

ADVENTURE CHRISTIANS
ROMANS 15:14-32

BIG IDEA: SERVING JESUS IS THE HIGHEST FORM OF ADVENTURE!

INTRODUCTION:

- A. For 14 chapters the Apostle Paul has been laying out the great doctrines of salvation and has been explaining how the Christian life is to be lived in very practical terms. In the process he has said almost nothing about himself. The subject of the Gospel has been all important in this book and the preacher himself has been in the shadows. Now, here in the middle of chapter 15, Paul emerges from the shadows and talks about his ministry and his plans and dreams.
- B. And it's all about changing lives for God!
- C. Changing lives...that's the heart of what Paul wants to see. Every preacher worth his salt is preaching toward a verdict. He wants every person in his audience to make a decision concerning the truth he proclaims. He is like a courtroom attorney arguing his case to the jury. In every way he knows how, he tries to produce evidence and persuade the jury to come to the same conclusion to which he has come.
- D. **Fred Smith** is a masterful contemporary preacher. He confesses, *"I speak only to change behavior. Making a speech is not an accomplishment; changing behavior is."*¹
- E. And in the process, Paul experienced a life of high adventure!
- F. **2 Corinthians 11:23-33**, *I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ³² In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. ³³ But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.*
- G. If we could distill it down, what was it that put a thrill into this man? How did he spell "Adventure"?
- I. **ADVENTURE IS SAVING A LIFE! Verses 14-16**, *I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. ¹⁵ I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of **proclaiming the gospel of God**, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*
 - A. The Christian Works for Jesus
 - 1. The program of getting people saved isn't really the Christian's program; it's Jesus' program. He's the One who came into the world to seek the lost. He's the One who died on the cross for our sins. He's the One who gave the Great Commission to the Apostles.
 - 2. That's why in verse 16 Paul calls himself a *"minister of Christ Jesus."* (**Verse 16**) Minister means simply a public servant, like a Press Secretary for the President. He's not there to toot his own horn. His job is to speak for the President, just as Paul's job was to speak for Jesus.
 - 3. It pleases Jesus to save as many people as possible out of this lost and sinful world. **Isaiah 53:11**, *"As a result of the anguish of his soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities."* (NASB) Any Christian who isn't concerned about getting people saved, has betrayed his calling as a witness of Christ Jesus.

¹ Fred Smith, "Making Your Message Memorable," *Leadership*, Spring 1998, p. 93.

4. Paul goes a step further and pulls out another metaphor: he says the Christian witness is a priest. The central idea of being a priest is the idea of being a middleman, a go-between, a mediator. The priest gets a message from God and then the priest gives the message to the people. God could take over TBN and give live broadcasts to the world. But He has chosen to speak through preachers.
 5. So when I witness, I realize I am accountable to Jesus to proclaim His message to sinners; to communicate His ideas, not my ideas.
- B. The Christian Works for Lost People
1. You don't go to a doctor for platitudes and placebos. If you're sick, you want to know it. If you need to have surgery, you want to know it. I wouldn't spend a dime on a doctor who wouldn't level with me, even if it was all bad news. I want to know the truth and I want a solution, no matter how hard the solution might be.
 2. One of the great tragedies of American society today is that we value our doctors much more than we value our soulwinners. Doctors are treated with great respect in TV shows and movies whereas soulwinners are usually portrayed as buffoons and irritants and incompetents.
 3. Americans care more about cardiac surgery than they do about soul surgery. They want a cure for cancer more than they want a cure for the sin-sickness of their souls which will doom them to eternal hell.
 4. We soulwinners work for people because we are purveyors of the Gospel. The word "Gospel" means "Good News."
 5. If you're drowning and someone throws you a life-ring, that's good news. The lifeguard is working for you!
If you've got cancer and the chemo kills it, that's good news. The doctor is working for you.
If you've got sin and somebody tells you about Jesus, that's good news. The Christian is working for people sinking in sin. In fact, it's the very best news in all the world!
 6. **Amy Tracy** ran from God for three years. She was living in a lesbian relationship and worked as national press secretary for the National Organization for Women. She went toe-to-toe with Christians "on the front lines of political battles, many times at abortion clinic doors or at gay-rights demonstrations." (p. 3) In November, 1994, she moved from DC to Seattle hoping to find answers for the turmoil in her soul. But nothing changed, including her deep hatred for Christians. Then, almost a year later, she went to a church that had the biggest ad in the Yellow Pages. "*After several weeks of slipping in and out of this church, I realized that the pastor's message, the gospel, was the very one my soul craved. On September 19, 1995, I walked down the aisle and accepted Christ as my Savior, and He claimed me as His own.*"² --Thank God for a faithful preacher who was working for God and was working for Amy.

