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THE RIVER CHURCH

REACH | GATHER | GROW

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If you are reading this, you are most likely in middle school or high school (or the parent of someone who is). Whether you are a Christian or not, being a teenager comes with its challenges. There are low moments where you get left out, fail a big test, or receive bad news. But there are mountaintop moments too; moments where you get good news about the team or role you were hoping to make and the feeling of accomplishment that comes with it! Wherever you are right now, God's Word has something to say about it.

All semester we will explore book of Romans. We will see how to be saved and share Jesus with others via the Romans Road to salvation and dive into the marks of a true Christian and how to live out your faith in Jesus as a teenager.

Come along on this journey by joining us every week for Student Growth Community at any of The River Church locations!



REACH

PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

1. What are some things that you are proud of?

_____
_____
_____

2. What topics dominate your conversations? If someone overheard all your conversations from the last week, what are some things they would say that you care about?

_____
_____
_____

The theme of the book of Romans is God. You may be thinking, “Well, duh!” It is about what God has done and is going to do. Originally, it was a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote about his desire to go visit the church in Rome. That is how we have the name of the book. Taking it a step further, Paul lays out the main message of the whole letter in Romans 1:16-17.

Read Romans 1:15-17.

3. In verse 15, what is Paul eager to do? Why do you think he wants to do that?

_____
_____
_____

Paul says in verse 16 that he is not ashamed of the Gospel because of its power. Paul experienced the power of the Gospel firsthand when God got his attention.

(Growth Community Leaders: If you want to take a detour with your group for a minute, read Acts 9:1-18, which records the conversion of Saul/Paul.)

Paul, who was first called Saul, was a religious leader who worked hard to stop Christians and even had them arrested and killed for

following Jesus. One day, while traveling to the city of Damascus, a bright light surrounded him, and he heard Jesus say, ***"Saul, why are you persecuting me?"*** He was blinded by the light and had to be led to the city where a man named Ananias, following God's instructions, prayed for him. Saul's sight was restored, and he was renamed Paul, dedicating his life to telling others about Jesus.

4. How do you think you would have responded if you had been in the place of Saul? What would have been different about your response compared to Saul's? What might have been similar in your response?

_____
_____
_____

Paul saw the power of the Gospel firsthand in his own conversion. He was living one way, persecuting and killing Christians, and within a matter of days after his encounter with God, he completely changed. He began sharing the Good News of Jesus to anyone who would listen.

Acts 9:26 tells us, ***"And when he [Paul] had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple."*** Many people were skeptical of Paul's conversion, even Jesus' closest disciples.

5. Put yourself in the shoes of the disciples. Would you have been skeptical of Paul? What are some of the fears the disciples may have had?

_____
_____
_____

6. Finish the saying, “If something is too good to be true, it….” What have you experienced that turned out to be too good to be true?

_____
_____
_____

However, Paul’s conversion turned out to be completely true! When God’s grace got ahold of him, his life did a complete 180. This is the true definition of repentance. It is walking in one direction and then turning around and walking in the completely opposite way.

7. What effect has Jesus had on your life? How have you seen God’s power in your life and around you?

_____
_____
_____

(Growth Community Leaders: when was the last time you shared your testimony with your group? If it has been a while, take the next couple of minutes and share about God’s grace in your own life.)

In the passage we began with, Romans 1:16-17, Paul says, ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”***

Paul shares his eagerness to preach the Gospel in verse 15. He shows us in verse 16 that salvation is for ***“everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*** No one is too far from salvation.

8. What do you think about the idea that no one is too bad to be saved? How could that work?

_____
_____
_____

Recently, I had a conversation with a high school student about how people who are about to die and have lived in sin all their lives can be saved if they repent of their sins and turn to Jesus in their final moments. The student was wrestling with this idea, but it came back to the grace of God. Salvation is not based upon our actions but on accepting what Jesus has done for us and placing our faith in Him.

9. If you truly believed that God could save anyone, how would that change how you treat those around you?

_____
_____
_____

I remember hearing about the conversion of a man named Nicky.

> Nicky Cruz was born in Puerto Rico in 1938 and grew up in an abusive and spiritually dark home. His parents practiced witchcraft and often told him he was cursed. As a teenager, he ran away to New York City and joined the notorious Mau Maus gang, quickly rising to become its leader. He was violent, filled with hatred, and known for his ruthless attacks.
>
> One day, a street preacher named David Wilkerson (author of *"The Cross and the Switchblade"*) approached Nicky and told him, "Jesus loves you." Furious, Nicky threatened to kill him, but Wilkerson refused to back down. Over time, Nicky was deeply impacted by Wilkerson's persistence and love. At a church meeting, Nicky finally surrendered his life to Jesus, experiencing a radical transformation.

After his conversion, he left the gang, reconciled with people he had hurt, and became a Christian evangelist. For decades, he has traveled the world sharing his testimony, especially with young people caught in gang violence, drugs, and crime.

As we conclude our time, I want you to consider a final question.

10. Does everyone deserve God's love? What about the people you do not like? Do you treat them like they deserve God's love and salvation?

_____
_____
_____

NOTES



GATHER

PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

1. What does it mean to you to live a full life? Who is someone that you would say, “They lived a full life?” What makes their life full?

_____
_____
_____

After showing the limits of the Law and the benefits of the Spirit of God, Paul, the author of Romans, gets very pointed with his intended audience. After speaking in reference to non-believers and the state of their thoughts in hostility to God, Paul turns to Christians in saying, ***“You, however…”***

Read Romans 8:9-11 together as a group.

2. Notice the word ***“in”*** throughout verses 9-11. How many times is it used? What are some of the people and things it is used to refer to?

_____
_____
_____

I. Close to Christ

There is a close, intimate connection between believers and God Himself. Believers are not told that the Spirit is around them or above them, but rather that the ***“Spirit of God dwells in you.”*** Paul originally wrote this to Christians in Rome, but in speaking of the truths of their salvation, we can apply these theological truths to Christians today as well.

