IMPACT INCREASE
Romans 15:14-21
By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. If you are a Christian, then God wants you to serve Him.
2. God created you to serve Him.
    a. In Gal 1:15, Paul said that God set him apart to be an apostle before he was born.
    b. In Jer 1:5 Jeremiah said something similar -- God chose him to be a prophet before he was born.
    c. Those men may be unique in how they served God, but they are not uniquely created to serve God. You were created to serve God, and God has a very special impact that He wants you to make.
    d. You aren't here by accident. And you aren't here to serve yourself – to have fun, or get rich, or get famous. God created you for a purpose – to serve Him; to make an impact for Him.
3. God saved you to serve Him.
    a. Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.
    b. You were saved ("created in Christ Jesus") for service.
    c. God didn't just save you so that you would go to heaven. Salvation is not just about the next life; it's also about this life.
    d. And God certainly didn't save you to sin, or to make your life all about you. He saved you to serve Him and make an impact for Him.
4. God has gifted you to serve Him.
    a. 1 Peter 4:10 Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.
    b. God gives every Christian a spiritual gift – an empowerment for ministry – to contribute to the church.
    c. Some Christians think that only the preacher is called to serve God, and to minister. The word "minister" just means "serve," and God has gifted every Christian to serve and to make an impact for Him.

5. God has empowered you to serve Him.
    a. Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
    b. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit, and one of His main purposes in your life is to empower you to serve Him.
6. Finally, God commands you to serve Him.
    a. Romans 12:11 Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit;, serve the Lord.
    b. "Serve the Lord." That is a command in Scripture to every Christian.
    c. It doesn't matter how old you are. It doesn't matter how educated you are. It doesn't matter how rich you are. God commands you to serve and to make an impact for Him.
7. There are so many ways to serve God, but two ways God wants every Christian to serve is evangelism and discipleship. Jesus commands all Christians to "go and make disciples." God has put you where you are for a reason – to evangelize and disciple the people around you. To lead them to faith, and help them grow in the faith.
8. God has surrounded you with a group of people. You can call them your circle of influence. These are people you regularly rub shoulders with. Immediate family; coworkers; class mates; team mates. God wants you to serve Him by impacting those people for Christ.
9. This morning I want to address this question: How can we effectively impact people the people around us for Christ? How can we increase our impact? If that's what God wants us to do, then how can we be more effective?
10. We are studying the book of Romans, which is a letter written by Paul to the church in Rome. If anyone was effective at impacting people for Christ, it was Paul. Paul led people to Christ; he started churches; he trained pastors; he traveled the entire Roman empire for Christ; he wrote thirteen letters that became a part of our Bible and which have been impacting people for the past 2,000 years. And as Paul is getting close to the end of his letter, he reveals some things about himself that will help us understand why he was so effective. And these are principles that we can adopt and imitate.

II. TEXT: Romans 15:14-21

14 My brothers and sisters, I myself am convinced about you that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. 15 Nevertheless, I have written to remind you more boldly on some points because of the grace given me by God 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving as a priest of the gospel of God. God's purpose is that the Gentiles may be an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. 17 Therefore I have reason to boast in Christ Jesus regarding what pertains to God. 18 For I would not dare say anything except what Christ has accomplished through me by word and deed for the obedience of the Gentiles, 19 by the power of miraculous signs and wonders, and by the power of God's Spirit. As a result, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum. 20 My aim is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, so that I will not build on someone else's foundation, 21 but, as it is written, Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.

1. I want to focus on two things about this text: the purpose, and the practical application.

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE TEXT: Explanation, Justification, and Elaboration.

1. Explanation: Paul explained why he wrote the letter – to remind them on some points (v. 15).
    a. **Romans 15:15** Nevertheless, I have written to remind you more boldly on some points.
    b. Some of these points were:
        a. All have sinned.
        b. You can't save yourself through good works.
        c. But God has provided salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.
        d. Even though obeying God's law doesn't save you, it is still vital that you avoid sin and live for God.
2. Justification: Paul justified his authority for writing.
    a. What gave Paul the right to tell the church in Rome what to believe and how to live?
    b. **Romans 15:15-16** 15 Nevertheless, I have written to remind you more boldly on some points because of the grace given me by God 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus.
    c. By "the grace given me by God to be a minister," Paul was referring to God's special calling on his life to be an apostle.
    d. He pointed to apostleship several times in Romans:

