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## ROMANS 15:17-33

Romans Series: How God Changes People

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I am grateful for your Spirit who draws us together. We're all different people and we've all got different things going on and yet you draw us together to experience a sense of unity. We do experience that here when we sing, when we fellowship together. We thank you for the gift of your Spirit that draws us together. Lord, I know that there are some folks that are not here today, some because they're sick, some because they're traveling. We pray for the group that's at Creation this weekend. Thank you for the nice weather they've experienced. We pray that you continue to bless them this weekend with refreshment. We pray for those who are sick. We pray that you heal them. Lord, draw us together as a fellowship, as a body. We want to be the kind of people that you want us to be and we want to be your church as a lighthouse in this community. Now Lord, as we look at your word in this passage of scripture, we ask that you would speak to each of us. In Jesus' name, amen.

I want to share with you a little bit about myself. As you know, I'm a busy person. I'm involved in a lot of things. I'm a father, I'm a grandfather, and I'm a husband. I'm a pastor here at Calvary Chapel. I really enjoy my work here at Calvary Chapel. Sunday is my favorite day of the week. Not just Sundays, but also just caring for people, looking forward to the things that are coming down, and looking forward to fall and what's happening there. I really like being a pastor and I like this church. I'm also involved with the National Center for Biblical Parenting where I'm teaching, counseling, and I'm writing about parenting. I help my daughters by managing the business side of their pet grooming business that they have in Ewing.

I have a lot of things going on. So one of the things I do regularly is I have what I call an internal staff meeting. That's where I pull all of me together and just sit quietly and listen to all the parts of me kind of go through the different things. I let everybody speak so that everybody gets their part. Not a lot of conflict in those meetings that we have. I know some people take medication for this, but for me the Lord is at work in the midst of those meetings with me. I'm asking the Lord to speak in the midst of that internal staff meeting as I'm trying to figure out what are the priorities. Because I got this guy over here telling me one thing and this guy over here telling me another thing, and somehow we have to organize all that and put that together and decide what are we going to do with time, talent, energy, money, and so on. It has to all be balanced.

There are some people that are very conflicted inside. Their internal staff meetings are yelling at each other and so on. So I really appreciate that the Lord oversees my internal staff meetings and I'm able to maneuver through them. At the end of my internal staff meeting everybody goes

away with jobs, so each one of my persons takes these jobs away and we go forward and do what we're going to do.

Now one of the things that helps me to be able to manage this part of my life is that I have a personal mission statement, a calling that God has given to me that has developed over time, but the things that I know God wants to do in my heart and life. So today it was so fun for me to look at Romans 15 to see that Paul gives us his personal mission statement there.

I want to talk to you today about having a personal mission statement that will guide your thinking and help you know what to do in your life. I think it will be powerful and Paul does some really interesting things as he goes through there and shares with us his personal mission statement.

I'm going to share with you what I think are seven benefits from a personal mission statement right out of the passage. So we're going to take the verses one at a time, starting at verse 17 in Romans 15. I'm going to put a couple verses up here at the front, but you want to open your Bibles because after we get going here, we're going to look at what's in your Bibles and I won't throw them up on the screen.

But for now, let's put the first one up there because this is what Paul is saying overall. This is the overarching statement about his personal mission, about what God has called him to do. There it says – *Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.* There's two things, glorifying Jesus and serving God. Those are his overarching principles that are going to govern the rest of the things that he's going to do.

When you have a personal mission statement, it defines your purpose, your calling. It drives you forward so you can make choices about your direction, about what you're going to say no to, about what you're going to say yes to. It empowers you to move forward. You can't do it all today. There's too much available. You have to make choices and a personal mission statement helps you to do that. We're going to see how it helped Paul as we go through these seven different benefits of a mission statement.

The first benefit is that it provides us with focus, intention, and conviction. You can see that in Paul's first words there that he's saying *I glory in Christ Jesus and in my service to God.* It's driving him forward. So there's no question in his mind about some things. He's not going to get involved in some things even though they might be good. He's choosing where he's going, he has focus, he has intention, he has direction. When you and I have focus, intention, and direction in our lives, we're able to maneuver through life more peacefully, I think. We're not so conflicted about all the choices that are out there and we're able to move forward with some strategy.

Here are a couple examples of personal mission statements that people have had. This is one of a fifteen-year-old young man: "My mission in life is to have my own family. I need to remember that what I do now in my life will affect them." I really like that statement. "Because of this, I try my best to serve God and do the right things that will benefit my future." What a great way of thinking for a young person. "I believe God would someday like me to have a large farm with

horses where I can help handicapped children. I'd like to work with animals, perhaps even be a veterinarian. Most of all, I want to have time for my family. So today I will study hard and stay away from things that may hinder my dream from happening." Just reading that you can see how that kind of a mission statement that a young person has will guide them through some of the temptations that might exist in the world today.

