

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

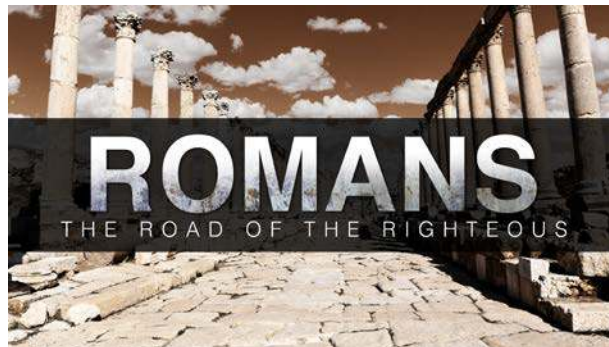
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 1:8-15

Written By

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Any saint who has ever accomplished much for Jesus Christ has done so because they were committed to prayer. Sift through the pages of the word of God and you will see the truth of these words. In your quest, names like Abraham (Genesis 20:17), Moses (Numbers 11:2), Hannah (1 Samuel 1:10), Samuel (1 Samuel 8:6), Solomon (1 Kings 8:28), Elisha (2 Kings 4:33) will most certainly surface. These people, men and women alike, founded a nation, grew people of God, sought God's blessing, desire God's wisdom for daily living, tapped into God's power to counter their work culture, bro spiritual renewal to God's people, and stood unflinching against the forces of spiritual and moral darkness. The old saying is true: prayer changes things.

For the apostle Paul, he wanted to bring further and greater spiritual change to Rome, which was the capital of the world in his day and age. Rome's military power created the *Pax Romana*, or unified peace, throughout the Middle East and what is now Europe. Rome's vast state-of-the-art road systems assured the flow of goods and services to every part of their kingdom, and they also promoted the free movement of people from one city to the next. Rome's ships sailed the seas and brought security and commerce to the lands under the sway of their power. Yes, when Paul lived, the architectural wonder of the city of Rome, replete with its walled fortifications, highly organized military and governmental structures, and thriving businesses made it the place to be.

Based on all of this, it is no wonder that the gospel of Jesus Christ took a foothold here. Once Jewish Christians traveled here with the life-giving, transforming gospel, it is not take long

for those lost in vacuous, hopeless, and dead-end systems of religious belief to fully and excitedly embrace the true gospel. Lives were changed as sin failed to keep people chained up anymore. Failing marriages found health and wholeness. People ensnared in various addictions found freedom and strength to remain clean. Hardened soldiers, who had seen their fair share of horror in war, secured an inner peace which drove their demons away. Politicians who were accustomed to graft and the personal benefits of abusing their power, learned how to serve the populace as godly people. Slave owners discovered how God wanted them to treat those under their care, and slaves learned how to respond to those who owned them. The balkanized nature of the ethnically mixed city started seeing the various ethnicities come together as one cohesive people full of care and compassion for each other. And throughout the magnificent city home churches, small places of worship, which were all inter-connected with each other, started cropping up.

God was up to something big in Rome. The people saw and sensed, and so did Paul . . . even miles away in far-flung regions of the kingdom. This is why he wanted to come there. Even though he did not know these amazing Christians, his experience as a church planter, pastor, Bible teacher, counselor, and missionary taught him much that this burgeoning church could benefit from. He could learn from this as well, and together they could utilize their God-given gifts to use Rome as a fulcrum to reach the entire Roman Empire for their resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ.

How did Paul seek to realize his vision? He did what all great, godly saints do. He prayed not just one short prayer, but many prayers. He did not put together a think tank to strategize how to bring the gospel to Rome in an even bigger fashion. On the contrary, he fell to his knees repeatedly and sought God's mind on the matter. I do not know about you, but there is much in these opening words of Romans which relate to us. Our Rome is Washington D. C. We, too, are strategically located, which, in turn, gives us the opportunity to do our best in assuring the gospel impacts not just the nation, but the world. We, too, know that God us up to something here in the nation's capital. The amazing spiritual and numerical growth He has sovereignly sent our way, coupled with how He is blessing other area churches, shows us that He is not content to permit darkness to overtake light.