3. What comfort does it bring that if you are ***“in Christ,”*** God’s Spirit is dwelling in you?

_____
_____
_____

4. What conviction does it bring that the Spirit of God is dwelling in you if you are a Christian? How does that truth affect you moving forward from here?

_____
_____
_____

As we say often at The River Church, God's Spirit is not in us because of what we have done or how good we have been, but because of Jesus Christ. At our moment of conversion, we receive the imputed righteousness of Christ. It is the best deal we have ever been offered and received. Christ receives our sinfulness, and we receive his righteousness! As a result, we can stand before God the Father sinless. This is why the author of Hebrews tells Christians, ***"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace"*** (Hebrews 4:16).

5. What can it look like to stand before the throne of grace with confidence? Is this something that you regularly make a habit of? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____

Standing with confidence before God is one of the many benefits of this life that Christians are afforded because of the Spirit of God dwelling within them.

II. Connected to Christ

There is a phrase I grew up hearing that purported an incorrect idea of easy-believe-ism. In kid's church, over and over, I heard that all I had to do to be saved was to "ask Jesus into my heart."
Read Ephesians 3:17.

6. What do you think of the phrase, “Ask Jesus into your heart to be saved”? Is it accurate? Is it missing something? Should it be a phrase that we use in evangelistic contexts?

_____
_____
_____

There is a theological phrase that I learned in my Systematic Theology course in Bible college called, “Union with Christ.” It is the idea that Christians are joined with Christ in His life, death, and resurrection, and it is the result of confessing Him as Lord. Paul talks about this earlier in Romans 6:5-6, ***“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”***

A couple of weeks ago, my wife, Haleigh, and I went to visit family in Colorado. Like any sane person, we chose to fly instead of making the 20-hour road trip. When we arrived at the airport, we had a choice to make. Would we board the plane to Denver or just stare at it and hope that by being inspired by it, we would arrive in Denver? We could even try following the plane, but I could only run 13 miles an hour. So, I would never keep up with the plane. Clearly, we boarded the plane. As we got to our seats, we sat down, got buckled in, and settled in for a three-hour ride. If we did not board the plane, we would not have arrived in Denver. As the plane took off, because we boarded it and were united to it, the destination of that plane determined our destination. If the plane climbed, we climbed. When the plane hit turbulence, we hit turbulence. Ultimately, when the plane landed in Denver, we landed in Denver.

This is a picture of the Gospel truth of union with Christ. Where the plane went, because we were united to it by boarding it, so we went. Because of this, a Christian’s salvation is secure because we are connected to Him!

7. Have you doubted your salvation? What causes you to question it?

_____
_____
_____

If Christ has been resurrected (which has been proven over and over!), verse 11 of Romans chapter 8 tells us, so will Christ raise our mortal bodies one day. As Christ has come once, He is coming back again.

8. How often do you think of the future resurrection? How can setting your mind on the future promises of God change your here and now?

_____
_____
_____

Until Christ comes again, believers have the promised Holy Spirit with us. One of the dangers in Christianity is singing songs where we welcome the Holy Spirit into spaces. The Holy Spirit does not need an invite! If Christians are gathered together, the Holy Spirit is there! It is not like the Holy Spirit just chooses to show up some Sundays and not others. Leon Morris puts it well in saying, “The Spirit is not an occasional visitor; He takes up residence in God’s people.” That is a beautiful promise from God’s Word! The Holy Spirit of God has chosen to make His home within us. Now, as the temple where God dwells, we are His ambassadors through word and deed!

NOTES



GROW

ELIJAH EDWARDS

When I was in Elementary school, I had a best friend named Torin. The two of us would spend almost every moment together. We shared the same class, lived only a block away from each other, and we loved the same things. We were best friends from 3rd grade to 6th grade, and almost nothing could separate us. Yet, when 7th grade came, we were no longer in classes together, and we did not see each other as much. Our relationship dwindled because of our circumstances. Since then, I have not kept in touch with him. We grew apart and are no longer best friends, nor do we even keep in touch.

1. Can you think of a friend in your life where this has happened to you? Why did you grow apart?

_____
_____
_____

Something we must understand is that human relationships can become strained. Bad things can happen, words can be said, and hardships can happen that can cause relationships to fall apart. The love of those relationships can lessen until there is not any at all. However, as we read through our passage for today, we will see that there is a relationship and a love that, no matter the circumstances, no matter what you go through, you will never lose this love.

Read Romans 8:37-39.

I want to make this clear, and I want to make sure we all hear this, as I myself need to hear it daily. When you have confessed that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead, then you are saved through Christ. From that point on, nothing can separate you from the love of God.

2. What are some things that you have believed can separate you from God's love?

_____
_____
_____

3. Ask yourself, “Do you truly believe that nothing can separate me from God’s love?” Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____

When we are in a relationship with Jesus, there is nothing that can take us away from Him. That means we can grow deeper with Him, knowing that there is not a catch. We are not just going to lose this relationship like the others we have lost.

4. Knowing that nothing can separate you from the love of God, what does that make you think about growing in your relationship with Him?

_____
_____
_____

I am going to flip it now and ask, “How many of you have lost relationships because you did not put in the work or because you fell away?” My old friend, whom I mentioned earlier, tried many times to reach out to me, and he even came to visit me in college. I did not reach back out to him. I failed to reciprocate him trying to be friends again. He was trying to rekindle a relationship and strengthen it.

We do this exact thing to God. We already know that nothing can separate us from the love of God, but we as humans can take advantage of that and choose not to grow in our relationship with Him. We do this because we are selfish, lazy, and sinful. We do what we want to do, and we pour into relationships we see as important.

5. Based on your day-to-day life, which relationship or relationships do you feel you give the most attention to? Why?

_____
_____
_____

6. Trick question: Can putting God as a less important relationship separate you from His love?

_____
_____
_____

Again, nothing can separate us from the love of God. Jesus sacrificed Himself for everyone.

