

For the Love of God

Our Obligation to the Unreached – Part 2

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OUR OBLIGATION TO THE UNREACHED – PART 2

Romans 9-16

If you have Bible, and I hope you do, turn with me to Romans 9. This may be one of the most common phrases in our church: We need to offer our lives, our families, and our church to the Lord, with a blank check before God, with no strings attached, saying in our hearts, "God, do whatever you want to do in me/with me, in us/with us for your sake in the world.

So why do we use this phrase, and what exactly does it mean to give God a blank check? These are the two questions I want to lead us to consider this tonight based on what we have read in Romans this past week. Last week, we saw in Romans 1:14 our obligation to the unreached. Together, we thought about over two billion people spanning 6,500 people groups who at this moment don't have access to the gospel. We put ourselves in their shoes and realized, if we were them, that would mean that we have knowledge of God, we have rejected God, and we stand condemned before God, and if we don't hear the good news of what God has done in Christ, we will die in that state and go to an everlasting hell without ever even hearing the gospel.

And then we stepped out of their shoes and said, "That's not tolerable." It's not tolerable that 2 billion people in the world are in this state at this moment. So we must go to them; we are obligated to go to them. Their knowledge of God is only enough to damn them to hell. The gospel of God is powerful enough to save them for heaven. The plan of God warrants our sacrifice, and the Son of God deserves their praise. So we don't have an option. We must work to get the gospel to unreached peoples; all of us, we must.

And we talked about how that's why the book of Romans was written: To cause the people of God to rise up and do whatever it takes to get the gospel to unreached people. We walked through maps and saw that Paul was writing this book in order to persuade the church at Rome to help him get the gospel to Spain, where they still hadn't heard it. And so this whole book is written, in a sense, to show us our obligation to the unreached. And I'm convinced that God has us reading Romans right now for the same reason: To show us, in a fresh way, how each of us individually and all of us collectively must do whatever it takes to get the gospel to unreached people.

This then leads to the inevitable question, "What does that mean for our lives?" So what do I do? What do you do? What does each of us do individually? And what do all of us do collectively? And the answer to that question, I'm convinced, is a blank check. From you, from me, from the church, we say to God, "We know we must work, strive, live, and die to get the gospel to people who've never heard it. So with that obligation on the table, we lay our lives down on the table. We lay our families down; we lay this church down with no strings attached, and we say to God, 'Whatever you want us to do to get the gospel to unreached peoples, we will do it.'"

Have you said that? Have you said to God, "Whatever you want me to do to get the gospel to unreached peoples, I will do it"? Has your family said, "Whatever you want us to do to

get the gospel to unreached peoples, we will do it"? This is the challenge for all of these elders and pastors, to pray, "Whatever you want us to do as The Church at Brook Hills to get the gospel to unreached peoples, we will do it."

And today I want to show you in Romans why we should say that, why each of us should say to God, "I'll do whatever you want me to do, with no strings attached. God, I see what's going on in Iraq and Syria right now, and if you want me to take my wife and my kids to Iraq or Syria for the spread of the gospel, I'll do it." Talking whatever, no strings attached. And that sounds crazy, out of the realm of even thinking for many in this room. And that sounds utterly foolish to everybody in this culture, including most people sitting in the seats and pews of church buildings right now. But this tonight, I want to show you why we must be crazy like this, why being foolish like this in the eyes of the world is the wisest thing you can do with your life. I want to show you why anything less than a blank check before God is utter foolishness.

Why a Blank Check?

Because we've been saved by the gospel.

I am going to give you five reasons why we give God a blank check, with no strings attached, not even an Iraq string attached. One, because we've been saved by the gospel. This is the thrust of Romans. We saw last week how Paul is wanting the church at Rome to help him get the gospel to Spain, but notice what he doesn't do. He doesn't spend all his time in this letter telling the church at Rome about the needs in Spain, telling them stories about people in that city or this town in Spain. Instead, he writes them a letter in which he gives them quite possibly the most pure, potent picture of the gospel that we have in all of the Bible.

And in so doing, Paul is pointing us to the inevitable reality. It's there in your notes: The beauty of the gospel creates a burden for mission. Once you know the gospel -- I mean, really know it -- and really believe it, then mission to unreached people just makes sense. Think about this in Romans. In Romans 1-3, he paints a picture of the depravity of man, the lostness of man without God. He says, *"Everyone stands guilty before God with nothing to say"* (Romans 3:19-20).