        a. Romans 1:1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle.
        b. Romans 1:5 Through him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the Gentiles.
    c. Why was it important for Paul to point to his apostleship? The word means "one sent," like a messenger or ambassador. But the apostles were the Christ-appointed leaders of the early church. They had authority over all the churches, to tell people what to believe and how to live.
    d. Do we still have apostles today? Some charismatic and Pentecostal churches say yes. I lean toward no. Why?
        a. According to Eph 2:19-20, their mission was to lay the foundation of the church. Since the foundation has been laid, there is no need for more apostles.
        b. According to Acts 1:21-22, an apostle needed to be an eye-witness to the resurrection. All the eye-witnesses are now dead.
        c. According to 2 Cor 12:12, an apostle was able to perform certain signs, such as miracles, signs and wonders. While God still performs miracles, I don't see that any individuals today have this gift. Of those who claim to have it, they seem to be phonies.
    e. So Paul's purpose in this section was to explain why he wrote, to justify his authority for writing, but then third…
3. Elaboration: To give further details about his calling.
    a. First, he was called to reach the Gentiles (v. 16).
    b. Second, he was called to be a missionary (v. 19-20). He said he had proclaimed Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum (NW of Greece). He said that he wanted to preach the gospel in placed that had never heard of Jesus.
    c. Third, he was called to share the gospel.
    d. **Romans 15:16** to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving as a priest of the gospel of God. God's purpose is that the Gentiles may be an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

e. Notice that he described himself as “serving as a priest of the gospel of God.” This is figurative language. Paul was not claiming to be a literal priest like the Jews had in the Old Testament.
f. What does the New Testament say about priests? Three facts:
    a. First: The office of priest does not exist in the church.
        a. The church only has two offices: Pastors and deacons. The pastor (or elder, or overseer) leads the church and preaches the word. A deacon leads a particular ministry in the church under the direction of the pastor. There is no official office of priest in the church.
    b. Second: Under the New Covenant, human priests are no longer necessary.
        a. In the Old Testament, the priest served as a mediator between God and the people. No one could approach God (in the Holy of Holies) except for the high priest on the Day of Atonement, when he would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the Mercy Seat to atone for their sins. God established this institution to illustrate the need for Christ (Col 2:17; Heb 10:1-4). The New Testament declares that Jesus is our true high priest who offered His own blood for our sins once and for all (Heb 5:10; Heb 6:20). In so doing He gave all believers direct and bold access to God (Rm 5:2; Eph 3:12; Heb 4:16; Heb 10:19-22). Now Jesus is declared to be the only mediator between God and mankind (1 Tim 2:5). Even in confessing our sins, we can go directly to God rather than through an intermediary (1 Jn 1:9).
    c. Third: The Bible says that every Christian is a priest.
        a. 1 Peter 2:5 you yourselves, as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
        b. As priests, our job is to offer spiritual sacrifices. What sacrifices?
            i. Rm 12:1 – living a holy and pleasing life.

ii. Heb 13:15 – giving praise and thanksgiving to God.
iii. Heb 13:16 – doing good works.

d. So, Paul wasn't saying he was a literal priest, like the Jewish priests. He was using figurative language. What did he mean? Let's look at the context:
e. **Romans 15:16** to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving as a priest of the gospel of God. God's purpose is that the Gentiles may be an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.
f. Just as a Jewish priest would offer acceptable sacrifices to God, such as an unblemished lamb, Paul's ministry "as a priest of the gospel" was to present the Gentiles to God as an acceptable offering, or sacrifice. By "acceptable" he means saved and fully mature ("sanctified by the Holy Spirit").
g. So you could say that another type of spiritual sacrifice that God wants us to offer Him is the people that we evangelize and disciple.

4. So the purpose of this section is explanation, justification, and elaboration.
5. Next, let's look at the practical application in this passage. In this passage Paul gives us a pattern or an example to follow. In this passage, we can see why Paul was so effective at impacting people for Christ. We can learn from his example. Let me point out three ways to increase your impact as a servant of God – three words.

IV. THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION: 3 WAYS TO INCREASE YOUR IMPACT

1. Affection.

a. Notice how Paul addressed the church in Rome.
b. **Romans 15:14** My brothers and sisters.
c. The Greek word for "brothers and sisters" is *adelphos*. The commentator William Hendriksen calls it "an affectionate term of address," and "a term of endearment" (Hendriksen, NTC, Rm 7:1).
d. By calling them "brothers and sisters," Paul is telling them that he loves them; they are important to him; they are dear to him.