All of this leads to a logical question: How to we discover what He wants us to do to further the impact of the gospel? How does He want us to tap into the power of what He's up to? He calls us, like Paul, to be people of prayer. Ostensibly, Paul's life is a model of how live to the glory of God in godless, carnal, and self-absorbed, twisted times. And how is that? You cultivate a life of powerful prayer.

What Does A Powerful Prayer Life Look Like? (Romans 1:8-15)

Three instructive concepts arise from a study of these highly personal and passionate verses from Paul's inspired pen.

Paul's Prayer Life Was Pointed (Romans 1:8)

By pointed I mean Paul's prayer for specific aim. From the outset he knew what he was going after. You catch his "pointedness" with these words:

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world (Romans 1).

Paul begins as if he is going to follow his first prayer point with the second, but he never got around to it. Look throughout the rest of the prayer and you will not find it. Why? Because many times prayer is an emotional thing. You have something burning on your heart to bring before the Lord, and you do talk about it, and before you know it host of other needs or praises have emotionally spilled out before the throne. This is what I believe happened here. Paul had many things on his mind to tell the Romans gave been praying about, but when he actually got down to talk about it, his passionate heart shifted into overdrive. Ever done that in your own prayer life? If so, I'm sure you can relate.

What did Paul focus on? Like a great leader, he zeroed in on encouraging these saints. He built them up. He started out on positive prayer footing which is denoted by the opening main verb, "I thank." Lexically, the Greek is from the verb *eucharisto* (εὐχαριστῶ). Sound familiar? We get the word *eucharist* from this verbal stem. Grammatically, the verb is a present active indicative. The active voice means the subject, Paul, is doing the action. He is the one committed to being thankful in prayer for other saints. Take note. If you are a negative, critical, caustic person, you need to understand this is not a spiritual gift. Further, please realize you garner no praise from God living a negative life and then telling God in prayer you associate with highly positive believers. Admit it. It is hard to criticize other believers when you are praying and praising God for them. Powerful prayer starts with you being committed to being positive toward others.

Additionally, the present tense nature of the verb can be classified as *iterative present*. For those Greek students among us I must ask, What is the difference between an *iterative present* and a *progressive present*?¹ The iterative speaks of repeated action, while the progressive speaks of continual action. Pragmatically, this means Paul prayed repeatedly for these Roman Christians he had never met. Logically, there were times when he did not pray for them; however, if you looked at his prayer life on a spiritual spectrum, you would see numerous plot points of prayer (try and say that fast). All of this grammatical talk should make you stop and ask yourself: Who am I praying and praising God for on an iterative basis?

Thankfulness dripped from Paul's life as he communicated with churches. His letters substantiate this truth:

⁴ I thank (Εὐχαριστῶ) my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1).

And he made this statement to a group of believers who usually had it out for him as their spiritual father. Here are a couple of more illustrations:

¹ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 518-521.

¹⁵ For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you, and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks (εὐχαριστῶν) for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; (Ephesians 1).

³ I thank (Εὐχαριστῶ) my God in all my remembrance of you, (Philippians 1).

Paul was a thankful man and his thankfulness spilled over into how he viewed others in the body of Christ. When he saw praiseworthy things, he made it a habit of making sure God knew how he felt. Ask yourself: Does God hear more of my praise for others or my complaint about others? It is a question worth asking yourself as you seek power in prayer. True, there are times when you withhold the positive and address a spiritual compromise head-on, as Paul does in his letter to the Galatians; however, a maturing saint will typically unleash power in his prayer life because he sees the positive net spiritual gains in the lives of others. How is that balance in your prayer life?

Paul's thanks for these believers evidences his knowledge of how he gained access to God: "through Jesus Christ" (διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). The preposition, *dia* (διὰ) followed the genitive, Jesus Christ, is classified as "means," which tells us Paul knew how he could approach the throne of the living God. Divine connection occurred only through, or by means of, his spiritual and faith relationship with the redemptive work of Jesus. Paul utilizes the same preposition elsewhere in his book to denote this amazing reality:

²¹ that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through (*dia*, διὰ) Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5).