II. AVENTURE IS SHAPING A LIFE! **Verses 17-18**, *Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.* ¹⁸ *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--*

- A. God Is the Shaper but We Are the Conduits—**Verse 18**, *by what I have said and done--*
1. **Who puts the goodness in there? Romans 15:14**, "*I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness...*"— In **Galatians 5:22** it is one of the characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. In **Ephesians 5:9** it is one of the characteristics of the fruit of the light of Christ.
 2. **Who dispenses divine mercy?** *A mother once approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed a certain offense twice, and justice demanded death.*
'But I don't ask for justice,' the mother explained. 'I plead for mercy.'
'But your son does not deserve mercy,' Napoleon replied.
'Sir,' the woman cried, 'it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for.'
'Well, then,' the emperor said, 'I will have mercy.' And he spared the woman's son. (from Luis Palau's e-zine)

² Amy Tracy, "A Relentless Pursuit," *Focus on the Family* magazine, March 1998, 3- 4.

3. **Who gives people eternal assurance?** God doesn't want His children to live lives of perpetual insecurity. I don't want my kids to wonder if they are really members of our family. I don't want that question to even pass through their minds. I want them to feel complete belonging and security. God is the same way as our Heavenly Father.
 - So, a good Christian spends time helping people know that they are really saved. He will explain from the Bible how a person can be sure and that a person can be sure. He will tell them when he sees the evidence of the fruit of salvation in their lives.
 - Soulwinners don't just want people to be saved. They want people to know that they are saved and enjoy the good feeling of being loved and approved by God.
 4. **Who do I think I am?**
 - **Matthew 28:19-20** *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*
 - **Galatians 4:19** *...until Christ is formed in you...*
 - **1 Corinthians 11:1** *Follow my example [imitate, mimatai], as I follow the example of Christ.*
 - **2 Timothy 2:2** *... entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*
 5. **What am I supposed to produce?**
 - The Promise Factor—*I will make you...* (Matthew 4:19)
 - The Evangelism Factor—*fishers of men.* (Matthew 4:19)
 - The Contingency Factor—*Follow me...* (Matthew 4:19)
 - The “Be With” Factor—*that they might be with him...* (Mark 3:14)
 - The “Send Out” Factor—that he might send them out to preach. (Mark 3:14)
- B. God Is into Spiritual Replication—**Verse 18, leading the Gentiles to obey God**
1. Howard Hendricks was involved in a Sunday School convention in Chicago. *“During a lunch break, three of us who were teaching at the convention walked across the street to a little hamburger shop. The place was filled, but soon a table for four opened up. We saw an elderly lady whom we knew was attending the convention because of the bag she was carrying, and we asked her to join us.*
We learned that she was eighty-three and from a town in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. In a church with a Sunday school of only sixty-five people, she taught a class of thirteen junior high boys. She had traveled by Greyhound bus all the way to Chicago the night before the convention. Why? In her words, ‘To learn something that would make me a better teacher.’
I thought at the time, Most people who had a class of thirteen junior high boys in a Sunday school of only sixty-five would be breaking their arms to pat themselves on the back: ‘Who, me? Go to a Sunday school convention? I could teach it myself!’ But not this woman. Eighty-four boys who sat under her teaching ministry are now young men in full-time vocational ministry. Twenty-two are graduates of the seminary where I teach.”³
 2. Isn't it cool when God uses you to influence another person to obey God?! Churches are full of spiritual replication.
 - Awana kids come to know Christ
 - Teens get disciplined.
 - Marriages are healed.
 - New believers grow in their faith
 - Financially strapped people are able to buy groceries
 - Missionaries are to pay their bills and preach the Gospel on multiple continents.
 3. This church is a ready-made replication venue with all kinds of opportunities to influence changed lives.
 4. *Discipleship Essentials*
 - Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, said, “Activity is no substitute for production. Production is no substitute for reproduction.”