This is a mission statement from a thirty-year-old dad. "My mission is to act as an instrument of positive change (in three areas) in my family, my work, and my community. I will utilize all of the talents that God has given me and will participate in all aspects of my life with (three things) energy, purpose, and gratitude." I really like that word 'gratitude'. More and more I'm being convinced that gratitude is a key to life. Being grateful for what we have instead of complaining about what we don't have. "I will utilize my talents (and here's his talents) of strategy and administration to ensure that my home is loving and calm, my workplace is productive and positive, and my community is responsive and growing. Through this focus I will give more than I take and will provide a positive role model for my children."

So here's two people who have personal mission statements that help guide them through. Those are just examples of something you might decide to do yourself to create a personal mission statement for yourself.

Let's go back to Paul's words because Paul is starting his mission statement with these words: *Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.* That's the most important thing. That's the overarching thing he wants us to know.

He continues on in verse 18 and 19 by saying this: *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.*

Now Paul's commitment to God and his zest for life is seen in his speech. So he's saying here, "I'm going to choose my words carefully." Do you see what a mission statement does? It guides even the way you talk. It's not just something you put on the wall somewhere. It helps you make decisions every day about what you're going to do. That's what Paul did. It came out of his mouth.

That's very important because let's just look at a couple verses that Jesus said. He said first of all that *where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* So we know that what we value in life is reflected in our hearts because our hearts are given over to that. We treasure those things. But the next verse that I've marked here is – *For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.* So whatever a person treasures in their heart then that's what's going to come out of their mouth. So as you talk to people, you'll know that.

This is very important if you're a counselor or you're a parent because you want to be listening to what the person is saying. As people talk, you know and get an understanding of what's inside of their hearts. That's very important if you're trying to help them to grow or to change or even understand them or get to know them. You want to know what they're thinking about. You want to know what their treasure is. You want to know what they're talking about.

I like to call this spiritual transparency when we talk about what's going on inside of us. That's what Paul is doing. He says, "I'm going to talk about what God is doing through me to the Gentiles," because that's his special ministry.

Now many times people view faith as a private matter. I think it's very private and personal, but I also think it's very helpful for us to talk to others about Jesus. If you were to go to a movie that you saw last night and you really liked it, you wouldn't have any hesitation to tell other people, "I saw that movie last night. It was really good!" If you watched a ball game and you saw a great play, you'd be here to talk about it today and tell people, "That was a really interesting play. Did you see that?" The same thing is true about our faith.

I would suggest that when you come to church often stunning things happen. I don't know if they happen to you, but stunning things happen to me where God speaks to me through the worship, through the passage that we're working through. I just go out of Sundays flying high. I think we can take that the next day and say, "Let me tell you something I learned at church yesterday," or "let me tell you this great thing that happened at church yesterday," or maybe even on the way home, "I was surprised at this." The point is we're talking about something that is going on inside of us, what God is doing and what He is working on.

If you look at your Bible passage now in the next verse as he's describing what he's talking about, he says this: *So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.*

This is a map. The red border indicates the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus. There are three stars I've placed on the map to draw your attention to the places that are being talked about. Down here we have Jerusalem where this star is. Up there (where Bosnia is today) we have Illyricum and then Rome is the people he's writing to. So way over there on the side, that star is Rome. Just some places so you can understand the geography.

Paul is saying from all through *Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum, I have proclaimed the gospel* to the Gentiles. That's what he's saying there. *So from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.* Paul had a unique calling. He had a ministry, he believed, to the Gentiles. The calling that was part of his mission statement was to reach new people, Gentiles, for Jesus Christ.

So in verse 20 it says – *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.* So Paul was committed to sharing Christ in new territory. That was part of his vision that God had given him. He had a clear aim and view. Paul didn't get up every morning and say, "God, please tell me your mission for me today." He didn't do that. He got up every morning knowing that God had given him a mission, and he's praying and asking God to work through that mission today. I like what he's doing.

So the first point that's a benefit of a personal mission statement is that it provides us with focus, intention, and conviction. It's unique for each person, to a certain extent.