But then, as we saw last week, in what must be the greatest transition verse in all of the Bible, Romans 3:21, Paul says, *"But now..."* He shows how God has poured out His wrath against sin upon His Son, and in so doing has made a way for anyone anywhere to be saved. How can we be saved? In Chapters 4 and 5, Paul describes how we are saved not by our work, but by trust in Christ's work. Romans 5:1 - *"We are justified through faith...through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."* We believe (Romans 5:8) that *"very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man..."*

And this changes everything about the way we live! In Romans 6, Paul describes how through faith in Christ, we are dead to sin and alive to God. Now, Romans 7, that doesn't mean we don't still struggle with sin; we do. *"For what we want to do, we don't do, but what we hate, we do...when we want to do good, evil is right there with us, waging war against our minds and making us prisoner of the sin at work within the members of our bodies...who can rescue us from this body of death?"* And Paul says, *"Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

And then, in what is quite possibly the most triumphant chapter in all the Bible, Romans 8, Paul says:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Then he goes on to talk about how

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

And then he starts talking about suffering, after which he says:

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Then he closes, saying:

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is the gospel. And this gospel is good. And don't miss the bottom line. Do you know how good this gospel is? The gospel is good enough to throw yourself into hell so that other people can have it. Paul says in Romans 9:1-5,

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are

Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Paul says with great sorrow and unceasing anguish, "Before God, I would go to hell if I could. I would throw myself into damnation if that would mean the salvation of these people." I don't know how to comprehend that statement. To stand on the brink of everlasting darkness, eternal fire that will never end, and to say, "I would jump in right now if that meant the Jewish people's salvation" – Jewish people, mind you, who were persecuting Paul, who were waiting for him in Jerusalem to arrest him and have him killed. And Paul says, "I'd go to hell forever for you."

Why would Paul say that? And why would you say that? Think about this -- it's different, I know, but there's many similarities. Think for a minute about an unreached people group today. Think Iraq or Syria; think about an unreached people group that is producing terrorists who are intent on killing you. Think about an unreached people group that is waiting to arrest and/or murder you or your family when you come their way. Why would you say, "I'd throw myself into hell forever if that meant you might be saved"? But then to say, "But since I can't, I'll do whatever it takes for your salvation. I'll lay down my life, my family, and my future, so that you might be saved." Why would you say that and mean that?

You would only say that if you really knew that you yourself were once under the wrath of God, deserving of eternal damnation, and that hell was your rightful destination. And you knew that God – the very God whom you rebelled against – this God came running after you to redeem you. And how did he do that? He did that by going to hell for you and me. Christ redeemed us by putting Himself in our place on a cross, where He bore the wrath we deserve in our stead. And then, though our eyes were blind to its beauty, God's grace broke through our hard hearts, and He opened your eyes to believe. He saved us -- He predestined, called, justified -- and He has promised to glorify us with Him forever. So now, it just makes sense, as sinners saved by this gospel, to say to God, "We'll go to the most rebellious, the hardest to reach, the most resistant people, and lay down our lives in love for the sake of their salvation." We give God a blank check because we've been saved by this gospel.

Because we've been sent by God.

Second, we give God a blank check because we've been sent by God. So that's Romans 9. Now keep going to Romans 10. Remember these words that we read a few days ago? Romans 10:9,

...Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are

sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Did you hear that? This is God's plan for getting the gospel to unreached people. We've walked through this text before. Take the verbs backward, starting in verse 15. It all starts with God sending His children, and His children preach. People hear. When they hear, they believe. When they believe, they call. When they call, they're saved. Where does it all start? With God sending His children.

Oh, just think about this. Why do we give God a blank check? Because God, the God of the universe, the God who brought the sun up this morning, the God who will bring it down tonight, the God over all the world has sent you and me to spread His gospel in the world. This is a breathtaking thought! Just let it soak in where you are sitting. God is sending you. And when you realize this, when we realize this, it just makes sense to say, "Okay, wherever, whatever, whenever, blank check, I'll do it."

And just think about why He's sending us. It is there in your notes. God is sending us for others' salvation. God wants to save people all over the world, and He is sending you and me to bring them good news of how they can be saved!

I read a story this week about a Syrian woman named Zunira who fled her country and came into a refugee camp. Zunira's husband had left her after 30 years of marriage, and she found herself alone in her war-torn country. The night before Zunira left Syria, she had a dream in which she was being attacked, and as she ran out into a road to get away, all of a sudden a horse came along, and she rode the horse into a middle of a group of Christians, who said to her, "We know people say we don't fear God, but we do fear God," and these Christians brought her in and took care of her.