³ Howard Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1987), 23-24.

- “Much of the feverish and frustrating activity of the contemporary church is devoid of relevance and fulfillment. Entertainment, not education, is our program. Laymen are disenchanted. They are looking for an involvement with an eternal bite. C. S. Lewis said it: ‘All that is not eternal is eternally out of date.’” Howard Hendricks, “Foreword,” in Walter A. Hendrichsen, *Disciples Are Made—Not Born* (Wheaton, IL.: Victor Books, SP Publications, 1976), 5.
- “On day I sat down and meditated on what would be the most horrible thing that could happen to me as a Christian. The conclusion to which I came was that when I die, God would take me aside and say to me, ‘Hendrichsen, let Me show you what your life could have been like *if only* you had done what I asked, *if only* you had been faithful to Me, *if only* you had disciplined your life and made it really count, as I wanted you to.’” Walter A. Hendrichsen, *Disciples Are Made—Not Born* (Wheaton, IL.: Victor Books, SP Publications, 1976), 16-17.
- “You will have a clear definition of manhood. You will develop a new manhood language. You will make significant personal discoveries about yourself. You will make new friends who are pursuing a common goal. You will have your own personalized Manhood Plan for achieving authentic manhood.” Robert Lewis, *The Quest for Authentic Manhood* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2003), 9-10.
- Luke 6:40, “Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.”

III. ADVENTURE IS SURRENDERING CONTROL! **Verses 18-19, what Christ has accomplished through me**...¹⁹ *by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.*

A. By Letting God Empower My Initiatives

1. When Brad gets done with today’s sermon, you might reflect and conclude, “*He didn’t say anything this morning that I didn’t already know.*” That wouldn’t surprise me. Most of the sermons I hear don’t contain anything that I haven’t heard a dozen times before. But does that mean that you and I don’t need to hear the same things over and over again? Paul says here in **verse 15** that he wasn’t preaching anything new to these Roman Christians. He said he was reminding them of things they already knew. Why?
2. But the Word of God is powerful and it is designed to energize my soul. So you and I don’t need to be smart or novel. We need to be sowers of the Word of God into people’s lives.
 - a. We can’t handle too much new material. What if every sermon you ever heard contained one new teaching that God wanted you to obey. If you went to church once a week for a year, that would be 53 new spiritual teachings that you were supposed to put to work in your life. Can you imagine 53 spiritual changes in your life per year? What if you also listened to one radio sermon per week on your commute to work. Now we’re up to about a 100 spiritual changes per year. Realistically, most of us can handle just a few spiritual changes in a year, and with that most of us will be deliriously happy and God will indeed be pleased, too.
 - b. We don’t hear too well.
 - 1) One Nobel prize-winning author said, “*Everything has been said. But as no one listens, everything has to be said again.*” (Andre Gide)
 - 2) “*One widely known law of advertising is that a message must be communicated seven times before it really sinks in.*” (Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Church, Zondervan 1995, p. 117)
 - 3) The following letter to the editor appeared in the British Weekly:
Dear Sir:
It seems ministers feel their sermons are very important and spend a great deal of time preparing them. I have been attending church quite regularly for 30 years and I have probably heard 3,000 of them. To my consternation, I discovered I cannot remember a single sermon. I wonder if a minister’s time might be more profitably spent on something else?