The second point I want to make here is that it uses scripture to provide vision. Paul now, as he's telling us the story, quotes a Bible verse from the Old Testament. What he's doing is he's taking scripture and he's tying it into his purpose statement and his mission statement because he wants us to see how God is working through His word in his life. So look at verse 21. It says – *Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."*

He's describing his mission experience as he's sharing the gospel with other people who have never heard. His mission, he believes, is to be one of those guys on the front lines sharing the gospel. We call those people missionaries who are out there today. They're sharing the gospel with people who don't even know. But even locally, some people just have that ability to walk up to someone in the park and start talking about Jesus in ways that others don't. That's what Paul had as a mission.

A good personal mission statement is going to rely on God's word to tie that into where they're going. Now Paul takes a passage from Isaiah 52:15 in his quote. This is a verse that's really about the Messiah that's yet to come and His purpose and what He's going to do. Paul now takes this picture of the Messiah and he says, "I'm going to take a piece of that and it's going to be my life verse. God has called me to reach out to people that don't know the gospel." So that is his message here.

It's not the same for everybody. This is what Paul views his mission to be. If we look at Timothy, Timothy was called to stay in Ephesus and be a pastor of a church. Titus was called to stay in Crete. But Paul had this different kind of a mission and he was ready to go. He wanted to be out there. He must have loved to travel, to talk to new people, and he had focus about where he was going.

That's why we come to verse 22. Because verse 22 is going to bring us to our third benefit of a mission statement. I'm hoping to motivate you by the time we're done here to have a mission statement, a personal one, even work on it. It may take a little bit of time to develop it, but to take and write down a personal mission statement for yourself.

Here's another benefit. It helps us say no to things. Notice the verse in verse 22. He says, *This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.* He's had to say no to coming to see them before. *Often*, it even says, I've had to say no to *coming to you*. That's because he has a mission. His personal mission statement helps him to know what to say yes to and what to say no to.

There are so many choices out there that we could take advantage of, but we have to know which ones to choose. Yes, there are bad things that we need to say no to. I say no to substance abuse, to smoking, to junk food because I want to be healthy. I don't have to ask those questions about those. Those are bad things for me. I don't want them. But there are other times that there are good choices that are available, and sometimes my personal mission statement allows me to know how to navigate those things. There are a lot of good things that we have access to, things that we could do. A strong mission statement helps us to be able to say no to certain things.

So Paul had to say no to coming to visit them in Rome. Taking that long trip over there, for a while he had to say no. We're going to find out why in just a moment as we continue in the passage, but I just want you to see that it will help you say no.

I think we all need the ability to say no to things, both bad things that are out there and good things that may get in the way of the mission that God has called us to do. But it doesn't always help us say no to things.

Let me point out the next phrase or the next statement. It's going to take us into this map, but let me come back to that in just a second. Let's go to the fourth benefit of a personal mission statement, and this is it empowers us to do bold things. So on the one hand, number three, it helps us to say no (he says that's why I haven't been able to come; I've had to say no because I'm on a mission here), but now I want you to see in the next part of the passage it empowers us to do bold things.

Let me read this to you starting in verse 23. *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.*

Let's go back to the map. I just want you to see. I don't know if I can experience the immensity of the task that Paul would have. If he leaves Jerusalem where he's going to go back to now and he starts heading over to Rome where they are, that is a long way for him to travel. And then look at how much further Spain is over there. He doesn't say where he wants to go in Spain, but he wants to get over to that area. That is a long way.

I would suggest that we can learn from this passage that having a personal mission statement empowers us to do bold things. I believe God wants us to do bold things. He wants to inspire us. Not just us, but He wants to benefit those people around us so they're inspired. It means taking risks, being willing to fail, experiencing hardship. All of that is being bold. Paul is willing to take that bold step in part because he knew that God was leading him and directing him. He had this personal mission statement, this calling that drove him forward.

Let me show you another point in the steps here, seven benefits of a personal mission statement. Number five is that it focuses on others, not just on self-improvement.

Now I would suggest that there's teaching in the world about having a personal mission statement. Everybody should have a vision statement, personal mission statement. Corporations should have them. Businesses should have them. I think that's good. However, one of the things that helps drive us as Christians is that it ties this mission statement into caring about others. Many times the mission statement that exists out in the world is a mission statement that is about advancing myself. Moving myself further in the world so that I am rising up in the corporate ladder, obtaining more wealth, or I'm somehow being able to move forward with more skills, education, and so on. Those things are all good, but it's very important to tie those into others, I believe. That's why Paul does that.