ἵνα ὡςπερ ἐβασίλευσεν ἡ ἀμαρτία ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ, οὕτως καὶ ἡ χάρις βασιλεύσῃ διὰ δικαιοσύνης εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Christ's name is in the genitive form) τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν.

⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through (*dia*) Jesus Christ our Savior, (Titus 3).

οὗ ἐξέχεεν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς πλουσίως διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν . . .

Those in our godless culture who say that prayer does not matter do not understand what the gospel of Jesus accomplishes. For one, it enables them, for the first time in their lives to have direct access to the throne of the living God (Hebrews 4:16). This new spiritual relationship also gives them access to the power of the living God for daily living for now this person is a child of God. If anyone understood this unique opportunity and privilege it was Paul, and that is why he is careful to attach this key prepositional phrase. Again, it should make you stop and ask yourself: When I am praying, do I pause and let God know I know how I have access into His presence?

After God spoke about the means by which he could pray for these Roman saints, he employs a *hoti* (ὅτι) particle to introduce the reason for his unique prayer. Put differently, this is where Paul says pointedly and specifically why he gave thanks for this particular saints on an iterative basis.

because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world (Romans 1).

ὅτι ἡ πίστις (*the faith, not a faith*) ὑμῶν καταγγέλλεται ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ

By placing the article before the word “faith,” Paul showcased Christianity as the faith, par excellence. There are other faiths and religions on the planet but they pale into insignificance in light of the spectacular and historical story of the gospel. No other religions, as we have stated in prior studies, have precisely prophesied the coming of God to redeem mankind from his sin problem. No other religion has God walking among as the perfect God-man, teaching and preaching look no one ever before, and performing organic, life-transformative miracles at will. No other religion is based on the brutal death of their innocent Savior, followed by His very public resurrection, followed by numerous appearances over a period of forty days. Based on the evidence, Paul rightly says the Romans hold tenaciously to *the* faith. Further, they are so adept at spreading the faith to those lost in false systems of belief that Paul has heard about their faith just about everywhere he travels. His speech is hyperbolic, but the over-emphasis most certainly drives home the point: The faith of Roman believers was contagious and had spread like a wild fire all over the world.

I ask you, Is there anything greater a church could or should be known for? I do not want our church known for our great programs, for our wonderful outreach into the community, for our excellent teaching venues, for our, well, you fill in the proverbial blank. I want us to be known for our commitment to the Christian faith, to the belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way to God. I want us to be known for those who are convinced that spiritual truth matters, meaning all religions are not the same, nor are they on equal footing. God has come to earth, walked among us, bore our sin on a cross, and has risen from the grave as the Victor, and that, my friend, changes everything. That is the faith we need to be about, and it is the very faith Paul constantly thanked the Lord for as he contemplated the church in Rome. Talk about a point prayer. How pointed are your prayers?

A second truth about powerful prayer is showcased in verses 9 through 10:

Paul’s Prayer Life Was Perpetual (Romans 1:9-10a)

Paul clearly understood the importance of ongoing prayer. No doubt he had learned this trick from studying the lives of the Old Testament saints, the words of Jesus, and taking a look at his own spiritual life. Two parables would’ve stuck out, I am sure, of all Paul had studied; namely, the parable of the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5-13), and the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-6). The words of Jesus from Luke 19, verse 11 were ones Paul would’ve not well:

And I say to you, ask (note the present tense nature of the verbs denoting ongoing activity), and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.

Persistence pays and prayer. Persistence shows just how important something is to you, persistence can move God's hand to work in your favor where your will His will coincide. We see persistence in prayer woven carefully through versus 9 through 10. It first crops up with . . .

The Witness of the Perpetuity (Romans 1:9). Paul shows the Romans how much he prayed for them by first calling God as his witness.

For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you.