Read John 3:16.

Read Romans 6:23.

Read Romans 5:8.

So, let us lay this all out. We have a God Who wants a relationship with us, and He shows us that through His forgiveness and sacrifice, He made a way to save us from our sins. He did this to give us a relationship that is whole and never-ending. In this life, we have and will have so many relationships that end, fail, and hurt us. God never will.

7. Reading all of this and knowing that this love will never fail you, how does that change how you see your relationship with Jesus?

_____
_____
_____

You may be thinking, “Okay, I got it. You made your point, but what does this have to do with Grow?” I am so happy you hypothetically asked that question! Relationships become stronger when they grow. They become deeper and more meaningful when growth happens. That is why, here at The River Church, we call our small groups Growth Communities. We are a community that is striving and working on growing our relationship with God. That is why we read the Bible, have these small group times, and have fun together.

It is all about growing closer to one another and, more importantly, growing closer to God.

It does not end there. Growing in Jesus is something that needs to be committed to daily. I can attest that I am not the best at this. I miss opportunities, and I sometimes choose things over God. Yet, when I am growing in a relationship with Him, I feel more connected and focused and feel that nothing can stand in the way because of what Jesus has done for me.

8. What does growing in relationship with God look like? How do we do that?

_____
_____
_____

9. Leaders: What are some ways that you prioritize growing in your walk with God?

_____
_____
_____

Reading His Word, praying, being around other believers, coming to Student Growth Community, following His commandments, and sharing the Gospel are ways that can help us grow in Christ. However, we have to put in the time.

10. How can you grow in your relationship with God this week?

_____
_____
_____

NOTES

4

ROMANS ROAD: SIN

PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

I have heard it said before that the best way to know that humans are born fallen (or sinful) is to look at little kids. That may seem harsh, but bear with me for a second. At the time of writing, my son is seven years old. I have to admit, he is a very cute kid! When he was about two years old and first started talking, I noticed something very interesting. He loved to eat snacks, and we would always tell him that he could not have snacks before dinner. Also, he had to ask us first. One day, we heard his little feet run to the snack cupboard, wrestle through a box, and open up a snack that he had begun to eat. Once he came back over to us, he had no snack in his hands, but he had little crumbs around his mouth. I asked him, "Buddy, did you just grab a snack without asking?" His immediate response was, "No! I did not do that!" The first thing he thought to do was lie. I did not teach him that. I did not send him to sin camp to learn how to sin. It just came naturally to him.

1. Can you recall a time when you were younger when you tried to hide something wrong that you did from your parents?

_____

_____

_____

As we talk through the Roman's Road or the salvation message through the book of Romans, we are going to point out some key, fundamental truths to help you understand it clearly. The first thing we need to start with is sin. It is the bad news because we cannot have the Good News without first starting with the bad news.

Read Romans 3:23.

This verse is very short but has many implications in regard to the Gospel. Paul makes it clear that all have sinned. This ***"all"*** is a very complex Greek word that means "all." Everyone who is living on Earth or has lived on Earth is a sinner. They have fallen short of God's perfect standard of living. One of the very first things we need to answer about sin is, "Who has sinned?"

2. Have you learned about sin before? What were those experiences like?

_____
_____
_____

3. Do you truly believe that everyone in the world is born with a sinful nature?

_____
_____
_____

4. How does it make you feel to be told that you fall short of God's perfect standard?

_____
_____
_____

There is another place in the Gospel of Mark that will help explain this idea a little bit more.

Read Mark 7:14-23.

After being challenged by the Pharisees as to why Jesus' disciples did not follow the tradition of washing their hands before they ate, Jesus gave this great parable. He said nothing on the outside of a person defiles a person; it is what comes out of a person that defiles him. What Jesus is saying is that all of the sin in our lives comes from our hearts and our own sinful nature. Because of our sinful nature, we are spoiled in the eyes of God. This does not mean that all of us are as bad as we can possibly be, but it does mean that our sin is not something that is outside of us that we do, but, rather, something that comes from inside of us. It is who we are apart from Jesus.

5. How does this story better help you understand the idea of a sinful nature?

_____
_____
_____

6. Think about your sin. Do you feel like you sin because you want to or because you are forced to?

_____
_____
_____

Now, another part of the verse from Romans 3:23 that I want to discuss is the idea of falling ***"short of the glory of God."*** It might be easy to give the Christian answer, that it means to fall short of God's perfect standard. However, it is a little confusing when you think about it. What does that actually mean? What does that look like? Why is it really that important to be perfect?

Read Isaiah 6:1-6.

Imagine this scene! He was standing before the King of the universe! Many of us are probably thinking that it would be the coolest thing in the world to see God face to face. Yet, Isaiah, who was an Old Testament prophet and someone that God actually spoke to, had a startling response. His immediate reaction was to fall on his knees and cry out, "Woe is me! I am unworthy to be in the presence of the perfect and holy God!" He was seeing firsthand the indescribable distance between who he was and Who God is. He was seeing firsthand what the holiness of God looks like, and he knew that he fell short of being even close to that perfection.

7. Do you think being perfect is possible for us?

_____
_____
_____

8. Do you view your sin as something that is bad, or do you think that you are pretty good?

_____
_____
_____

Before we end, I am sure many of you are thinking, “Thanks, Patrick, all this talk about sin makes me feel terrible about myself.” First, if you are feeling like that, you are welcome. Second, understanding how sinful you are and how far you fall short of God’s perfect standard is the best thing that can ever happen to you. Being in this place will allow you to truly surrender and lay your life down to the grace of God because that is where He wants you to be. He wants you to see that you cannot be perfect and cannot save yourself. Only by His grace, through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, can you be made a child of God. I want to show you a verse that describes this truth.

Read Isaiah 57:15.

