LEARNING BY EXAMPLE
Romans 15:22-16:16
By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Turn in your Bible to Romans 15.
2. The title of this sermon is "Learning by Example."
3. One of my favorite quotes is by the Christian author Max Lucado. "God loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to let you stay that way."
4. God loves you just the way you are, in spite of your faults and flaws. But He wants you to grow up as a Christian. He wants you to progress toward maturity.
5. The Bible commands you to grow:
    i. 2 Cor 13:11 Become mature.
    ii. Eph 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ.
    iii. 2 Pt 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.
6. The question I want to ask this morning is how do you grow as a Christian? The Bible gives us several answers.
    i. The Bible: Study God's word.
        1. Jn 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.
        2. 1 Pt 2:2 Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation.
    ii. Prayer: Pray for growth. Paul often prayed for people to grow in Christ.
        1. Col 1:9-10 9 For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, 10 so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God.
    iii. The church: Get in church. The pastor's job is to help you grow.
        1. Eph 4:11-13 11 And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and

teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.

2. The pastor primarily does this through preaching and teaching the word.

iv. Adversity: God allows you to go through difficult circumstances.

1. Rm 5:3-5 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, 4 endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope.

7. But there's another important means of spiritual growth – learning by example.
   i. Paul often encouraged the churches to follow his example.
      1. 1 Cor 4:16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me.
      2. 1 Cor 11:1 Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.
   ii. This is another reason why it's so important to get involved in church – to learn from the example of the church leaders and of the mature Christians there.
   iii. This is why Paul told Timothy and Titus, as young pastors, to set the example for the church.
   iv. 1 Tim 4:12 Don't let anyone despise your youth, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.
   v. Titus 2:7 Make yourself an example of good works with integrity and dignity in your teaching.
8. Learning by example happens in two ways:
   i. First, we can learn from present examples – from those who are living at the same time as us.
   ii. Second, we can learn from past examples – those who have gone before us. This second way is what we are going to do today. In fact, this is one of the purposes of Scripture – not just to provide instruction, but to provide examples – of what to do and of what not to do.
9. 1 Cor 10:11 These things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

i. This passage is referring to the Israelites when they were in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. Even though God performed all kinds of miracles, signs, and wonders in delivering them from Egypt, they committed idolatry and sexual immorality, and they tested and grumbled against God. And God punished them. Paul says these stories were written as examples for our instruction. Those are bad examples. Today we are going to look at some good examples.

10. In Rom 15:22-16, as Paul is nearing the end of his letter to the church in Rome, he includes his travel plans, as well as some greetings to a bunch of the Christians in Rome. In this section Paul reveals insights about himself, about the churches in Greece, and he mentions 26 people by name and provides details about them. While there is not much instruction in this passage, i.e. doctrine, there is plenty to learn by studying the examples of these Christians who have gone before us.
11. The way that I've organized this passage is with a series of questions – 5 questions to stimulate your spiritual growth.

II. 5 GROWTH QUESTIONS

1. Do you help the needy?

i. **Romans 15:22-29** 22 That is why I have been prevented many times from coming to you. 23 But now I no longer have any work to do in these regions, and I have strongly desired for many years to come to you 24 whenever I travel to Spain. For I hope to see you when I pass through and to be assisted by you for my journey there, once I have first enjoyed your company for a while. 25 Right now I am traveling to Jerusalem to serve the saints, 26 because Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 Yes, they were pleased, and indeed are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister to them in material needs. 28 So when I have finished this and safely delivered the funds to them, I will visit you on the way to Spain. 29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

ii. In this section Paul explains his travel plans.

1. He had wanted to visit the church in Rome for a long time, but was been prevented because his priority was to travel to places that had never heard the gospel (see 15:20-21).
2. He says that his next goal was to go to Spain. Spain had been a part of the Roman empire since about 200 BC, but it had just recently become a Roman province. It was considered the western end of the world (with China being the east).
3. Paul's plan was to visit the Roman church on his way to Spain.
4. But first, Paul had something else to do. Many of Christians in Jerusalem were in poverty for a couple of reasons – famine and persecution. So Paul raised an offering among the Gentile Christians in Greece – in the provinces of Macedonia and Berea – specifically to help Christians in Jerusalem. So Paul raised this offering and was now transporting it to Jerusalem.