In Greek, the word “witness,” *martus* (μάρτυς), from which we get the word martyr, is placed first in the sentence for the sake of emphasis, something which is lost in the English translations. Paul do not want the Romans to miss this point that is why he place this important word at the head of the sentence. Paul only called God as his witness a few times in his writings (2 Corinthians 1:23; 11:31; Galatians 1:20; and Philippians 1:8). Why did he do this? Two reasons are plausible:

- No one knew about the content of his prayer life better than God; therefore, God was the best witness possible to support the fact that Paul prayed for the saints constantly. As a side light I must ask you another question: could you call God as a witness to how much time you spend in prayer for specific believers?
- I think, although it is not in the text, that Paul saw God's witness to his prayer life because he typically came off as emotionally distant, awkward, highly analytical, and intellectually tough. Concerning this item Paul, the words of Dr. Donald Barnhouse are insightful: “we know from his second epistle to the Corinthians that some people did not like him. He hit too hard. Some people thought him dogmatic, didactic, positive. His blows were sledgehammer blows. They thought that he walked according to the flesh (II Cor. 10:2). They complained he was waiting and powerful only in his letters, but that this personality was weak and his speech contemptible (II Cor. 10:10). There may well have been those who came to him and said, ‘Paul, show a little more love.’ He would've blinked at them through his half blinded eyes and remained speechless, for he knew he loved them with a burning love.”²

Paul had probably little insight into how these saints viewed him, but he probably knew that news about him had probably come to them from a variety of sources, both positive and negative.

²Donald Barnhouse, *Romans*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 100.

To preempt the negative caricatures which did not match the reality of his inner prayer lie, he, therefore, simply went on record in God's courtroom to notify these believers how much his love for them moved him to prayer. We are all wired differently, are we not? I, like Paul, do not drip with love and emotion, but it does not mean you, too, are not on my heart before God. But sometimes it is good for the analytical types to stop and articulate what really goes on in their inner spiritual life so the more emotionally driven saints can rest assured they are spiritually covered in prayer. I must also say I stand convicted by Paul's model. If I were to call God to be my witness for how often I pray for you, I must say it can, and should be more than I currently do. I do love and care for you, and I think you know that, but I need to step up my prayer in your behalf as we seek to do greater things for God. I trust also that you are praying for me, and many of you are because you tell me. Let God be our witness that we are, in fact, people who pray for each other.

The Words of Perpetuity (Romans 1:9-10a). Words in the text to point out how much Paul prayed for these believers.

⁹ For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the gospel* of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you, ¹⁰ always in my prayers making request, (Romans 1)

Keywords are “unceasingly,” “always,” and “making request,” which is a present tense participle from the word *deomai*, to beg (δεόμενος).³ This last word shows you just how committed Paul was

³William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 218. **δέομαι** (s. δέησις) pass. dep. impf. 3 sg. ἐδεῖτο **Lk 8:38** (Tdf. and other edd. have the Ion. form ἐδέετο, so also TestJob 39:8; s. B-D-F §89; Helbing 110; Thackeray 243); fut. δεήσομαι LXX; 1 aor. ἐδέηθην, imprv. δεήθητι, pl. δεήθητε; pf. δεδέημα 3 Km 8:59 (in var. mngs. Hdt.+). In our lit. only w. the mng. **to ask for something pleadingly, ask, request**, which predominates also in LXX and En (Jos., Vi. 310 al.), w. gen. of pers.

ⓐ gener. of address to humans *ask, request*

α. w. inf. foll. (X., Cyr. 1, 5, 4; Herodian 2, 11, 9; Jdth 12:8; 3 Macc 1:16; 5:25; pap esp. in petitions since III B.C.; e.g. PCairZen 236, 4; BGU 1297, 6; UPZ 50, 24) **Lk 8:38; 9:38; Ac 26:3** (σου) v.l.

β. w. acc. of thing (X., Cyr. 1, 4, 2; Pla., Apol. 17c; 1 Esdr 8:53 v.l.) δεόμενοι ἡμῶν τὴν χάριν *begging us for the favor* **2 Cor 8:4**. Without gen. of pers. δέομαι τὸ μὴ παρὼν θαρρήσαι *I ask that when I am present I need not show boldness* **10:2**.