9. Have you come to an understanding of your sinfulness and acknowledged that you need a Savior? Explain why or why not.

_____
_____
_____

10. Take a moment and write out this verse in your own words (you may use pen and paper or on your phone), and then explain to each other why you wrote it that way.

_____
_____
_____

P.S. I would love to hear how you wrote out that verse in your own words. My email is pbicknell@theriverchurch.cc. Email them this week!

NOTES



THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

1. What are some small choices you make every day? How would your life change if you made the opposite decision one day?

_____
_____
_____

2. Have you ever made a choice that had a bigger consequence than you expected? Share that example with the group.

_____
_____
_____

In life, our choices have consequences. Some consequences are immediate, like staying up too late and being tired the next day. Others take longer to appear, like eating unhealthy food and feeling the effects years later. The same is true with sin. The Bible tells us that sin has consequences, and today, we will look at what those are.

Understanding sin and its consequences is important. Read Romans 6:23. Paul makes a bold statement here: ***"The wages of sin is death."*** Let us break this down. Wages are what we earn for the work we do. If you have a job, you expect to get paid for your work. In the same way, when we sin, we earn something as a result.

What is sin? Sin is disobedience to God. It is anything we do that goes against His commands, whether in our actions, thoughts, or words.

What is the consequence? Paul says that what we earn from sin is death. This means spiritual separation from God. Just like a worker gets a paycheck for their labor, sin has its own payment: death.

James 1:13-15 says, ***"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted***

when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."

3. Where does this tell us the root of each of our sins?

_____
_____
_____

4. Why do you think sin leads to death?

_____
_____
_____

5. Can you think of examples in the Bible where sin led to serious consequences?

_____
_____
_____

6. How do we see the consequences of sin in the world today?

_____
_____
_____

7. How have you ever seen sin's consequences in your own life or someone else's?

_____
_____
_____

8. Do you think people always recognize the consequences of their sins right away? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____

Romans 6:23 tells us the bad news, but if we read the whole verse, there is good news too: ***"But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

Sin has consequences, but God offers a way out through Jesus. We will dive deeper into that next week.

Take a few moments and think about areas of sin in your life. You do not have to share with the group. You can keep it to yourself.

9. What are the ***"wages"*** of those sins? (You do not have to share your answers with the group.)

_____
_____
_____

Accept the gift of salvation that Jesus offers. We do not have to stay stuck in sin's consequences!

10. We can live differently because of God's grace. How can knowing Jesus change the way you make choices?

_____
_____
_____

This week, take time to reflect on your choices. Are there any areas where you need to turn away from sin? Pray and ask God to help you follow Him instead of choosing things that lead to destruction.

Prayer: *God, thank You for warning us about the consequences of sin. Help us to recognize the weight of our choices and turn to You instead. Thank You for offering us the gift of eternal life through Jesus. Teach us to follow You in every decision we make. Amen.*

NOTES



ETERNAL LIFE

ZACH HONNEN

Wages make the world go around. I remember the first time I realized that work deserved wages. As a young child, about 9 years old, I would “work” with my dad. I use the quotations because my version of work was to dig for half an hour (if that) and then find ways to avoid doing anything for the rest of the day. I definitely think I have developed a better work ethic since then. Yet, the point of the story is that, at that point in time, I did not realize that work came with wages.

1. What type of work (chores) did you do as a kid in your house?

_____
_____
_____

2. When did you first grasp the understanding of wages?

_____
_____
_____

I thought I was just working because my dad said so, but at the end of the day, my dad would take my brother and me to the glorious McDonald’s or Speedway for food and Speedy Freezes. At that moment, I realized work resulted in wages. My wages were treats that I would not have had at home.

Working with my dad, I did not just discover wages, I discovered what gifts can look like as well. At the end of the job, the homeowner we were working for gave my brother and me $90 each. For a 9-year-old kid in the early 2000s, that was a lot of money! The homeowner had already paid my dad, and this was something none of us expected. It was a gift. It was free to me. It was undeserved (remember what I said about my work ethic back then).

Oftentimes, when we receive gifts, we expect the gift. When birthdays or Christmas come around, we tend to expect gifts. However, when I received that gift, I had no expectation of receiving it. It was not something that I deserved or earned. It was freely given.

3. What is a memory you have of a gift that you were given that was not expected or deserved?

_____
_____
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4. What is a memory you have of a gift that you gave that was not deserved or earned by the recipient?

_____
_____
_____

Romans 6:23 says, ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** In this text, we see wages and a gift. In the last lesson, Pastor Keaton went into the wages - the fact that we are owed death. Because of our sins, we deserve death and separation from God forever. Our evil works have earned a wage of death. Today, we will focus on the second half of our passage and, by extension, the second half of my story. We will look at the free gift of God, which is eternal life.

5. Looking at what Paul is saying in this passage, how would you define ***"free"***?

_____
_____
_____

6. How would you define a gift?

_____
_____
_____

(Leaders: Maybe share a story about one of the best or worst gifts you have ever received.)

Paul describes death as something that we have earned because of our work, which is our sin. It is a wage. It is what we deserve. Again,

looking at my story with my dad, there was an arrangement, or at least a mutual understanding, that when I went to help him work, he would provide a sweet treat or a trip to McDonald's for me. However, Paul pivots from this idea of wages and earnings to the idea of a ***"free gift."*** This is not something that you or I deserve. This is not something that you or I earn. This is something that is freely given with an open hand.

So, the question is, what is this gift? What is this thing that is freely given but not deserved? Let us look at the text once again, ***"but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

7. What does ***"eternal"*** mean?

_____
_____
_____

8. How do you define ***"eternal life"***?

_____
_____
_____

9. What are some things you have been taught about eternal life or that you believe about eternal life?

_____
_____
_____

What I want us to realize is that you and I are eternal. We are made in the image and likeness of God, and from the moment you are born, you become eternal. Your soul and my soul will exist forever. We are not eternal in the same way that God is eternal. God always is, always was, and always will be. You and I have not always been, but you and I always will be. What our passage today is talking about is eternal life in Christ. The Bible teaches that we are eternal and that there are two eternal destinations that we have after this life, one is Heaven, and the other is Hell.

