

Ready for Anything

Romans 15:14

It's graduation season. Hard to imagine that we're here again, sending kids off to college, seeing other kids move up to new grades or levels—I can't believe that my son Ian goes to middle school next year. This is a season when people try to pass along some wisdom to those who are moving on to new things—new places. A lot of that happens in the tried and true literary form we call the graduation speech. Here are some examples.

There are two types of education. One should teach us how to make a living, and the other how to live. -- John Adams

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. ---
Nelson Mandela

I am always ready to learn, but I do not always like being taught. -- Sir Winston Churchill

You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose. You're on your own. And you know what you know. You are the guy who'll decide where to go. -- Dr. Seuss

Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don't have to have college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love. --Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

As we celebrate our own day of transition here, I want to share some biblical wisdom for all of us to wrestle with—whether we're leaving or staying here in London.

We've been talking about the idea of the 'active ingredient.' The active ingredient is the substance in medicine that makes the drug work—that makes us feel better. Whatever else makes up the rest of the pill or liquid, it's the active ingredient that makes it work—the part of a drug that actually heals us, that makes us feel better, the part of the medicine that's designed to restore our health.

To be an active ingredient is to live our faith in a way that make our communities

better, healthier, more shalom-filled places. Active ingredients bring the message of the gospel—the message that heals us and restores health in authentic ways to the places where we live and work and study and shop.

This is a journey through what it means to be missional people in a missional church. We find our missional habits and practices at the intersection of what we believe about God, and what we do about that belief.

I myself am convinced, my friends, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge, and competent to instruct one another.

Paul's letter was written to the new Christian church in Rome. It was mostly Gentile but it had a strong core of Jewish converts in it, too. There were 50,000 Jews in Rome in the 1st century, and many of them converted to the Christian faith. Many of the early Christian churches in Rome were actually converted synagogues, so there was a deep sense of connection between the Jewish and Gentile members of the Roman church. That's why there's so much about Judaism and Jewishness in Romans.

This letter was written in the year 55AD—fairly early in the history of Christianity. Remember that the Christian movement was still being persecuted at this point, and it would get worse as the church grew.

By the time we get to this chapter, Paul is starting to talk about his future plans, including a trip to Spain and Turkey, and eventually a visit to Rome. (Sounds a little like listening to people make holiday plans around here.)

Paul is an entrepreneur at heart—part of the reason he's thinking of moving around is that, as he says later in the chapter: 'It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on anyone else's foundation.' The church was already well-established in Corinth, even if it had some problems, and so Paul was getting restless to take the Christian message someplace where it could have an influence over as many people as possible.

In our text Paul is making plans to visit the young church in Rome to see if he can help them to take the next step. What's clear is that Paul knows he doesn't have to go there and start from scratch—there's a group of leaders there who are ready to take the next step—ready to graduate to a deeper level of leadership and discipleship.

And so our text is Paul's way of affirming the faith and growth of the Roman church—it's like a commissioning or a graduation speech. Listen to it again: "I myself am convinced, my friends, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge, and competent to instruct one another."

As we prepare to say goodbye to some good friends today, what should we notice in Paul's commissioning of the Romans?

'you yourselves are full of goodness': This one has two-parts. First, there's an admission here on Paul's part that since he hadn't been their teacher, that they'd reached their maturity largely on their own, or at least without the help of one of the major apostles. Second, we should notice that being 'full of goodness' isn't about perfection or somehow learning to live without sin, but rather about being mature models of Christian kindness and mercy.

'complete in knowledge': Again, this doesn't mean that they knew everything. When Will Durant, one of the great American historians, gave a commencement speech, he said: "Education is a progressive discovery of your own ignorance." Paul the apostle would have agreed with that. Being complete in knowledge isn't about knowing everything. It's about having insight and understanding into God's purposes and God's plan. The Roman Christians, who had to overcome serious obstacles every day in order to live out their faith, knew enough of how their stories and God's story intersected to handle themselves in any situation.

'competent to instruct or admonish one another': This is about taking that step from being beginners to being more mature in the life of discipleship. Part of that comes when we take our experiences and share them with others through teaching or exhortation—maybe even warning or correction. Mostly, though, this is about the Roman Christians being ready to be influencers in a city that was the most influential place on earth at the time.

As we mark another graduation season and especially as we celebrate this special anniversary for your church, what can we take from Paul's commissioning of the Roman Christians? More to the point for all of us, as we talk about what it means to be active ingredients—to be mature Christians in a missional church, how does all of this help us grow as disciples where we live and work and study and shop? We'll use the same outline Paul used.

Full of goodness: We're called to be mature models of Christian kindness and mercy. That includes everything from simple hospitality to sacrificial acts on behalf of those in need. But mostly it's about how our faith guides how we live in our homes and neighborhood and jobs and schools—how we live as active ingredients—how we become missional people.

Complete in knowledge: It's crucial as we live our faith that we work to understand it, too. This isn't about knowing everything, this is about understanding the content of the gospel. This is also about understanding how our own lives are being transformed through Jesus Christ. Where does your own story intersect with the gospel story? The answer to that question, however it is unfolding in your life, is about becoming 'complete in knowledge'.

Competent to share our faith: This isn't about getting degrees or reading books or passing tests. Being ready to share our faith is just that—growing into an awareness of how we can help others come to their own experience of the transforming with Christ in their lives. This is about taking responsibility to be influencers for the gospel. Just as Rome was an enormously influential city in the ancient world, there aren't too many places in the world today with more influence than London.

Where are the influencers for Christ in this city?

A lot of them are in this room right now. The real question is this: Will you step out in faith to influence this city, and the world, with the good news of the gospel?

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: "I myself am convinced, my friends, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge, and competent to instruct one another."

I would say the same thing about you.

If you're rooted here in London or at least staying for a while, being missional people means living our faith, understanding how it works, and sharing it with other people. That's what this church is going to be talking about and practicing in the coming year.

If you're leaving this summer then let me give you this challenge. Take how you've grown here and share it with the community of faith you settle in wherever you're going to live next. Take your experiences here and let them become the fuel for

how you live your faith in a new city or country.

We say the Charge and Blessing together each week, but it takes on new meaning as we prepare to say goodbye to another group of friends.

When I say 'You go nowhere by accident', remember that your response is 'Wherever we go God is sending us. Wherever we are, God has put us there—he has a purpose for us.'

God can and will work in you and through you wherever you go—whatever you're doing. Christ who lives in you wants to do something with your life wherever you are.

That's what we believe, or at least struggle to believe. It's what the Roman Christians were struggling to live out under terrible persecution and threat. It's what we live to do each and every day as we grow into missional people in a missional church.

"I myself am convinced, my friends, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge, and competent to instruct one another."

I really am.

Amen