

11.

Romans 15:22-29

Be Thinking Ahead

Being a Spirit-led Christian does not mean being a whimsical Christian. While God's leading often does involve an openness to the Holy Spirit that involves spontaneous action, it is not always like this — and perhaps not *usually* like this. Paul's comments to the Romans in this passage serve as an encouragement for believers today to be led by the Spirit *and* to make plans for our futures.

1. Finding the particular will of God for our lives can sometimes seem to some as being like trying to decipher cryptic clues from God. Based on Romans 15:22, should every 'closed door' be interpreted as God's direction?
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It seems that God's direction for our lives can feel very natural. That is, He places certain goals or dreams into our hearts which cause us to say things like, "One day I would like to visit Rome!" or, "One day I'm going to run a half marathon."

2. Read Romans 15:23 and note what Paul had been longing to do 'one day'?
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Good leadership is largely about thinking ahead and being prepared ahead of time. We see Paul's leadership gift at work in his statement to the Romans in Romans 15:24. Paul refers to his intention to go to Jerusalem to deliver financial aid to the struggling believers there (Romans 15:25). We this intention stated in Acts 19:21.

3. When Paul reached the coast near Ephesus, he called for the elders of the Ephesian church (Acts 21:4). When they arrived they felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to warn Paul about something. What did they warn him about? (Note also Acts 21:11-13.)
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When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he was arrested by the Romans. This led to him being held without charges for quite some time as the Romans were not clear on why the Jewish leaders wanted him imprisoned. He eventually appealed to Caesar to hear his case, which was his right as a Roman citizen (Acts 25:11).

4. When we walk with Christ, the Holy Spirit guides our steps — even we don't like them, or agree with Him. Even though Paul had made his intentions known, his plans were dramatically changed when he was arrested. Despite these apparent set-backs, what was his outlook based on his statements in Acts 23:11 and Acts 27: 23-25 and what can we learn from this?
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The Gentile churches who supported Paul's fund-raising for the believers in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26-27) reveals something remarkable about how Christians felt about each other even though they had never met and they were scattered across the empire.

5. What does this tell us about the kind of attitude we should have toward our brothers in sisters in need who are in far-flung parts of the world?
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Paul's stated intention after visiting Rome was to be sent on his way to take the Gospel to Spain (Rom. 15:29). He never made it. After being held under house arrest in Rome, he was then imprisoned by the Praetorian Guard before being brought before Caesar in AD 64. By this time Caesar Nero had begun his campaign of persecution against Christians and ordered that Paul be beheaded. Many scholars believe that the reference in Revelation 20:4 to those who had been beheaded was a veiled tribute to the great apostle.

6. Even though Paul's plans were somewhat disrupted and he was unable to fulfil his intended missions trip to Spain, he came to understand that he was about to finish race in Rome (2Tim. 4:6-8, and note Romans 15:29). Does this provide *encouragement* or *discouragement* for us to make plans and goals for our futures? Discuss.
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Amen.