γ. w. direct discourse foll., (*I beg (of you), or please*) (Gen 19:18; 44:18; PCairZen 639, 15 δέομαί σου, μὴ με περιδίης; Vi. Aesopi W 100, 6f P. δέομαί σου, δέσποτα, διαλλάγηθι Σαμίοις) δέομαί σου, ἐπίτρεψόν μοι *please allow me* **Ac 21:39**; sim. **8:34; Lk 8:28; Gal 4:12**. W. λέγων added **Lk 5:12**. Without gen. of the pers., but w. ὑπέρ Χριστοῦ (s. ὑπέρ A1c) added **2 Cor 5:20**.

δ. w. ἵνα foll. (Sir 37:15; 38:14; 1 Esdr 4:46; Jos., Ant. 12, 121) **Lk 9:40; 11:37** D; B 12:7; Hs 5, 4, 1.

ⓑ of petition to God (w. αἰτεῖσθαι) δεόμεθα ... ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐλέους αὐτοῦ, ἵνα 1 Cl 50:2. W. gen. (cp. Epict. 2, 7, 12 in a simile about petitioning a bird-augur as one would a deity; PsSol 2:22 of one petitioning τοῦ προσώπου κυρίου) τοῦ θεοῦ *praying to God* **Ac 10:2**; τοῦ κυρίου ἵνα Hn 3, 1, 2; Pol. 6:2. Other constructions in address to God: w. εἰ ἄρα foll. **Ac 8:22**, ὅπως (cp. Ael. Aristid. 35, 28 K.=9 p. 108 D.; Aesop, Fab. 63 P.=117 H.: ἐδεήθη αὐτῶν ὅπως; Jos., Ant. 9, 9) **Mt 9:38; Lk 10:2**; δ. πρὸς τὸν κύριον (Ps 29:9; 141, 1; Is 37:4) w. ὑπέρ τινος and ὅπως foll. **Ac 8:24** (ParJer 7:24).—Without ref. to the one petitioned: περί τινος (Jdth 8:31; Sir 21:1; 28:4; Da 4:27; Jos.,

to praying for the Romans. Before God's throne he felt like his prayers were like a child begging for something before a father. Ever prayed like that with that sort of passionate intensity? To read through other Pauline letters and you will see his commitment to pray continually for other saints. For instance, in Ephesians 1, verse 16 we read:

[I too, verse 15] . . . do not cease giving thanks for you, or making mention of you in my prayers (Ephesians 1).

He loved the Ephesians that is why prayed for them.

The Thessalonians believers were also high on Paul's daily prayer list:

³We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers . . . (1 Thessalonians 1).

Even though he was extremely busy, Paul carved out time to pray for other believers.

Why pray continually? One, it is the command of God ("Pray without ceasing," 1 Thessalonians 4:17). Two, it cause us to grow in faith as we learn to lean upon and listen to God. Three, it help us come to understand the will and ways of God. Four, our Adversary, the Devil, never rests (Ephesians 6:10-16). To let your prayer guard down is equivalent to a soldier heading into battle without a flak jacket. Five, it shows God we are serious about following hard after Him. Six, it reveals things we would have never known before. Concerning this, Andrew Murray writes,

Let your attitude be the same whether you are praying for yourself or for others. All labor, bodily or mental, needs time and effort. We must give ourselves up to it. Nature reveals her secrets and you'll church treasures only to diligent and thoughtful labor. However, little we can understand it, spiritual husbandry is always the same: the seed we sow in the soil of heaven, the efforts we put forth, and the influence we seek to exert in the world above all require a complete surrender in prayer. Maintain great confidence that when the time is right, we will reap abundantly if we don't give up (Galatians 6:9). ⁴

This is sound advice we should all heed. Paul lived in this fashion and look at what he accomplished for Jesus in his lifetime. Oh, God, move us to being people of protracted times of perpetual prayer.