e. Evidently Paul thought it was important for them to know that he cared about them because he used this term many times in Romans – 14x.
f. But there's more. Notice that in Rm 15:14 Paul uses the term "my." Rather than simply saying, "brothers and sisters," which he often did, here he says, "My brothers and sisters" to express even more affection. William Hendriksen said that this shows "how filled to overflowing with love was this heart of Paul."
g. This isn't the only example of Paul's affection. As you study his writings, you will find that he was characterized by an open display of affection.
    a. In his closing remarks in Romans, he asked them to greet several people by name, whom he referred to as "my dear friend."
        a. Romans 16:5 "Greet my dear friend Epaenetus."
        b. He said the same thing of Ampliatus (Rm 16:8), Stachys (Rm 16:9), and Persis (Rm 16:12).
    b. He closed his first letter to the Corinthians like this:
        a. 1 Corinthians 16:24 "My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus"
    c. Listen to him express his love for the church in Philippi:
        a. Philippians 1:7-8 7 Indeed, it is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.
h. What does Paul's example tell us? If you want to impact people for Christ, you have to not only care deeply for them, but you have to express your affection. You have to express to people that you love them, that they are dear to you. You can do this in a written note, or verbally, or when appropriate, with physical affection.
i. This is why Paul told the church in Rome to kiss each other.
    a. Romans 16:16 Greet one another with a holy kiss.

b. In that culture it was common to greet your family and close friends with a light kiss on the mouth to show your affection. So Paul was telling the entire church to show that same affection to each other.
c. Of course, most scholars and theologians believe this was a cultural thing. This kind of affection wouldn't be appropriate in most cultures today. But you can substitute it with a handshake or a hug.

j. Why is affection important? Because the old saying is true: People don't care how much you know unless they know how much you care. And one of the essential ways that you show someone that you care for them is with affection.
k. How are you doing in this area? Think about the people that you want to impact for Christ. When is the last time that you told them you loved them; that they are very important to you; that you deeply care about them? This week, who do you need to show affection to? Who do you need to hug? Who do you need to write – a hand written note, or even just a text message or email, to express your love for them? If someone comes to mind, do it this week. Do it today.
l. What else can we learn from Paul about how to increase our impact for Christ?

2. Affirmation.

a. Not only did Paul show affection, but he practiced words of affirmation.
b. Dr. Gary Chapman, the author of the best-selling book *The 5 Love Languages*, says that words of affirmation are essential for healthy relationships, and he defines words of affirmation as using spoken and written verbal communication that uplifts, praises, and expresses appreciation.
c. Notice how Paul uses words of affirmation in his correspondence with the church in Rome.
d. **Romans 15:14** My brothers and sisters, I myself am convinced about you that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.

e. What's Paul doing here? He's praising them. He's giving them a compliment. In fact, he gives them three compliments. He praises them because they are…
    a. Full of goodness.
        a. The Greek word for "goodness" (*agathosune*) can mean two things: moral goodness, and kindness.
        b. Paul was praising them for being morally good and upright – honest, pure, holy, righteous – and for being kind – inclined to help others and be generous.
    b. Filled with all knowledge.
        a. Paul was praising them for having deep spiritual and theological knowledge. For knowing Scripture and to apply it.
    c. Able to instruct one another.
        a. They were able to teach each other.
        b. What's the difference between knowledge and the ability to instruct? The ability to instruct others in spiritual things requires to things: integrity (you practice what you preach), and doctrinal purity. Paul didn't just praise them for having a lot of knowledge, but for having correct knowledge, and the moral authority to teach it to others.
f. These are big compliments, aren't they? These are virtues we should all strive for. Let's do a little test. Would others say these things about you? Would the people closest to you describe you as full of goodness, filled with knowledge, and able to instruct?
g. And Paul didn't merely say they were good and knowledgeable, but "full" of goodness and "filled" with knowledge. He was lavishing praise on them.
h. Paul often used words of affirmation in his letters. This was his regular practice. You often see it in his opening and closing remarks. Let me just give you one more example. Listen to how he affirmed, praised, complimented Timothy:
i. Philippians 2:19-22 19 Now I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I too may be encouraged by news about you. 20 For I have no one else like-minded who will genuinely care about your interests; 21 all seek their own

interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know his proven character, because he has served with me in the gospel ministry like a son with a father.

j. I counted seven compliments in this passage. You may be able to find more.
    a. He is unique; outstanding; extraordinary; one-of-a-kind.
    b. He is like-minded.
    c. He is selfless -- he genuinely cares about your interests.
    d. He is devoted to Christ—he cares about the interests of Jesus Christ.
    e. He is a man of proven character; a man of integrity; blameless; above reproach.
    f. He is like a son to me.
k. So what do we learn from Paul. If you want to impact people for Christ, be generous with your words of affirmation. Praise and compliment them. Catch them doing something right. Point out their victories, their successes, their strengths, their areas of growth. Thank them for their efforts and contributions.
l. You have to be intentional about this. For most of us it is not easy. It's easy to find fault; to see the negative; to criticize. It's hard see the good, and even harder to take the time to point it out.
m. Don't confuse affirmation with flattery. Flattery is when you tell people what they want to hear in order to manipulate them. It is insincere, dishonest. Affirmation is genuine; it is true.
n. Why are words of affirmation so important? Words of affirmation have a powerful effect on people because they encourage them to keep going and to keep growing. When someone compliments my preaching, and it's genuine, it encourages me to keep preaching; it tells me that my effort is making a difference. And it also gives me confidence that I can keep improving if I work at it.
o. So, who needs your words of appreciation today? Who needs a thank you note? Who needs a compliment note? Who do you need to recognize? Do it today.
p. Let's look at another way to increase your impact.