iii. So, we have our first example here. Paul and the Gentile churches took action to help people in need.
iv. I don't have to convince you that it's good to help the needy. Even most atheists and agnostics agree with that.
v. Jesus said, "It's better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35)."
vi. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus assumed that we understand the importance of giving to the needy. In Mt 6:2 He didn't say, "If you give to the poor," but "When you give to the poor, don't do it so people will admire and applaud you."
vii. When you help the needy, you are acting like your heavenly Father (see Jn 3:16). When we were sinners, God looked down from heaven and saw that we were in desperate need of rescue. We needed a Savior to rescue us from sin and hell. So He sent Jesus to help us, to die in our place and bring us back to God.
viii. And the Bible says that when you give to the needy, you are storing up treasure for yourself in heaven. In Mt 6:4 Jesus said that when you give to the poor for the right reasons (to glorify God, not self), that God will reward you.
ix. So, do you help the needy? Not, have you ever helped the needy, but do you regularly respond to the needs around you by helping?

By getting involved? Or are you so frugal with your time, money and energy (and frugality can be a good thing, meaning careful, and avoiding waste) – but you are so frugal that you don't share with the needy?

2. **Do you view other churches as competitors or as partners?**
    i. **Romans 15:25-27** 25 Right now I am traveling to Jerusalem to serve the saints, 26 because Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 Yes, they were pleased, and indeed are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister to them in material needs.
    ii. This is from the same section that we read in the previous point. Because the church in Jerusalem was struggling, other churches worked together to meet the need. The churches that helped were in Macedonia and Achaia. The churches in Macedonia included Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. The church in Corinth was in Achaia. All these churches partnered together to accomplish a goal. They worked together.
    iii. This gives us a second example to follow. Do you view other churches as competitors or as partners?
    iv. Of course, I'm speaking about like-minded churches; churches that are preaching the truth.
    v. Do you celebrate when other churches grow; when they reach people for Christ; when they add new members; when they have baptisms; when they build new buildings? Are we willing to share our resources with other churches?
    vi. I've seen both sides of this. When we first started Church Acadiana, some of the local churches were not excited about us, and they were not willing to help us. They saw us as competitors rather than partners. They were afraid we were going to steal their sheep.
    vii. But then more recently we have been overwhelmed by the generosity of other churches. In the construction of our church, a sister church opened up their building to let some of our volunteers sleep in their fellowship hall all week. When we lost our meeting place at the movie theater, two sister churches

offered to let us use their building on Sunday evenings, since they weren't using them.

viii. The fact is we cannot accomplish the Great Commission by ourselves. No church can. But when we partner together, we can accomplish so much more. That's why I sincerely appreciate being a part of the Southern Baptist Convention. Some people don't like Denominations, but that's because they probably don't understand them. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention is strictly about partnership for the Great Commission. Every church is completely autonomous; there is no denominational hierarchy that tells us we can and cannot do. But it's made up of 40,000 like-minded churches. And by pooling our resources, we support six of the largest seminaries in the country, 3,300 missionaries and church planters around North America, and 3,600 international missionaries operating in 150 countries.

3. Is prayer a priority?

i. **Romans 15:30-33** 30 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in prayers to God on my behalf. 31 Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 and that, by God's will, I may come to you with joy and be refreshed together with you. 33 May the God of peace be with all of you. Amen.

ii. After sharing his travel plans, Paul asks for prayer. He asks them to pray for three things: First, that the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem won't harm him. Second, that the believing Jews in Acts will accept his gift. Third, that he will be able to visit them in Rome.

iii. What can we learn from Paul's example? There are several "prayer lessons" in this passage.

iv. First, prayer is important.

1. This is why Paul often commanded it:
    a. Col 4:2 "devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving."
    b. 1 Thess 5:17 "pray constantly."
2. In Paul's letters, he often prayed for his readers.
3. And in at least 8 of his 13 letters he requested prayer.

v. Second, it is good to pray for yourself.
    1. I point this out because one time a man in our church told me he never prayed for himself because doing so was selfish.
    2. If it is selfish then Jesus was selfish, because even He prayed for Himself when He asked God to deliver Him from the pain of the cross.
    3. And here we see Paul praying for himself when he asks the church to "strive together with me in prayers". He wasn't just asking them to pray for him; he was asking them to join him in the same thing he was praying for – himself.
    4. And notice that Paul didn't just pray for spiritual things. One of the things he prayed for was simply physical safety.
    5. Pray for yourself. You must. What are you worried about? What is frustrating you? What is discouraging you? What is overwhelming you? What are you trying to accomplish? Take it to the Lord in prayer.
vi. Third, it is good to pray for others.
    1. Paul prayed for the church in Rome (Rm 15:5-6, 13), and here he is asking them to pray for him. It is good to not only pray for yourself, but to pray for others – for their salvation, for their spiritual growth, for their all of their needs.
    2. James 5:16 says to "pray for one another." Praying for others is one of the 59 "one-anothers" in the New Testament.
    3. This is one of the marks of spiritual maturity. Praying for yourself is good, but it is the simplest and easiest form of prayer. Praying for others is harder because it requires love and concern for other people. It requires selflessness. It is giving your time and energy and attention – prayer requires all three – on behalf of others.
vii. Fourth, it is good to invite others to pray for you.
    1. Paul was close to God. If anybody had God's ear it was Paul. Yet even Paul knew that it wasn't enough to pray alone. He knew the power and potency of prayer increases when people pray together for the same thing.