10. What do you believe about Heaven, and what do you believe about Hell?

_____
_____
_____

11. Have you ever taken time to think about what happens after this life?

_____
_____
_____

Both of these destinations can be defined and described with many different Bible verses and texts, but I think the most clear and understandable definition is that Heaven is with God ***"in Christ Jesus."*** Hell is separation from God. The reality is that God is the source of all things good, all things enjoyable, and all things lovely.

Psalm 16:11 says, ***"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."***

Hell is the absence of all good, love, peace, and kindness. It is the presence of all things evil. In the same way that darkness is the absence of light, Hell is the absence of God.

12. Knowing that these two realities exist, what is your response? Does the idea of Heaven and Hell invoke fear, or does it bring motivation to share the Gospel with your friends and family?

_____
_____
_____

13. Do you know Jesus? If so, do you share Jesus?

_____
_____
_____

14. How often do you think about the reality of our hope in Jesus? Oftentimes, the devil tries to distract; however, I would like you to actually think about how good God is and how exciting it is that we have eternal life in Christ Jesus.

_____
_____
_____

Within this gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus, we see the idea of grace. Oftentimes, as Christians, we can misconstrue grace for mercy and vice versa. Have you ever considered the difference between the two? I have found that I get caught up in mercy but never understand grace. So, for a quick second, discuss the difference between the two.

15. How would you define grace? How would you define mercy?

_____
_____
_____

The difference between grace and mercy is important. Mercy is not getting the punishment or negative consequence that I deserve. If I run through a stop sign and get pulled over by a police officer, but he lets me off with a warning, he is extending mercy by not giving me what I deserve (a ticket). Yet, grace is something entirely different. It is giving something to someone that they do not deserve. The greatest picture of this is what we see with Jesus on the cross. We not only receive mercy, we also receive grace. We deserve death. We deserve eternity separated from God in Hell, but we are given eternal life in Christ Jesus. This means we will be in a place full of joy, comfort, celebration, peace, love, mercy, and grace for eternity. We will never be dissatisfied. We will be fully satisfied in our God and King.

If you do not know the Lord and are not sure you have eternal life in Christ Jesus, talk to someone and settle that today.

NOTES



ACCEPTING THE GIFT

ELIJAH EDWARDS

I know it is “spooky season,” as it is called this time of year, but I am going to throw in a little bit of “jingle season” tonight. I want to ask the age-old question, “What is the best Christmas gift you have ever received?” There is one I remember to this day. I was in 2nd grade and at my grandparents for Christmas. That morning, I received every single Bionicle that was released that year. Now, if you do not know what Bionicle is, have a leader look it up, as it was the greatest toy line that Lego ever released. I was ecstatic about getting all of those for Christmas. That was the best gift I ever received from my parents.

1. What is the best Christmas gift you have ever received? Why?

_____
_____
_____

Now, that was from my parents, but the best gift that I have ever received overall was the gift of eternal life through Jesus.

Read Romans 5:8.

Read John 3:16.

Read Romans 6:23.

All of these verses point to the gift of eternal life through Jesus. The best gift that we can receive is that, while we are sinful people and that sin means that we should receive death, Jesus took that punishment so we can have eternal life through Him and forgiveness of all our sins. Accepting that sounds like a no-brainer, right? How do we accept it?

Read Romans 10:9.

2. After reading this verse, how do we accept the gift God has given us?

_____
_____
_____

Two key words are ***"confess"*** and ***"believe."*** A couple of summers ago, I preached about this topic at Kids Camp. In order for the kids to memorize this verse better, I used sign language when saying it. Have someone in your group look up the signs and say this verse again using these signs.

I. Confess

"Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord" means that you are admitting to yourself, others, and God that Jesus is Lord. It is that Jesus is Lord over your life. It means that you are outwardly showing that Jesus is God and that you are declaring it.

3. What does confessing Jesus is Lord look like for you?

_____
_____
_____

Confessing means leaving behind your sinful life. This does not mean that you do not sin anymore. You will still sin, but it is about how you respond to it. You do not accept the sin as who you are. Instead, you accept how Jesus has made you new, and that sin does not have to be lord (ruler) over your life.

4. What are some sins that you need to leave behind and give to Jesus?

_____
_____
_____

Confessing means living a life like Jesus. Loving your enemies, helping others, being slow to anger, and praying for others are all things that exemplify a life with Jesus.

5. How can you live like Jesus this week?

_____
_____
_____

Confessing is a full life change from what Jesus has done for you, and that is part of accepting the ultimate gift.

II. Believe

"Believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead" is the other half of saving faith. Jesus did not stay dead after being crucified. He defeated death and rose again three days later to show that even death has no power over Him. He has the power to do something that no one else and nothing else can do, and that gives us new life and eternal life.

Read Ephesians 2:1.

We are dead in our sin. Our sin keeps us from God, and Jesus came to raise us up from that death as He Himself rose from the dead to bring us that new life. So, if death is defeated, what do we have to fear?

6. What does believing look like?

_____
_____
_____

Believing that God raised Jesus from the dead means that you believe in the power of God. It means you live as if you believe it. You trust in Jesus because of what He did, and you give your life to Him because you believe in what He says.

7. If we believe that Jesus was risen from the dead, how can we trust Him?

_____
_____
_____

With all of this being said, the question to ask is, “Have you accepted the gift?” Do you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead? This is the greatest gift that is laid out before us, even when we do not deserve it. Have you accepted it, and if not, will you accept it? If you have, then how do you live like you have? If you have not, do you want to tonight? Talk with a leader about what it looks like to accept this gift.