3. Boldness.

a. **Romans 15:15** Nevertheless, I have written to remind you more boldly on some points because of the grace given me by God.
b. Paul wrote with boldness.
c. What is boldness? The Greek word means daring, audacious. Merriam-Webster defines it as "fearless before danger; showing or requiring a fearless spirit." It is the willingness to take risks.
d. How was Paul bold in his letter to the Romans? He said things that were very controversial, and very offensive to some. There was a risk that the church would reject his letter; that they would tear it and throw it away; that they would burn it; that they would reject him. What did he say that required boldness?
    a. In Rm 3 he explained in great detail how sinful they were.
    b. He also explained that everyone, both Jews and Gentiles, were headed for eternal punishment (Rm 3:9).
    c. He wrote that the law could not get you to heaven (Rm 3:20).
    d. He wrote that God was equally the God of the Jews and Gentiles, and that Abraham was the father of both Jews and Gentiles who put their faith in Jesus (Rm 3:29; Rm 4:16-17).
    e. In Rm 9 he wrote that being a Jew was not enough to get you to heaven. The Jews who accepted Jesus would be saved, and those who did not would miss out. And the same goes for the Gentiles (Rm 9:30-31).
e. Even though Paul faced possible rejection, he spoke the truth. That's boldness.
f. Boldness is taking a risk for Christ. It is doing something to serve God or others that might get you in trouble or cause you pain, either physical or mental.
    a. It is sharing the gospel with a lost person even if it's awkward.
    b. It is praying for someone in public even though people might stare at you.
    c. It is speaking the hard truth even if you might be criticized.
    d. It is inviting someone to church even though you might be rejected.
    e. It is doing the right thing even if it might get you in trouble.

f. It is doing a good deed, or giving a compliment, even if people might misinterpret your behavior or motives.
g. It is attempting a ministry, such as a Bible study, even though nobody may attend.

g. If you want to impact people for Christ, you need boldness. Why? Because serving God is often risky. It's almost always risky. Almost anytime you serve God there is the risk of failure, rejection, persecution, suffering, and criticism. Without boldness, without the willingness to take risks, you're not going to accomplish much for God because you're not going to attempt anything for God because you are afraid of the risks.
h. Where do you get boldness? You may be very timid; afraid of your own shadow; terrified of rejection; of ridicule criticism; of failure; for looking foolish. Where do you get boldness? We could do multiple sermons on that question, but let me just give you one answer: Pray for it. In Acts 4, Peter and John were arrested and threatened for preaching the gospel. So they went to the church and had a prayer meeting, and they specifically prayed for boldness.
i. Acts 4:29 And now, Lord, consider their threats, and grant that your servants may speak your word with all boldness.
j. What happened next? God answered.
k. Acts 4:31 When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.
l. Boldness is not just something you need. It's not just something that you want. It's something that you can have. God wants to give it to you. He gave it to them, and He will give it to you.
m. Do you need boldness? Are you fearful? Are you timid? Is there something you've been wanting to do for God, but you are just too afraid? Go home, shut the door, get on your knees, and cry out to God for boldness. Say, "God, I want to serve you, but I'm too fearful. I'm afraid. I'm scared. I'm a coward. Change me. Give me boldness." And you don't stop praying until He answers your prayer. And He will.

V. CONCLUSION

1. Here's how I want to close. God has called you to serve Him with your life; to impact others for Jesus Christ. Have you accepted the call? Have you dedicated your life to serve God? If not, then let's start there. This morning, I want you to pray, "Lord, dedicate myself to Your service. Use my life to impact others for Christ."
2. For some of you, maybe you need to devote your life to being a pastor; to serving the Lord vocationally. Don't wait for God to speak audibly to you and invite you. Don't wait for a phone call from heaven. Here's the question: Would you like to serve God, and that be your job? If so, then go for it. Come and talk to me and I'll help you work through what that might mean for you. But it starts with dedicating yourself to God's service.
3. Second, God wants you to be effective – to produce much fruit. If you have already dedicated yourself to serving God with your life, here's a prayer for you. "Lord, show me how I need to grow so that I can be fully-effective at impacting people for Christ."