Not knowing all that meant, Zunira came out of Syria into a refugee camp, where she met a follower of Christ named Rachel. Rachel connected Zunira with a group of Christians who are serving Syrian refugees, and all of a sudden, Zunira found herself surrounded by a group of Christians praying for her, caring for her, and sharing the gospel with her. This led to Zunira telling coming to those Christians one day and saying, "I am overwhelmed by God's love for me, and I want to trust Jesus to cleanse me from all my evil."

Do you realize that this is something we get to be a part of? This is what God is sending us for! For people's salvation! For people without hope to have hope. For people without love to be loved. For people on a road that leads to everlasting suffering to come to know everlasting life! This is why we give God a blank check, because He's sending us for others' salvation!

And He's sending us for His glorification, which goes back to what Paul was saying back in Romans 9. Why was Paul so anguished in those verses? Remember how he talks about the Jewish people. *"They're Israelites...to them belong the adoption, glory, covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all!"* This is the people of God, Paul says. The people that God bound His name and His glory and His honor with going all the way back to Genesis 12. The glory of God is at stake in this people.

This is why he says, immediately after this in verse 6, *"It is not as though God's word had failed."* And in the rest of Romans 9, 10, and 11, Paul is zealous to show that God is sovereign over the salvation of His people, and God will be faithful to His promises. Now again, it's different; in many ways, it's different, but we know there's promises in the Bible

– Revelation 5 – that Jesus has purchased men and women from every people, tribe, tongue, and nation. But you look at the world with 6,000 unreached people groups, and it's tempting to think, "Is God really going to save people from all of them? Is God really sovereign over salvation? Is God really going to be faithful to His promise?"

And so we give God a blank check. Why? Because we have brothers and sisters whom God has promised to adopt as sons and daughters, and our Father is sending us to bring them into the family that they might know the joy and the love and the hope and the wonder and the grace and the mercy and the grandeur and the glory of our God. Over 11,000 people groups in the world, with 6,500 of them unreached.

So why do we give God a blank check? Because our God is worthy to receive praise from 6,500 more people groups on the planet. God is sending us for their salvation, His glorification, and -- don't miss this -- He's sending us for our satisfaction, for our good. I know that putting a blank check on the table with your life and your family and your future is a scary proposition for many of us. I mean, what if God says to go to Iraq or Syria or Afghanistan to work among the Taliban. Is that what I'm going to do with my life or my family?

The thought of a blank check may be frightening to us, but don't forget who you're giving the blank check to. If you can trust God to save you from your sins, then you can trust God to lead your life. If you can trust God to save you for eternity, you can trust God to satisfy you on earth. What we really need to be afraid of is any conditions we might put upon our obedience to God. We give God a blank check because He has sent us, and it just makes sense to say, "Send me wherever, however, whenever you want."

Because we are slaves of Jesus Christ.

Alright, we've got to speed up here, because I really want to get to the personal and the practical. So what does this look like? So let's just hit the high points of the rest of what we've read in Romans. The third reason why we give God blank checks with our lives, families, church is because we are slaves of Jesus Christ. Remember, this is how the book of Romans opened: "*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus...*" And then you get to Romans 12, and Paul writes in verse 1, "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*" That's blank check language right there. We are living sacrifices; our lives are quite literally on the altar before God.

When you think about it, giving God a blank check is really the essence of what it means to be a Christian in the first place, isn't it? What happens at the moment when you come to faith in Christ? At that moment, you turn aside from your sin and from yourself, you say, "I don't want to go my way anymore; I want to follow your way." That's a blank check, isn't it? It's not like we come to Christ and say, "I want to follow some of your ways, and some of my ways." No, we say, "I want to follow your way, whatever it is." This is the essence of what it means to become a Christian. We say, "I am trusting you now to save me from my sins and to lead me as my Lord. You're Lord, not me. I trust you to call the shots in my life. I am your servant, your slave."

Do you know why blank check language -- surrender to go wherever, do whatever -- seems so foreign to so many of us today? Isn't it because we have so diluted the gospel invitation - - "Just pray this prayer, say these words, and that's all it means to become a Christian" -- when it's not true. It's just not true. Yes, "*everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved,*" but that's just it: You're calling upon the name of the Lord. This is the Lord

who rules over you, to whom you belong, before whom you bow, and you say, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do."

Becoming a Christian, being a Christian, necessarily means giving God a blank check. Romans 12:1: We sacrifice our bodies for His worship. "My body is a living sacrifice; it belongs to you to use however you want for your worship." We saturate our minds with His Word. Romans 12:2, "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...*" We think differently from the world around us. We don't value what the world values like safety, security, success according to the standards of this world. No, we value obedience to God's Word over all these things in the world.