2. Are you struggling with something? Worried about something? Carrying a heavy burden? Don't carry it alone. Don't pray alone. There is power in corporate prayer, in joining together.

viii. Fifth, God answers prayer.
   1. As I said, Paul had three prayer requests, and all three were answered.
   2. First, he was delivered from the unbelieving Jews. When he got to Jerusalem, some Jews tried to kill him, but the Roman soldiers found out about it and protected him (Acts 23:10).
   3. Second, the Christians in Jerusalem accepted his gift. Acts 21:17 says, "When we reached Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters welcomed us warmly."
   4. Third, he made it to Rome (Acts 25:11-12). When the Romans rescued the Paul from the Jews who wanted to kill him, they arrested him and eventually took him to Rome. In Rome Paul was under house arrest for two years. That may sound like a bad thing, but it wasn't. In Rome he was able to live in his own house with a Roman soldier, which meant that he had 24/7 protection. He was allowed to have as many guests as he wanted. And while in Rome, he wrote four books of the Bible – Ephesians, Philippians Colossians, and Philemon.
   5. Prayer works. God answers prayer. I've seen it in my life, and in others.

ix. Is prayer a priority in your life? Here's one way to make it a priority? Give God the first hour of your day. It's called a daily quiet time. Spend an hour or so every day talking to God in prayer and listening to God through the Bible.

4. Have you found a place to serve in church?

i. Look at Romans 16, the last chapter in the book. In verses 1-16 Paul mentions 26 people by name, as well as some of their character qualities. Let's look at the first one.

ii. **Romans 16:1-2** I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchreae. 2 So you should welcome her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in

whatever matter she may require your help. For indeed she has been a benefactor of many—and of me also.

iii. The first person Paul mentions by name is a woman named Phoebe.

iv. What do we know about Phoebe?

1. Her name means “bright and radiant.”
2. It was a Greek name, so she was probably a Gentile.
3. Most scholars believe that she delivered this letter to the church in Rome. It says that she was from Cenchreae, which was a town right next to Corinth. It is believed that Paul was in Corinth when he wrote the book of Romans in AD 57, near the end of his third missionary journey. This is why Paul is commending Phoebe to them, and urging them to welcome her and help her in any way she needs.
4. She was a benefactor. That word can simply be translated “helper” (LEB; NLT), but it can also be translated “benefactor” or “patron,” which was a wealthy person who used their wealth and influence to help people and causes. Paul said that she was a benefactor of him personally, and of many people.
5. She was “a servant of the church in Cenchreae.” Ther word “servant” has two possible meanings. It is the Greek word *diakonos*. It can mean anyone who serves in any capacity, or it can mean a deacon, one of the official offices of the church. The church has two offices – pastor (or elder, or overseer/bishop), and deacon. They way I define and distinguish pastors and deacons is like this: The pastor leads and preaches. Deacons are ministry leaders; they lead particular ministries in the church under the pastor’s supervision. If Paul meant deacon, then that means that women can hold the office of deacon in the church. And that’s the way I read it. Many scholars say that the words “of the church” indicate an official position, not just a generic servant. So our church has two pastors – a lead pastor and an associate pastor. We both lead and preach. And then there are deacons. And I consider a deacon to be anyone who leads a ministry; so you’re not just serving in a

ministry, but you are leading a ministry. For example, if you lead a Home Group, or a ministry like Bible Drill, or the Greeting Team, or the Worship Team, or the Hospitality Team, then at our church you are a deacon. Depending on the role, a deacon can either be a volunteer or paid staff.

v. So, Phoebe was a wealthy deacon. That means she served in a significant way in her church.
vi. Every Christian is not called to be a deacon – to lead a ministry, but every Christian is called to find a place to serve in the church. A significant place of service.
vii. 1 Pt 4:10 says, "Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God."
viii. God has given every Christian a spiritual gift – an ability – to be used in service in the church.
ix. Not only should you be serving in the church, but you should be working hard in the church.
x. **Romans 16:6, 12** Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you… 12 Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who have worked hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, who has worked very hard in the Lord.
xi. In this short passage, Paul mentions four people by name – all women, by the way, like Pheobe – who worked hard for the Lord.
xii. I'm so thankful that we have people like this in our church – volunteers, who work hard for the Lord. Our church would not be where it is without them.
xiii. So, here's the spiritual growth question. Have you found a place to serve in the church? Do you work hard for the Lord in the church?