Look at verse 25 as we continue to read through the passage describing his testimony and his heart about ministry. In verse 25 he says – *Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem.*

So I want you to see that a very real part in his mission statement is that he's caring for people. Not just sharing the gospel with the Gentiles, but his heart is hurting because the Jewish people back in Jerusalem are suffering. They're suffering because there's a famine. Historically we know that. There's a famine in the land, back there in Palestine. Not only that, the Jews who had become Christians were being persecuted, many of them having lost their jobs. There's a lot of poverty now among the Christian Jewish community in the Jerusalem/Judea area, so Paul has a heart for that. He's collected some funds as he's been traveling around and he's carrying a monetary gift back to them in order to help them.

The point I just want to step back and look at is that Paul, as he has this mission to go to Spain, hasn't forgotten people. People are the most important thing, so he's going to go back to Jerusalem and he's going to care for these people.

I think that means we actually step into the drama of other people's lives. We step into the trauma that other people experience and the pain that they have. We as Christians don't use people to get to the next level. We recognize that people are the end and they are our goal. We are trying to get to know them and spend time with them. We stop. We care. We help. We give. It's part of what Jesus called us to do. Jesus invested in people. Those people are in our homes, they're in the classroom, they're in our workplaces, in our neighborhoods. We are different than others because we stop and talk to people. We take an interest in them.

My doctorate degree is in Organizational Management and Strategic Planning. How I got here, I don't know. But no really, I've applied this idea of organizational management and strategic planning to the church and the development of God's church, and to the family and to the development of the family.

In my study in organizational management, one of the things that I developed for myself (I'm sure I grabbed it from other sources), is I made my list of ten tasks of a manager. Every manager has these ten tasks. Things like planning, coordinating, communicating, evaluating, leading. All of these things that a manager or leader does, these ten different tasks, I often use those as I'm doing leadership training in the church and so on.

However, one of the things that was striking for me as I compared management lists that are out there on the Christian side and those that are not (because there's a lot of management training that's out there in the world today) is that there's an eleventh task of a manager who's a Christian. That is the task to care about the people they are managing. Sometimes that takes place in the world, but many times what happens in the world is the manager's concerned about the bottom line – completing the task, reporting in, making sure our team looks good. Caring about the people places way down. But those of us who are Christian managers recognize that we are in contact with these people that we work with because we have a responsibility to them. We're caring for them. Whether we're managing a home, we're managing a business, wherever we are,

if we're managing something, we're coming into contact with people and we have a job to do that.

That's why it's important to be part of our personal mission statement that somehow all of the things that God is doing in our lives through education, experience, money, talents, time, and so on have an end result, and that is to use them to bless people. So Paul is very clear about this.

I know this is true in many of your lives. That's why you come to church earlier, you hang out afterwards, or you're involved in a small group. You want to invest in the lives of people. So a fifth benefit of a personal mission statement is it helps us to focus on others, not just on self-improvement.

A sixth one (and I'm going to take you to verse 27 in just a moment) is this: A personal mission statement keeps our eyes on God's direction and blessing. Let's read through and I'll show you where I got that starting in verse 27.

As Paul is continuing to talk about the gift he's taking from Achaia and Macedonia and he's bringing, he says in verse 27 – *They were pleased to do it (that is give the gift), and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles (they were Gentiles) have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings (Christianity came out of the Jewish religion in essence. Jesus was a Jew, so Christianity came that way), they (the Gentiles) owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task (that is gone to Jerusalem to deliver the gift of the finances to them) 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.*

So number six says it keeps their eyes on God's direction and blessing. It seems that Paul, as he's making plans, has his eye on God's direction and blessing. I think that's a good thing to include on a benefit of a personal mission statement. It keeps our eyes in the right place so that we're focusing on God's direction and His blessing in our lives. That's what's happening here.

Now I just want to make a side note here. There are some people in the Christian community who believe that planning is against being Spirit-led. That if you're being led by the Spirit then you better not plan because if you're planning then that's somehow against the Spirit's leadership in a person's life.

I want to suggest there are some times when we plan God out of our schedule. So I've got my plans today and God couldn't interrupt me if He wanted to. We can't move to that extreme. But it does seem that Paul has a lot of plans here, I would suggest. His plans are tied into working with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit directing him. The two must work hand in hand. In fact I would suggest there's a way to plan that's Spirit-led. We can have Spirit-led planning in our lives and God can work through that to empower us to move forward. So number six – a personal mission statement keeps our eyes on God's direction and blessing.

Let me go to the last one I see here. The next point is a personal mission statement teaches me how to fit into God's plans.

Let me read the last verse of this chapter starting 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.*

What he's doing is he's taking his personal ideas and he's dovetailing them with God's plans so that his planning fits in with God's direction in his life. I would suggest that a personal mission statement helps us fit into what God wants to do in the world and how we can participate in it.