We sacrifice our bodies for His worship, we saturate our minds with His Word, and we surrender our wills in this world. "*That by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*" That's it; that's what we want; that's the essence of a blank check, to say, "Form my will in this world according to your will for this world." This is what it means to be a Christian! We give God a blank check because we are slaves of Jesus Christ.

Because we are servants in His church.

Fourth, we give God a blank check because we are servants in His church, which is what Paul goes on to talk about in the rest of Romans 12. And I want to highlight this because Paul immediately starts talking about the body of Christ, and listen to what he says in Romans 12:3-6a:

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...

And then he starts to list these different gifts.

And the picture I want you to see in this, particularly as it relates to giving God a blank check, is that as followers of Christ, we're members of a family where everybody counts. This is one of those places where I'm guessing some people in this room are either starting to tune out or maybe have already tuned out, thinking, "Well, I just don't think my life is going to make that much of a difference when it comes to mission among unreached people, so this really doesn't apply to me." And this is where I want to stop you and say, "This does apply to you." It applies to every single one of us. God's passion for His glory in all nations is not a compartmentalized program in the church for a select few who are called to that. Now, we're all called to this mission, commissioned on this mission. We are a body together on this mission to make the gospel known in the world, particularly among people who have never heard, and every member has a part to play in it. Every member has a part to play in mission.

We're members of a family where everybody counts, and we're members of a family where everybody contributes, because God has given gifts by His Spirit to every member in the body of Christ for the purpose of mission through the church. Every single follower of Christ in this room, and specifically every single member of this church, you've got something, you've got much to give for this mission. And so, this is why, every member of the body of Christ then puts a blank check on the table and says, "God, I believe you have gifted me,

maybe even in unique ways that are different from the people around me, and I'm saying, 'I want to use the gifts you have given me however you want for the spread of your gospel and your glory to the peoples of the world, particularly people who've never even heard it.'" This is why we give God a blank check, because we're servants in the church, every single one of us gifted by God in a way that every member counts in mission and every member contributes to mission.

Because we are sure of His commission.

This leads to the last reason we give God a blank check: Because we are sure of His commission. After Paul expands on the church and its role even in the culture around it in Romans 13 and 14, in the beginning of Chapter 15, he calls the church to unity in mission, as Jews and Gentiles with different backgrounds and different gifts. He says in Romans 15:8-9,

"For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.'"

And then what Paul does is he pulls four different quotations from the Old Testament, and he uses them to paint a picture of God's purpose in all of history, specifically the purpose for which Christ came to the world. Paul basically shows how Jesus Christ died to redeem people from among all peoples for the praise of God. In these quotations, Paul takes us all the way back into the Old Testament to show us that when God called the people of Israel, the Jewish people, it was never just about God receiving praise from them. God's purpose from the very beginning was to receive praise from all the peoples of the world.

The first quotation in verse 9 is from Psalm 18:49, and the picture is the Jewish people praising God among (in the middle of) the Gentiles. But then in the next quotation, the picture is the Jewish people praising God with the Gentiles. Romans 15:10 says, *"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."* So you have the Jewish people praising God among the Gentiles, and then the Jewish people praising God with the Gentiles. And then in the next verse, the focus is on the Jewish people calling the Gentiles to praise God. *"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him."* That's a quote from Psalm 117.

And then, finally, the last quotation is from Isaiah 11:10. And the picture is Jesus, referred to as the root of Jesse, rising up and receiving praise from among all the nations, Jews and Gentiles alike. Romans 15:12, *"The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope."* And the picture here is Paul saying, "This has been the purpose of God all along." Everything God has done in the world – all throughout the Old Testament and now into the New Testament – God's purpose has always been and will always be to form a people from among all peoples for the praise of His name. This is why Jesus came; this is why Jesus died, to fulfill that purpose and to make that people from among all the peoples of the earth a reality.

So step back, then, and get the picture. What is God doing in the world right now, today? God is doing what He has been doing from the beginning of history, from the dawn of creation. God is doing today what He sent Christ to do 2000 years ago. Today, God is forming a people from among all the peoples of the earth for the praise of His name. God is not fully praised when only one type of people worship Him -- only Jewish people, or only anglo-Americans, or only African-Americans, or only Latin Americans, or only Europeans. No, God is most fully praised when every type of people in the world – people from every part of America and every part of Africa and every part of Asia -- people from among all the

peoples of the world are joining together in the eternal praise of God. This is the purpose of God. This is the purpose for which Christ died. And Christian, this is the purpose for which we live.