NOTES



RESULTS OF SALVATION

PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

When I was in elementary school, if our class had a substitute teacher, that was a big deal. It was not because we were excited for the sub, but rather how we behaved when they were there had some serious consequences. If we were good, our normal teacher would come in the next day in a good mood. If we were bad, that next day in class was not going to be fun at all. Well, I remember one time I was sick, and our classroom had a substitute teacher. Outside of having to deal with being sick, I wondered how my class was going to do. I ended up feeling better, and I went to school the next day. As I was walking into class, I was worried. Did they behave? Was I going to have to deal with the consequences of their actions even though I was not even there? Turns out they were great. Our teacher was so happy with the class that she let us watch a movie that day. I did not do anything, but I still got to enjoy the benefits.

1. Have you ever had a moment like this in your life? Was it with a sports team, club, classroom, or siblings?

_____
_____
_____

That is a funny little story, but it is similar to the results of the salvation Jesus provided for us. We received amazing benefits because of the work of someone else. It is the work of Jesus's life, death, burial, and resurrection!

Read Romans 5:1.

Here is a pro tip for when you are reading the Bible: when you see the word ***"therefore,"*** always ask the question, "What is it there for?" Paul, for the last few chapters, has been walking out in great detail the truths of the Gospel and of salvation. Now, at the beginning of chapter 5, he tells us what that means for Christians. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. What Paul is saying here is that if we believe, we no longer have a conflict with God because of our sin. That conflict is resolved because of what Jesus did for us on the cross! This peace is one of the amazing results of salvation.

2. Have you ever been in a major fight with someone and then had it resolved?

_____
_____
_____

3. What feelings did you have when that conflict was resolved?

_____
_____
_____

4. Do you feel like you were ever in a conflict with God? How can that impact your thoughts toward having peace with God?

_____
_____
_____

Read Romans 5:2-4.

Sometimes, we make it seem like being a Christian and following Christ is always going to be sunshine and rainbows. Unfortunately, in this life, we are going to experience suffering. Many people think suffering is a bad thing. Yet, Paul describes it as a good result of our salvation. Why? I believe the reason is because we now have a new hope! Before we followed Jesus, there was no way for our pain and suffering to be redeemed or to be used for good. However, now that Jesus is our Lord, everything we go through in this life, including and especially our suffering, is going to be used for our good and His glory. We have hope, and that hope will build us up to be more devout followers of Christ.

5. What are some hardships in life that you have gone through or are currently going through right now?

_____
_____
_____

6. How can the hope you have in Jesus help you get through those hard times?

_____
_____
_____

Read Romans 5:5.

The last and best result of our salvation that Paul talks about in these few verses is the amazing gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, I am sure you read that verse and are ready to move on to the next section of this study. However, for just a moment, I want you to pause and think about what you just read.

Did you think about the fact that the third member of the Godhead is living within you? How absolutely wonderful is that! God Himself, who was there from the beginning and the same Spirit that rose Jesus from the dead, is living inside of you. That is a truth that should make you feel loved and have joy beyond all comprehension.

7. Do you often think about the fact that the Holy Spirit lives within you? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____

8. Do you view the Holy Spirit as being God? Do your actions (how often you pray, seek the Spirit's counsel, and meditate on the things of God) reflect your answer?

_____
_____
_____

The last stop in our little study of Roman's Road was looking at the results of the salvation that Jesus provided for us. These are the truths that I hope all of you experience. The result of our salvation is more than just going to Heaven one day. That is another great

result of salvation, but I want you all to know that there are some glorious benefits for you right now. You can have love, joy, peace, forgiveness, and a new sense of life by putting your faith in Jesus. If you believe in Him, the results that we talked about in this lesson are yours.

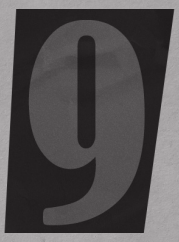
9. Do you have a hard time believing or accepting that these benefits are yours?

_____
_____
_____

10. Write in your own words how the results of salvation we talked about today can practically impact your life today.

_____
_____
_____

NOTES



MARKS OF A TRUE BELIEVER

PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

1. When did you first obtain a personal computer, tablet, or smartphone? How many hours per week would you estimate you spend looking at those screens?

_____
_____
_____

2. Is anyone brave enough to actually pull up their screen time on their phone and share it with the group?

_____
_____
_____

We are beginning a mini-series examining the marks of a true Christian based on the book of Romans in the Bible. Technology is not evil. It is neutral, but if we are not careful, our enemy, Satan, can use it to his advantage in our lives.

Using technology that allows outside information into our homes and heads has a profound effect on our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It can also influence our faith.

3. How have you seen modern technology change in your lifetime?

_____
_____
_____

Our screens have the power to influence our thinking and behavior toward God or toward the world.

4. Which direction would you say your use of screens steers you? What are some examples of positive and negative content you commonly find online?

_____
_____
_____

It can be easy to lose ourselves in our screens and not realize how long we have been online.

5. How often do you check or estimate the time you have spent online? How can the amount of time you spend on your screen help you measure your mental and spiritual health?

_____
_____
_____

6. In what ways can your screen use be a positive factor for your spiritual life?

_____
_____
_____

Read Romans 12:1–2.

Paul tells Christians that their life should be characterized by a couple of things. First, the goal of our life should be to worship God with it. Second, in verse 2, our lives should not look the same as those around us who are not Christians. Third, Christians should continually transform their minds by renewing them daily. I know that sounds a bit out there, so let us break it down.

Colossians 3:1-3 gives us a picture of what it means to renew your mind. Read it as a group.

Paul knows that forces in our culture, people in our lives, and events in our world collectively seek to form our character and influence our behavior.

7. What do you think it can look like to offer yourself to God as a ***"holy and pleasing sacrifice"***?

_____
_____
_____

8. What possible influence could our screens have in determining if we move toward worldliness or holiness? What actions could we take to purposely move toward holiness?