For weeks a storm of editorial responses ensued...finally ended by this letter:

Dear Sir:

I have been married for 30 years. During that time I have eaten 32,850 meals - mostly my wife's cooking. Suddenly I have discovered I cannot remember the menu of a single meal. And yet...I have the distinct impression that without them, I would have starved to death long ago."

- c. A fellow named **Dr. Johnson** said, "People need to be reminded more often than they need to be instructed."
 - d. I do one better than that: **II Peter 3:1** *Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as **reminders** to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. 2 I want you to **recall** the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.*
3. "Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it - his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toy, his uncle's watch. Deny him these wants, and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness, which would be murderous, were he not so helpless. He is dirty. He has no morals, no knowledge, no skills. This means that all children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of his infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions to satisfy his wants, every child would grow up a criminal, a killer, a rapist." (Minnesota Crime Commission report in Haddon Robinson, Biblical Preaching, Baker, 1980. Pp. 144-45)
- B. By Calling People to Sacrifice (v.16, *proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God...*)
1. When an Israelite got ready to go to the temple with a sacrifice of worship, he had to pick out an animal from his stock to give to God. Now the natural human tendency would be to cull out the weakest most worthless animal and give that to God. Why give God the best. I want to conserve my assets. God recognized that tendency and confronted it in the commandments: **Leviticus 22:21** *When anyone brings from the herd or flock a fellowship offering to the LORD to fulfill a special vow or as a freewill offering, it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable. 22 Do not offer to the LORD the blind, the injured or the maimed, or anything with warts or festering or running sores. Do not place any of these on the altar as an offering made to the LORD by fire.*
 2. Later on the Israelites did exactly what God had warned them not to do, and it really angered the Lord. Listen for His offended spirit in these words from **Malachi 1:6-8**: 6 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty. "It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' 7 "You place defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the Lord's table is contemptible. 8 When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty.
 3. What was the whole point of the sacrificial system? What did it signify when an Israelite brought a lamb to be killed and placed on the fiery altar? It was to remind the worshipper that the animal symbolized the offering of himself. A blemished animal sacrifice was like a half-hearted commitment. It would be like a wedding ceremony in which the groom doesn't say "I do" but instead says, "Well, sort of." Instead of "As long as we both shall live" the vows say, "As long as we both shall like."
 4. No bride wants a wedding like that and God doesn't want a worshipper like that. God wants and deserves our very best: all of our hearts devotion all the days of our lives.
 5. That's what a preacher preaches toward. As Paul proclaimed the Word of God His goal was not just to get people saved. He wanted to get people committed. To become wholehearted, acceptable offerings to God.
 6. Too many Christians are like this **farmer** who had several bad years and went to talk to his banker.

"I've got some good news and some bad news to tell you. Which would you like to hear first?" the farmer asked.

"Why don't you tell me the bad news first and get it over with?" the banker replied.

“Okay. With the bad drought and inflation and all, I won’t be able to pay anything on my mortgage this year, either on the principal or the interest.”

“Well, that is pretty bad.”

“It gets worse. I also won’t be able to pay anything on the loan for all that machinery I bought, not on the principal or the interest.”

“Wow! Is that ever bad!”

“It’s worse than that. You remember I also borrowed to buy seed and fertilizer and other supplies. Well, I can’t pay anything on that either - principal or interest.”

“That’s awful and that’s enough! Tell me what the good news is.”

“The good news,” replied the farmer with a smile, “is that I intend to keep on doing business with you.” (John Maxwell, Developing the Leaders Around You, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1995, p.71 quoted from David A. Seamands, Healing Grace, Wheaton, Illinois, Victor Books, 1988)

7. Some Christians think that they are doing God a big favor just by showing up for church once in a while. Preachers do their best to make Christians like that uncomfortable. Preachers want to get people to the place of costly, sacrificial living.
8. Hendrichsen, *Ibid.*, 93. “All the trainer can do is help a man become *what he wants to be*. If a man does not see things from God’s point of view, if he does not surrender his life to Jesus as Lord, if he is unwilling to pay the price of being Christ’s man, there is very little that can be done to disciple him.... The trainer, therefore, must yield the total responsibility for change to the person he is training.”

