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The Roads Best Travelled Part Thirty-three

The Road To Spain Parts one and two

(Based on Romans 15:17-33)

This piece is a two-parter but rather than leave it a week both parts are being broadcast together to give you the choice as to when you read them. The same WakeUpCall will be broadcast next week.

Have you noticed that there is a tendency in the life of faith to downgrade the concept of detailed planning and upgrade the concept of divine or supernatural guidance? One is seen as mundane, human or even selfish whereas the other is applauded, admired and aspired to as noble. Though your day to day experience may not include hearing God's voice or unusual interventions, you may still think that it is somehow preferable or more spiritual to live that way.

Even those who are from a conservative Christian tradition may still carry a sense of subconscious embarrassment at the thought of not really living the life of faith but having to rely on business projectional analysis for long term developmental goals and the production of viable business models.

The world of budgeting, goals, targets and aims seems occasionally grubby, but provides necessary tools which dirty your hands being the poor alternative to the mystical path.

As usual this mental trend is a lie – another one of the enemies of your soul, designed to drive a wedge between sacred and secular, spiritual and natural, faith and work – Sunday and Wednesday.

Transport your brain for a moment to the city of Rome AD 50ish. You are living and working in the capital of an empire. You are in city number one. Financially, politically, militarily and socially this is the 'it' city of the world. Even the poor in Rome would feel that they lived in the most important region on earth, the place of decisions, power and influence.

But as far as Paul of Tarsus is concerned it is a pit stop. For him Rome is the place to pass through on the way to somewhere else – a part, but not the centre of a plan.

Such is the road to Spain . If you and I have the sense to spot this road on our maps we can find the surprises needed to help us plan and deconstruct the lies simultaneously.

Paul outlines a four stage plan to his Roman readers. Stage one is to

finish the job off in Greece (19b). This had taken longer than he expected and slowed his progress to Rome , but he had now finished. Note the first tool worth collecting here is that God's planning strategy usually involves you finishing a job well and completing what you are currently doing. Generally the idea of dropping out is not a good one. We have to assume for example that when Peter, John and Co. were told to leave their nets they were already fully qualified in fishing.

Second on Paul's list was a trip to Jerusalem (25) to complete a very significant financial project which involved bringing monetary resources from outlying centres to the poor Jerusalem-based Christians. The tool worth collecting here is that Paul wanted to demonstrate in real financial ways the breaking down of inter-racial barriers. This truth was central to his own message. Tangible results in terms of individuals, new churches, and new practices existed all over the Asian continent and Paul wanted to add financial connectivity to the visible results. Visible results are not unimportant. Head, Church, and money counting is not invalid. When you plan and deliver on whatever you plan it is perfectly legitimate to go after results – it is not sub Christian. Note, however, that the results were consistent with his own message and values.

Third on Paul's list is probably his biggest goal – Spain (24). Why? Spain was on the edge of empire. It was not yet reached and therefore an 'untapped market' in Paul's mind. His strategy always involved going where the gospel had not yet gone.

But Spain was also strategic. Seneca – Nero's guardian and prime minister was Spanish. Quintilian, the world's top orator was Spanish. The poet Lucan and the epigram expert Martial, were Spanish. Spain was producing people who were changing the world. Paul wanted to change the country that was producing the people who were changing the world.

Fourth on his list was Rome – he would visit on his way to Spain , bless them powerfully, raise some finance, and then be off (28). What the Romans thought about being fourth we are not told, but we now have the outline of his plan. You may like to consider what you think of it.

The Road to Spain part Two (series number Thirty-Four)

The road to Spain is paved with further lessons worth absorbing when deconstructing the unhelpful aspects of our divided mindset.

Planning is not spiritually substandard. It is not a necessary nuisance activity only engaged in when you have to become professional. In fact planning is not opposed to spirituality at all.

There is, on the contrary, a spiritual approach to planning. Paul demonstrates that all his decision making was designed to have maximum impact as regards the gospel of Christ. His four stage plan was all designed to serve his life's goal. His life's goal was to be an ambassador of Christ.

So if you want to plan your business and your life well it will be worth asking how you can achieve maximum impact for the gospel in

whatever you plan.

To conclude that you must hang up your working clothes for a priest's robe is not the point here. We are all priests in this business and your current attire is already priestly. The point is to keep making gospel-centred decisions in all your planning.

Again this plan had immediate, short, medium, and long term elements. The overall plan was to get to Spain but there were daily, monthly, and medium projects on the go – all consistent with his life's mission.

Spiritual planning keeps long term aims in view without losing sight of the steps in between. So Spain was on the horizon but Jerusalem and Rome were on the way.

Paul's travelling plans and strategic message always kept the well-being of people in focus. Whether the poor in Jerusalem, the unreached in Spain or the Romans who needed a blessing, it was people who held his eye line.

Spiritual planning has to keep the human element right at its heart. When you sit around a table planning to downsize or take out heads, you will be well advised to remember the bodies and families involved. When you decide to pull out of a market or go into a market, consider the human implications. If you decide to say a sentence to the person next to you about your team's performance, remember it is a person next to you and with Paul aim to bring the full measure of blessing to them.

*Archives
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*see News
below*

Paul had many supporters, but in laying out his thoughts he asks that others would join in his struggle by praying (30). Spiritual planning always, always invites others to pray. The prayer request will need to contain the element of partnership. So it asks for rescue but is willing to serve. Paul will keep serving for as long as it takes, but whilst he does he needs protection.

It might be worth remembering an important New Testament prayer principle here. It is illustrated by the fact that there is no New-Testament prayer request for people to become Christians. This would be irrelevant. There are plenty of prayer requests for courage to make the gospel known because it is assumed that when this happens people will respond.

Good prayer requests expect things of God alongside a willingness to work.

Lastly, please do not assume that these pieces on the road to Spain are all about missionary or church work. These principles apply across the board – your board. To pigeonhole them into the church box will result in the absurd reversal of the sacred secular divide. It will simply become the secular sacred divide.

If you have forgotten the 'to do' list hidden in these two pieces, here is a summary:

PLAN

- I. Finish well (in Greece)

- II. Distribute well (Gifts from Asia to Jerusalem)
- III. Go for results
- IV. Make sure results are consistent with values
- V. Set sights on strategic centre (Spain)
- VI. Set sight on strategic pit stop (Rome)
- VII. Always remember my life purpose
- VIII. Review decisions for maximum impact
- IX. Combine short, medium, and long term
- X. Remember people
- XI. Gain appropriate prayer support
- XII. Keep the faith or die trying *

*It should be noted that Paul probably never made it to Spain – most likely he died in Rome .

Work well,

Geoff Shattock

If you would like some help reviewing your life, work or career path, we offer one-to-one coaching sessions for just such purposes. Please email comms@worknetuk.org for details.

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Here is some Biblical background for this week's Wake Up Call Romans 15:17-33

17Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. 18I 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— 19by 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. 20It 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. 21Rather, as it is written:

"Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."

22This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

Paul's Plan to Visit Rome

23But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, 24I

plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. 25Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. 26For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. 28So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. 29I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

30I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. 31Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, 32so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. 33The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

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Also remember to have a look at the Bible sections for the biblical background to your Wake Up Call

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