A third key component is unwrapped in verses 11 through 15:

Ant. 10, 203) B 13:2 (Gen 25:21); w. ἵνα foll. **Lk 21:36; 22:32**; w. εἰς and inf. foll. **1 Th 3:10**; δ. ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν *ask in prayer* w. εἴ πως foll. **Ro 1:10**. Abs. (Tob 3:11; 3 Macc 1:24; 2:10; En 12:6) δεηθέντων αὐτῶν **Ac 4:31**; αὐτὸς δὲ ἐδεήθη AcPl Ha 4, 6; οἱ δεόμενοι *those who pray* (Lucian, Tim. 5; 8; Wsd 16:25) 1 Cl 59:4.—DCrump, Jesus the Intercessor '92.—DELG s.v. δέω 2. M-M. TW.³

⁴Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Springfield, PA: Whitakere House, 1981), 123.

Paul's Prayer Was Purposeful (Romans 1:10-15)

as you might guess, Paul knew exactly what he sought for the Romans in his prayer life. From these magnificent verses five purposes are disclosed.

Purpose #1: Travel to Rome (Romans 1:10b-11a). On his three eventful and spiritually productive missionary journeys, Paul had covered much of the known world. Rome, however, the capital of all capitals had always eluded him. God had opened the doors to cities like Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Athens, the door to Rome had always been tightly shut. This closure, however, did not deter Paul. Listen and learn:

¹⁰ always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you (Romans 1).

For years, Paul had desired to travel to Rome (Acts 19:21), but God had not permitted him because He had work for him to do elsewhere. Paul had also lived long enough to watch God close doors of ministry he thought were clearly within God's will. His desire to minister in Bithynia is a case in point. He desired to go there but God led him to Troas, on the west coast of modern day Turkey, so he would be positioned to receive a divine call to go to the Greeks in Macedonia (Acts 16:7-10). Nevertheless, none of this divinely appointed opening and closing caused Paul to lose a desire to travel to Rome for God. He kept asking God if this could, one day, be His will. He eventually was sent there by God but not how he expected. He came not as a freeman, but as a prisoner of Rome under house arrest around 59 A. D. He would eventually be released but would later be beheaded in Rome under the despotic and unpredictable rule of Nero (which occurred sometime between 64 and 68 A. D.). Are God's ways unsearchable?

When I knew, in my spirit, that God wanted me to pastor somewhere else, I sought His will for many years. I have a massive folder in my filing cabinet of all of the churches who spoke with me, but none of them proved to be what God wanted. I still persisted and sought His perfect leadership, and he guided me here, to a portion of the country I never anticipated being a shepherd in. Indeed, Washington D.C. is my Rome by God's design and timing. Now I am onto praying specifically for other things to accomplish for God, things which are His will, not mine. What are you praying for? How often are you praying for this big, bold thing?

Purpose #2: To Impart a Spiritual Gift (Romans 1:11b). This is exactly what he says in the last part of verse 11 with a *hina* clause of purpose (ἵνα τι μεταδῶ χάρισμα ὑμῖν πνευματικὸν εἰς τὸ στηριχθῆναι ὑμᾶς).

¹¹ For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; (Romans 1)

Paul likens this particular purpose down to one lone spiritual gift, *charisma pneumatikon* (χάρισμα πνευματικόν). What this means is brought out best by Colin Kruse in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary on Romans*:

It is susceptible to two main interpretations: (i) It denotes some ministerial gift such as prophecy, teaching, or tongues. This is most unlikely, for in Paul's writings the one who imparts such spiritual gifts is never Paul, or any other human being, but always God (the Holy Spirit) (cf. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:1–4, 7–11, 28). (ii) It denotes the apostle's understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This interpretation is supported by the fact that elsewhere Paul speaks of sowing 'spiritual seed' among people (1 Cor. 9:11) where what is meant is the preaching of the gospel, and of the 'spiritual blessings', first promised to the Jews, being experienced by Gentiles through the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 15:27). And if Paul's letter to the Romans foreshadows in writing the sort of spiritual gift he wanted to impart in person, then that gift is a reminder of the content of the gospel he proclaims (Rom. 15:15–16).⁵