5. Are you willing to suffer for Christ?

i. **Romans 16:3-5** 3 Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life. Not only do I thank them, but so do all the Gentile churches.
5 Greet also the church that meets in their home. Greet my dear friend Epaenetus, who is the first convert, to Christ from Asia.
ii. Here Paul mentions Prisca and Aquila. We know a little about them because they are mentioned in several other places in Scripture.

1. They were husband and wife. Prisca was the wife, and Aquila was the husband.
2. Elsewhere Prisca is called Priscilla. Prisca is the more formal, Latin version of her name.
3. They were close friends and ministry partners with Paul. They were from Rome, but in AD 49 Emperor Claudius kicked all the Jews out of Rome, so they went to Corinth where they met Paul on his second missionary journey. Paul was a tentmaker by trade, and so were they, so Paul stayed with them and they worked together to make and sell tents to support their ministry. Eventually Claudius's edict was lifted, so they returned to Rome, which is where they were when Paul wrote Romans.

iii. This passage in Rome tells us two things about them.
1. First, they hosted a house in their home. For the first three centuries of Christianity, churches met almost exclusively in homes. There were no church buildings.
2. Second, it says that they risked their necks for Paul's life. The Bible doesn't give us the details of this incident. All we know is that they risked their life to save Paul's. In fact, according to tradition, around seven after this they were arrested and killed for their faith, around the same time as Paul.

iv. What can we learn from their example? Mature Christians are willing to suffer for Christ.

v. Immature Christians serve and obey Christ…
1. until it hurts;
2. until it costs;
3. until it gets dangerous;
4. until it gets risky;
5. until it gets uncomfortable;
6. until it requires sacrifice;
7. until it threatens their security.

vi. Mature Christians serve and obey Christ…
1. even though it costs;
2. even though it is dangerous;
3. even though it is risky;

4. even though it is uncomfortable and requires sacrifice and threatens their security.
5. Mature Christians work hard for the church, even though it is a sacrifice of their time and energy.
6. Mature Christians tithe and even give more, even though it means less disposable income.
7. Mature Christians are honest, even if it means getting fired, or losing a lot of money.
8. Mature Christians witness and evangelize, even if it means getting rejected or looking foolish. Mature Christians lose friends and family and fans and business because they refuse to compromise on the word of God.

vii. The willingness to suffer for Christ is the mark of a mature Christian.
viii. Paul told Timothy in 1 Tim 1:8, "So don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me his prisoner. Instead, share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God."
ix. In 2 Tim 2:3 Paul said, "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."
x. What was Paul saying? Don't serve God until it leads to suffering; serve God even though it leads to suffering. Lean in to the suffering. Embrace suffering.
xi. In fact, you are called to suffer.
xii. 1 Peter 2:21 says, "For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."
xiii. Jesus suffered not only to pay for your sins, but as an example of how you should live – embrace suffering for Christ.
xiv. So here's the question for spiritual growth: Are you willing to suffer for Christ? Are you doing, or have you done anything costly, painful, sacrificial for Christ? Has your faith in Christ cost you anything? Is there something God wants you to do, but your are resisting, running, dragging your feet because it will costly or painful?

III. CONCLUSION

1. So, five questions to stimulate your spiritual growth. What were they?
    i. Do you help the needy?

ii. Do you view other churches as competitors or partners?
iii. Is prayer a priority?
iv. Have you found a place to serve in church?
v. Are you suffering for Christ?

2. A list like this should do a couple of things:
    i. First, it should inspire you to grow. It should make you realize that you need to grow. It should get thinking about what steps you need to take to grow.
    ii. Second, it should drive you to Christ and the gospel. It should make you realize that you are a sinner; you are not perfect; and the only way to be forgiven and reconciled to God is through Jesus Christ. The only way to have the power and ability to live like this is if Christ changes your heart and empowers you with the Holy Spirit.
    iii. If you are a Christian, a sermon like this should make you praise God for the gospel.
    iv. If you are not a Christian, a sermon like this should convict you of your sin, and cause you to look away from yourself to Christ for salvation.