Now if you want to see God work and you want your prayers to be answered, I'm going to show you how you can do that today. One, I think it's okay and I think it's good for us to ask God to bless our plans, like Paul did. Or to say, "Lord, I'm doing this certain thing. Would you please bless that?" Or "Lord, I have a problem. Would you solve it?" Or "Lord, I have this problem. Would you heal me?" I think we can come to the Lord and in prayer we can tie into the grace of God and ask God for things. Asking God for things is a way for us to see God work. He wants to answer those prayers. Many times He answers them in ways that we appreciate. He doesn't always answer them in ways that we wish. He always answers prayers.

But I would suggest there's another prayer that we can pray. If you really want to see God work, pray this prayer. "Lord, as you work today, please reveal how I can be a part of your plan and deliver your grace. Use me today. I'm ready. I'm watching." You want to see God work? Then you say, "God, I want to fit into your plans today. Show me what you're doing. I want to step in and work where you are working." When we do that, then our eyes are opened during the day. We're sensitive to this interruption or that hurting person or this opportunity, and we say, "Oh, there it is," and we're ready to move in that direction because God is working. At the end of our day we can say, "Yes, God! Thank you for giving me the opportunity to work in line with what you're doing." When we have that kind of a personal mission statement it teaches us how to fit into the plans that God has allowed for us.

I think that when we work with the Lord and we see Him working, it gives us a tremendous amount of humility. I would suggest that as you start looking at a personal mission statement it may give you grandeur in your idea of what God wants to do, and that in itself provides the humility that we all need.

I want to say a word to those of you who are over forty years old today. I want to caution you because there's a temptation among us older folks to say something like this to the younger folks, "Wow. There was much more freedom of religion when I was younger. Wow. The good ol' days. Things were a lot better when I was younger." We start proclaiming doom and gloom to the rest of the world. Things like "wow, the political system is a total disaster. The economy is going to collapse. ISIS is taking over the world. The terrorism is getting worse." Look. You're scaring our kids. So I want you to be sensitive about the way you talk about our world.

Young people, I want you to listen to me for a minute. I want you to know that our world is a challenging place. It has all kinds of bad stuff in it. But I also want you to know God is in control and He's bigger than all the problems that exist out there. I also want you to know that God has a plan and that we can tie into His plan.

Let's just take politics for a moment and talk about politics. Not today's politics, let's talk about politics during the time of Christ. There were some political problems going on during the time of Christ. Have you heard about the guy Pilate? Pilate was a governor, he was a politician, and in fact he says to Jesus, "What is truth?" He doesn't listen to his wife about her concerns about this guy Jesus, and so he washes his hands and he says, "Fine. Crucify him." They send Him off, He's crucified, took care of that problem. But you would not know about Pilate today if you didn't know the story of Jesus. It's the story of Jesus that helps us understand New Testament politics, and so we can understand that there's a Pilate.

Did you know that there was a Herod? Oh you know about Herod because he killed all the babies at Christmastime. Remember that? Well you wouldn't even know about Herod if you didn't know the story of Jesus.

So I want to encourage you to get to know the story of Jesus. The world is a challenging place. I don't know if it's more challenging now than it has been in the past. There's darkness everywhere you go. But as the darkness increases, the light of Christ shines brighter.

The church of Jesus Christ is such a powerful place where people can receive healing. God has made a promise to us that He *will build His church and even the gates of hell will not prevail against Him*. It means I'm in the right place today at the church. God's church is this place that's going to carry on and move forward.

I've got to tell you, I'm hopeful about the future. Because I'm not trusting in a politician. And I'm not trusting in economy. I'm trusting in Jesus Christ. So let's move forward and accept the fact that God wants to do amazing things in our lives. Let's not scare the kids. Let's excite them about the potential that God has for each one of us.

I'd encourage you young people to develop a personal mission statement. It helps when you're having that internal staff meeting so you don't go crazy. It helps you move in the right direction. It's something that God, I believe, wants each one of us to think about and do.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, it's our desire to be involved in civil affairs, to be interested in politics, to take an interest in our economy, to get involved any way that we can. We want to know the news and be a part of what's going on. But Lord, I just want to pray that you would help us to not be under the circumstances or to be trodden down by the news that's so prevalent today. We thank you that you've given us the gospel, the good news, and that that gospel redeems us. It gives us a personal mission statement that's focused on you and drives us forward. So Lord, do a deep work in each of our hearts we ask. In Jesus' name, amen.