Charisma (χάρισμα) is used this salvific, redemptive way in the book (Romans 5:15–16; 6:23), hence, it is wise to see Paul's purpose wedded here to deepening the Roman church's understanding of all aspects of the gospel. He, of all people, knew firsthand how a doctrinally weak church could be easily thwarted and sidelined by the wiles of the Devil. He, of all people, knew how false teachers had infiltrated the church in Colossae and in the province of Galatia. Rome would not be spared the exploits of the Devil; therefore, Paul sought to make them strong in the message and meaning of the gospel so they could cut deep into their Adversary's kingdom. Believe, me nothing much has changed in the last 2,000 years. We, of all people, daily see why we need to know the Word of God and sound doctrine so we can be the light God intended. As you pray powerfully for our church, would you pray for all the area churches to have this deep commitment to the great gospel of Jesus, and all that this entails?

Purpose #3: To be Encouraged (Romans 1:12). How so? By each other's company.

¹². . . that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. (Romans 1).

If anything, Paul was a humble man. A humble man does not think he is better, smarter, or more gifted than others. A humble man does want to show off his various abilities before a whole new group of people. A humble man is not all about making a name for himself and creating some sort of a legacy. On the other hand, he realizes his human limitations and frailties, coupled with the strengths in the lives of others he is in contact with. Put simply, a humble man understands his

⁵ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 62.

need of others for encouragement, comradery, and intellectual iron sharpening iron. When we pray powerfully, we not only pray with purpose, but we do not think we are all of that and a proverbial bags of chips. We realize we really do need each other, especially in the dark spiritual day in which we live, and we live to be dependent on each other for care, support, education, and training in the ways of God. I need you and you need me, and together we can, and will accomplish much for God. May we always understand the importance of our symbiotic and sovereign relationship.

Purpose #4: To Secure Fruit (Romans 1:13). Paul's prayer here should be our prayer:

¹³ And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles (Romans 1).

He's being open and honest. Basically, he says, the main reason I want to come to your church is to help you secure more spiritual fruit, or more spiritual converts. One time as Darren and I drove outside of Dallas looking to hook up with a youth pastor candidate, we passed by a massive collegiate looking football field in the middle of, basically, nowhere. I naively asked, "Who is that for?" Darren replied, "It is for the local high school football team." Then he added, "They take their football seriously in Texas." No kidding. Football is what they are about in that little town. Saving souls, on the other hand, should be what we are all about, pure and simple. It is a driving purpose which should rightfully eclipse all other life pursuits, even football.

What is powerful prayer all about? It's about asking God for things that matter most. A lost soul is a great matter to God, wouldn't you agree? It should, then, be, a great matter to us. Oh, God, might our lives individually and corporately be all about sharing the gospel and seeing people trade kingdoms. Oh, God, may we not be a church committed to church transfers but kingdom transfers.

Lastly,

Purpose #5: To Pay a Debt (Romans 1:14-15). What debt did Paul have to pay in Rome? Good question. He provides the answer in the closing verses of this pericope:

¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome (Romans 1).

Greeks, here, speaks of anyone who is cultured, refined, educated and so forth. *Barbarian* is built off the stem *bar-bar*, which was a pejorative term used to describe how the language of the uneducated ethnic non-Romans sounded to the highly cultured Romans. The wise and the foolish imply round out an entire culture for it is usually composed of both. Why did Paul bring this all up? He mentions it because he cannot ever get off his mind how God saved him. That salvation experience was so profound, enlightening, and transformative he could never forget he was now

a debtor to everyone, spiritually speaking. Put differently, Paul says, “I must come to Rome for I have a spiritual debt to pay toward all those people, regardless of who they are, who need the gospel of Jesus Christ. So based on this, will you please extend me a much needed invite?”

As I stated earlier, Paul did make it to Rome, in fact, he would die a martyrs death in this glorious city. He prayed with great purpose and God answered it in the most profound fashion. And what resulted from this prayer? Once Paul arrived, Rome was never the same again. They might have had him in chains, but he was a free as ever to do God’s bidding. All of this transpired because one man, Paul, was devoted to powerful prayer. What did they prayer look like?

- It was pointed.
- It was perpetual.
- It was purposeful.

Our Rome now awaits the next Paul. May we be that saints for such a time as this.