.

Notice one thing Paul prays for in verse 10, **“making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.”** Paul wants the Romans to know that they are often in his prayers and that he prays often that God would open a way for him to go there. In verse 13 we see that the answer to Paul's prayer was delayed many times. Sometimes we think that something must be wrong with our prayer life if we don't get instant answers. But Paul didn't get a quick answer and when he finally did get an answer, I don't think it wasn't in the way that he had imagined. Paul would eventually get to Rome, as a prisoner.

How can you and I take steps to grow in our prayer lives? We can write down our prayers or our prayer requests so that we will pray consistently. We can pray out loud. We can use the time we have commuting in the car for prayer. When we exercise we can devote a portion of that time to prayer. We can spend time in prayer before we go to bed and when we wake up. We can pray with our church family every Wednesday.

Here is the cool thing that happens when you thankfully pray like this, your usefulness to God increases exponentially. Notice Paul says in verse 9 **“whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son.”** The word translated “serve” means, “worshipful service.” We serve for the Lord and from the heart.

[Believers on mission are thankful and prayerful but we will also discover that . . .]

## **2. A Church On Mission Is Focused on Encouraging Each Other (1:11-13).**

Paul's mission is focused on building up people. Paul expresses his heart in this way: **“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.”** Paul longed to see these saints. Compelled by Christ, Paul longed to visit the Roman church and he had three good reasons for such a visit. First, Paul wanted to go to Rome to impart some spiritual gift to them (1:11). Paul longed to use his spiritual gift of teaching as an apostle to encourage this church.

Paul hopes that his being with them will result in them being “established.” He wants these believers to be like a building with a strong foundation that can stand up under pressure. A church with spiritual stability knows what they believe and stays with those beliefs regardless of what happens in their lives.

One of the ways you can establish yourself and other believers is through mutual encouragement. One of the reasons we gather here weekly is to encourage one another. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, **“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”**

“Faith” is to be the stimulus of encouragement. My faith should encourage others, and their faith should encourage me. I need encouragement, and so do you. No believer can make it alone; we need each other. Even the great apostle Paul looked forward to being encouraged by the faith of the Roman believers.

Typically, the best place for mutual encouragement to occur is in small groups. When we come together for a corporate worship on Sunday morning there are certain things we can do well: We can sing worship songs to the Lord, we can hear the Scripture preached, we can greet dozens of believers, and we can reach out to unchurched people who come through our doors. But mutual encouragement from each other's faith happens best in smaller groups. In a small group context, we can intimately share our faith, our struggles and successes. We can comfort one another, pray for each other, and bear each other's burdens. We can encourage each other to press on, and in doing so find inspiration in one another's faith.

In verse 13, Paul says he longed to visit to bear fruit. Paul wanted to go to Rome to be used by God to see spiritual fruit in the lives of these believers. The thrust of the book of Romans is a presentation of the process of discipleship, a virtual manual on how to be "established" in the faith. When we meet with other believers, the purpose is to produce fruit.

Whenever we meet as a church family, God desires to pour out His Spirit and produce fruit in us. May we move forward as a church of faith-filled believers, for God seeks ordinary believers to join an extraordinary mission.

Are you on mission to bless and benefit your church family? What steps are you presently taking to bring this about?

We have seen two evidences of a church on mission: A church on mission is thankful and a church on mission is focused. The third evidence is:

### **3. A Church On Mission Is Eager to Share the Good News (1:14-15)**

Individual believers and churches must be thankful, prayerful and focused on mutual encouragement, but a church on mission must especially be eager to share the good news with a world that needs Jesus. If we do not have a passionate zeal, our mission will fall flat.

Paul says in verses 14-15, **"I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also."** Why is Paul "a debtor"? He keenly felt the obligation to tell everyone the good news.

Imagine if you had been cured of cancer and you found that this was the cure for everyone else who had cancer as well. Wouldn't you want to share that good news? In fact wouldn't you be so grateful for your cure that you felt the duty to tell others?

That is exactly what has happened to us as believers in Jesus. We have found the cure for sin and death. We have been healed ourselves. You can tell others where to find the cure. And the good news is, they don't have to go anywhere or pay any money. The cure is available and free for the taking.

Every person you meet needs the cure. You owe it to them to tell them about Jesus Christ. And telling them should not be a difficult burden. Paul was eager to preach the gospel to those in Rome, because he knew that it is God's remedy for sin to everyone who believes. Later in 9:16b, he exclaims, **"...for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel."**

After Paul's Damascus Road encounter, he was overwhelmed with a burden to share Christ with everyone. Jesus Christ is an equal opportunity Savior. So Paul preached Christ to every language (Greek and barbarians) and culture (wise or foolish). God wants to save people from every **"tribe, tongue, people, and nation"** (Rev 5:9).

Today, will you pray for a greater burden for those who have yet to believe the good news of Jesus? Plead with the Lord of the harvest to set your heart aflame.

Paul was eager to preach the gospel to the saints in Rome. He was referring not only to evangelism, but also to the application of the gospel to those who have believed. The gospel has much practical application for the saints, as Paul will show in chapters 12-16.

A church on mission is a church that is thankful and prayerful. It is a church that is focused on mutual encouragement. A church on mission is eager to share the good news with others.

Today, if you're tired of playing it safe and are longing to fulfill God's mission in your life and within your church family, step out in faith. God wants to lift you up and take you to a place of unprecedented health and growth. He wants to use you in a way that He never has before. All that He asks is that you humble yourself before Him and make yourself available. He will do more with your life and our church than you ever thought possible. God seeks ordinary believers to join an extraordinary mission.

Here is my simple challenge to you. Do something this week to touch three hearts. That's all. Take your paper and write down three names. Then beside each name, write down one way you can touch that person this week. It might be through a phone call. It might be by writing a letter. It might be by giving a word of encouragement. It might be by praying for them. It might be by going out of your way to see them. It might be by sharing Jesus with them.

Whose heart are you going to touch for Jesus' sake this week?