IV. ADVENTURE IS STICKING OUT YOUR NECK! **Verse 20**, *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.* **Verse 23**, *there is no more place for me to work in these regions.* **Verse 28**, *I will go to Spain and visit you on the way.* **Verse 30**, *join me in my struggle.* **Verse 31**, *Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there...*

A. By Feeling Passion for the Unreached

1. Paul was doing a little vision casting in these verses. I believe he was trying to light a fire under these Roman Christians to care about the lost people all around them and around the world.
2. In an article last year **Billy Graham** called the American church to recover the primacy of evangelism. He asks what will it take to get back to effective evangelism and one of his answers is, *“The mobilization of the whole church.”* Not just the missionaries, not just the preacher Pauls, but all every church member. He quotes **Prof. George Hunter**, *“Western Christianity needs a multitude of intentional missionary congregations - churches that will abandon the Christendom model of ministry as merely nurturing the faithful - whose primary mission will be to reach and disciple people who do not yet believe.”* (*CT*, Dec. 16, 1991, p. 44)” (Billy Graham, “Recovering the Primacy of Evangelism,” *CT*, Dec. 8, 1997, pp. 29-30)
3. **Ken Hutcherson** puts it somewhat more eloquently, *“In our bathroom at home, there are several bottles of perfume. Ladies have perfume, men have cologne - eua de toilette, which means ‘good-smellin’ in the bathroom.”*
“But I’ve noticed something about that perfume and cologne. The liquid fragrance contained in those bottles will stay there; it will be perfectly satisfied just hanging out on the bottom of the bottle if there isn’t some kind of outside influence that comes around to shake things up. It will sit there for years and won’t even move unless something touches it, shakes it, tips it, or sprays it. Without an outside influence, that perfume will sit in there until doomsday. All that nice fragrance and sweet-smelling stuff will remain bottled up, and it won’t do anybody a bit of good.”
“As I’ve thought about it, that seems like a pretty fair picture of the Christian life. If God doesn’t allow an outside influence to come into our lives from time to time - a little pressure, a little bumping around, a little shaking - we’ll just sit on our bottoms and won’t even move.” (Ken Hutcherson, The Church, Multnomah, 1998, pp. 134-35)
4. And sometimes the one doing that agitating is the soulwinner/discipler, just like Paul.

- B. By Being Willing to Be Second Priority (v.22, *This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.*)
1. Do you catch Paul's drift? He is telling them that he wanted to come see them. But he says that paying them a visit took second place to reaching lost people for Jesus.
 2. If we are going to be effective in reaching the thousands of unchurched people around us in this community, we are going to have to be willing to make some sacrifices. We are going to need to think less like church members and more like missionaries. Missionaries give up their language, their friends, their nice house, easy living, their culture and a hundred other things in the interest of reaching the lost.
 2. I pastored a church for five years in **Oregon** and I just couldn't get the church to grow. I got a clue why in a little conversation I had with my secretary one morning. We had a lovely brick building with seating for 400 people and an average attendance of about 125 on Sunday morning.
I asked her, "How would you feel if we were packing out the sanctuary every Sunday morning?"
Without hesitation she replied, 'I'd leave!'
"Really," I said,. "Why?"
"Well," she said. "When I come into church on Sunday morning and sit down in the sanctuary, I want to know the name of the person next to me and I want that person to know who I am, too. If we were filling the sanctuary, that wouldn't be true anymore. So I would leave to find another church small enough for me to know everybody."
 3. Don't get me wrong. This lady was one of my favorite people in all the church. I loved working with her. She was dedicated to her work in the church. Loved God with all her heart. She even had a great sense of humor. But she wasn't willing to take second place. She wanted to know her church friends more than she wanted to see lost people brought to the Savior.
 4. She needed to get demoted a little. Soulwinners/disciplers are supposed to help Christians do that.

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