Jesus Christ died to purchase people from among all peoples for the praise of God, and so, we as Christians live to reach people from among all peoples for the praise of God. And this is why we give God a blank check. If this is the purpose of God in this world, and if our lives belong to God in this world, then His purpose is our purpose. And we want our lives to fulfill His purpose. And we know this purpose is going to be fulfilled; it's going to happen. All the peoples of the earth will one day be reached for the praise of God, and we want to be a part of it. We've got confidence, don't we, giving God a blank check, because we know He's going to use it to bring about the culmination of all history! Oh, we give God a blank check for all of these reasons, because we've been saved by the gospel, we've been sent by God, we are slaves of Christ, servants in the church, and we are sure of His commission!

What Is a Blank Check?

So, what is this blank check that we give to God? And the end of Romans, it seems to me, is an answer to that question. Because what you have in the rest of Romans 15 and into Romans 16 is a picture of all kinds of different people. There are 26 different names mentioned and all kinds of people playing all kinds of different roles doing all kinds of different things. And Paul's saying to and about them all, "Together, let's get the gospel to people who've never heard it."

And that's the picture I've got in my mind when I look out at this church. Different people with unique gifts, unique passions, unique skills, and unique opportunities. And the picture is us together saying, "Let's get the gospel to people who've never heard it for the praise of our God. Let's give God a blank check with each of our lives individually and with our church collectively."

I will pray however You want me to pray.

Let's each say to God, "I will pray however you want me to pray." In Romans 15:30, Paul appeals for the church to strive together in prayer. This is where the battle begins. This is how you and I, tomorrow morning, from our homes, can be a part of what God is doing in Iraq and Syria and everywhere else in the world, specifically among unreached peoples.

I will give whatever You want me to give.

This is where we start with a blank check, but it's not where we stop. In giving God a blank check, we're also saying, "I will give whatever you want me to give." This, again, is part of what Paul is emphasizing in Romans. He is in the process of taking an offering to Jerusalem, when he asks for help on his journey to Spain, the words he uses specifically reference financial help in getting the gospel to Spain.

And this is where we remember that God has given us much. What if God really did want to get His gospel to every people group on the planet? Might He give His people unprecedented wealth in the history of the world to get the gospel to them? This is what He's given us. We're in wartime, brothers and sisters. This is not peacetime. We must conserve our resources. We're obligated to live more simply, to give more sacrificially. Why? Because there's two billion people on a road to hell right now who've never even heard how they can be with God in heaven. And you have the gospel.

So have you looked at your bank account and your budget and said, "I'll give whatever you want me to give to see more people reached with the gospel, particularly those who've never heard. Whatever you want me to sell, I'll sell. Whatever you want me to sacrifice, I'll sacrifice. Whatever you want me to give, I'll give for the spread of the gospel to unreached people." And we must say that as a church: "God, whatever you want us to give, however you want us to spend our money together, use us to get the gospel to people who've never heard it."

I will go whenever and wherever You want me to go.

And then, finally, to give God a blank check is to say, "I will go whenever and wherever you want me to go." In Romans 15, Paul is saying, "The Lord is calling me to Spain, and so that's where I'm going." But the Lord wasn't calling everyone to go to Spain; the Lord was calling others to stay in Rome, or Ephesus, or other places. This looks so different in so many lives. For some, it will mean going short-term, for others it will mean going mid-term, and for many, a blank check will mean students, families, retirees moving to live and work among unreached peoples. For others, a blank check will mean partnering with an international student at UAB or Samford who is from an unreached people.

No matter what it costs.

Oh, there are so many ways God will lead. The key, though, is that the blank check is on the table, and each of us is saying, "God, whenever (now/then), wherever (here/there), I'll go, no matter what it costs." This is what we saw way back in Acts 13, right, when the Spirit of God said to the church at Antioch, "Set apart for me Paul and Barnabas for the work to which I have called them." And the church at Antioch, though I'm sure it wasn't easy, that was hard for the church at Antioch, but they set them apart and sent them out. And it wasn't easy for Paul and Barnabas when they went. Everywhere they went, they faced resistance and persecution.

Knowing that You are my reward.

When we put the blank check on the table, there is cost, to be sure. Our lives won't stay the same. Our families won't stay the same. Our church won't stay the same. And the more we give our lives, families, and church to this mission, the harder it will get for us in this world, not easier. Paul knew this. Church at Brook Hills, let's say to God, each of us, "I'll pray however you want me to pray. I'll give whatever you want me to give. I'll go whenever and wherever you want me to go, no matter what it costs, knowing that you are my reward. I did what you told me to do."

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