_____
_____
_____

9. In what ways can we determine, or test, if our screens are helping renew our minds according to God's will or if they are conforming us to the world?

_____
_____
_____

10. What are some practical ways you can measure the effect your screen time is having on you? What steps can you take to limit any negative effects you see in yourself due to your digital habits?

_____
_____
_____

Screens are here to stay. We cannot bypass or ignore them, so we must decide how to use them rather than allowing them to form us.

God has given us a way to know His good, pleasing, and perfect will, and it happens when we renew our minds.

11. Consider what you think about most often. Who are the people, and what are the topics and events that crowd your head all day long? Have you made room for God's Word?

_____
_____
_____

There is a biblical principle called sabbatical. It comes from the concept of Sabbath rest, where God commanded His people to take intentional breaks. It was either resting on the seventh day (Exodus 20:8-11) or letting the land rest every seven years (Leviticus 25:1-7). The purpose was to trust God, renew their faith, and reset their priorities.

When was the last time you took a real break from screens? Is your technology serving as a distraction to the important things God has called you to?

We each have a choice to make. Will you use technology and screens as a tool to points you toward God, or will you let it be a distraction?

NOTES



WHAT IS LOVE?

ZACH HONNEN

We have many opinions or assumptions about what love is. If you grew up watching Disney films, you may think love is an extreme emotion you cannot control that happens the moment you meet somebody. If you are into Hallmark movies, it is something that builds over time. In Hallmark movies, love is covered by resentment in the beginning, but then builds to a moment of complete and total adoration. According to Hollywood, love is something we cannot control. It is the arrow that Cupid strikes us with. Clearly, it is conveyed as an overwhelming feeling. Yet, is that really what love is? Should we buy into the assumptions and advice of our culture on what love is? Or should we dismiss what our culture says? Let us look past what social media, movies, and Hollywood say love is and dive deep into what God's Word says love is. Before we can understand our biblical text, we need to start by understanding what our personal idea of love is. Please realize that love is far more than just an emotion, but it is not less than an emotion.

1. In your own words, how would you define love?

_____
_____
_____

2. What is the most loving thing someone has done for you, or what is the most loving thing you have done for someone else?

_____
_____
_____

3. Is there a difference between love and like? If so, how would you describe the difference?

_____
_____
_____

Before we jump into a text, I want to define the word love. The word love we see used in today's text is the word agape in Greek. This type of love is defined as unconditional, sacrificial, and selfless.

In Romans 12:9-10, Paul writes, ***"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."***

Again, to understand our text, we must know what love is. Voddie Baucham, in his series on love and marriage, says, "Love is an act of the will, accompanied by emotion, that leads to action on behalf of its object." This unconditional love that we are commanded to have toward one another is not an unconditional feeling. It is not a place of tranquility. It is a resolution to an action. I can say I love someone, but if my actions do not line up with my words, I do not truly love them.

So, when Paul says, ***"Let love be genuine,"*** he is not trying to communicate that we must have this overwhelming feeling. Paul is not saying that you and I need to be overcome with this deep, emotional feeling for one another. Paul is echoing what John says in 1 John 3:18, ***"Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."***

4. In your own words, what does genuine love look like? (Maybe think in regards to friends, family, or church.)

_____
_____
_____

5. What would love that was not genuine look like?

_____
_____
_____

6. Contemplate these questions in your own mind. Do you love people? Are you characterized as someone who loves in deed and truth?

_____
_____
_____

There is a movie that I believe demonstrates the kind of unconditional love that Paul talks about. It is called *"Fireproof."* It is about a husband and a wife who are at odds with each other and are heading toward divorce. The husband's father decides to reach out to his son and offer him some unsolicited advice. His dad gives his son a 40-day challenge to love his wife. It involves one new task ("love dare") every day. These tasks consisted of calling his wife to ask her how she was doing, buying her flowers, doing the dishes, and many other small sacrifices of love. What is interesting about this movie is that over the course of the 40-day challenge, the husband begins to truly love his wife again. At the beginning of this challenge, this "love dare," or small act of love, felt robotic to the husband and was void of emotion, but the more he exercised love towards his wife through actions, the more he began to experience true feelings of love and affection for his wife. There are two things I want us to recognize from this. First, it is not always easy to love genuinely, but with God, nothing is impossible. Second, the more we live the way He calls us to live, the more natural it becomes.

7. What are some ways that you can exercise love toward your family, friends, or the church?

_____
_____
_____

8. Have you ever thought of praying for those whom you struggle to love?

_____
_____
_____

The text says that we should ***"love one another with brotherly affection,"*** and ***"outdo one another"*** with ***"honor."*** Is that something that you think about? Oftentimes, we can get caught up trying to outdo one another in different things. I personally am very competitive. In high school, I would try to outdo anybody and everybody at anything. It did not matter if it was sports, school, or

whatever. I wanted to be the best. However, there was one area in which I did not try to outdo others, humility in honoring other people. I did not really care about those things. So, my questions for you are, “Do you care about those things? Do you see each day as an opportunity to try and love people more and more?”

So, now that we understand the command Paul gave us, we understand what God desires for us to do and how He desires for us to live.

9. Why should we love one another genuinely? Why should we try to outdo one another in honor?

_____
_____
_____

There are several Bible verses I would like you to look up and read to find the answer. Take time to discuss each verse and make your own assessments.

- ***“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”*** 1 John 4:7-8

- ***“We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”*** 1 John 4:19-21

- ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*** John 13:34-35

- ***"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."*** John 15:13

If I am a Christian and I know Jesus as my Savior, then I should walk in the same way Jesus walked. Jesus walked in love, not flattery or crazy, infatuated emotion. It was and is genuine love. This kind of love is perfect and it is also a choice. Jesus chose to love you and me when He died on the cross. As we have learned this year, ***"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life"*** (Romans 6:23). We are able to receive that free gift because of what Jesus did for us by dying on the cross and rising again. Jesus demonstrated the greatest act of love in history, and we are called to do the same according to John chapter 13. We are commanded to love. So, my question for us this week as we reflect on the love Jesus has shown us through the cross and as we let that love pour into us is, "Will we then genuinely pour Jesus' love out onto others or will we try to be fake and pretend that we care and pretend that we love people when in reality we do not?"

If you find yourself in a place where you are struggling to love others, I would ask you to talk to your leaders so they can help you find an answer for why you are not loving people the way Christ calls you to. I do not know your situation, but I know that when we truly understand the love of Christ, we cannot help but love other people. It is not easy, but it is simple. It is straightforward but extremely difficult, and that is why we need Christ to guide us and lead us in this "love dare" every day. Somewhere, I heard it put like this, "You will never look into the eyes of someone God does not love. Always be kind."

10. What is one step that you can take in your walk with Christ to live out the "love dare"? How can you love those people around you genuinely? (Think of the smallest step.)

_____

_____

_____

In closing, I would encourage you to pray for each other. Praying for a brother or a sister is an act of love, and I would encourage you to pray for each other throughout the week, demonstrating God's love to those around you.

John MacArthur wrote, "We cannot exercise love unless we are experiencing grace. You cannot truly love others unless you are convinced that God's love for you is unconditional, based solely on the merit of Christ, not on your performance."

NOTES



ZEAL AND FERVENT IN PRAYER

CHRIS MONTVILLE

When I am excited about something, it is hard for me to think about anything else. All I want to do is to do that one thing or be in that one place. A close personal mentor of mine lives in Dallas, Texas. A few years ago, I was going to visit him. As the trip approached, all I could think about was getting to see him and getting to spend the weekend hanging out. I rarely get to see him in person, so any time I do, I am super excited to get a hug from him and have some quality time talking about life. For other people, they might get excited about things like a new video game coming out or getting to summer break.

1. What is something that you get so excited about that you have a hard time thinking about anything else?

_____
_____
_____

We have been in a series talking about the marks of a true Christian. In our verses last week, Paul talked about how our love should be genuine. Let us see the next characteristic we should have:

Romans 12:11 says, ***"Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord."*** I want to start by defining some of these words we don't hear used in our culture very often so we can better understand the passage:

2. What is ***"zeal"***?

_____
_____
_____

3. What does ***"fervent"*** mean?

_____
_____
_____

The idea we get in this passage from these two words is to basically not be lazy. We should be intentional in our service to the Lord and serve Him with our whole hearts. We should not be lazy in the love that we show for each other. We should have a love for each other, and for God that is so different, people will recognize it! Jesus says this in John 13:34-35, ***"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."***

Now that we know we should have zeal and not be lazy for the Lord, what does that actually mean we should be doing? For starters, we know we are called to serve. That is a word that gets thrown around in church a lot.

4. What does it mean to serve the Lord? What does it look like?

_____
_____
_____

We are called to lay down our lives to serve our church family and also the world around us. This can be as simple as donating our time to run a soundboard behind the scenes, giving our time to pour into the lives of others, or a lot of things in between! There is no limit to what serving can look like. However, serving can also be difficult, and it is not always convenient.

5. Have you ever felt like the effort you put into something was in vain?

_____
_____
_____

Sometimes, in our service, it can feel like the work we are putting in is not worth the effort. It can feel like we put in a lot of work just for it to not really matter. Paul even tells us that his service often resulted

in tears (Acts 20:19). However, the Bible tells us that our effort is never in vain.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:58 and Colossians 3:23-24.

The Lord sees everything you do, and even when you do not see fruit from things immediately, or you feel discouraged or unrecognized, God sees all and promises to reward all. That is a great promise to hold on to!

Not only does the Bible tell us that our efforts are not in vain, but it also calls us to a higher standard. This idea of having zeal and being fervent in your work would not have been a new idea for first-century Jewish Christians.

Read Proverbs 6:6-11.

6. Are you excited to serve, or is it a chore for you?

_____
_____
_____

7. Would you say you serve with ***"zeal,"*** or do you just serve when your family forces you to?

_____
_____
_____

We should constantly check our hearts while serving. It can easily become something we are bitter toward doing or that we do begrudgingly. We should always be serving with a cheerful heart, remembering why we get to serve in the first place, which is because Jesus saved us from our former sinful life and welcomed us into His eternal Kingdom. That is always something worth celebrating, and our serving is always for the building of that Kingdom, but we can often lose sight of that.

I want to wrap up by talking about one other area of serving those around us that may have come up earlier in your discussion. It is sharing our faith. Our verse in Romans chapter 12 that we have been discussing has a cross-reference to Acts chapter 18, where we read about a man named Apollos.

Read Acts 18:24-28.

8. How do we know that Apollos had ***"zeal"*** and was ***"fervent in spirit"***?

_____
_____
_____

9. Are you as excited to talk about Christ as Apollos was? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____

Tim Mackie once gave a sermon on sharing our faith, and he used an example of a Mexican restaurant near him that he absolutely loved. He began to describe all the quirks and details of the restaurant, even describing the waiting line as being part of the experience!

10. What is something or somewhere that you are passionate about and get excited to talk about?

_____
_____
_____

11. Do you have that same zeal and passion when talking about Jesus with people? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____

We have a world full of people who do not know the Lord. They are currently destined for an eternity separated from Him. People need to know the reason Jesus came to this Earth and the reality that without His sacrifice, there is no way to God the Father. If we truly believe this, this should be the most passionate thing we can talk about. What the world's opinion of us is should not impact the reality that people's eternity is at stake, and it should not stop us from recognizing the love that Jesus has shown us by dying on the cross for us so that we may be saved. Let us consider that as we go through this week and think about the next time we have an opportunity to speak boldly about Christ to someone.

NOTES



HOPE, PATIENT, PRAYER

PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

When I think of hope, the first thing that comes to my mind is working on the first truck I ever owned when I was 17 years old and in high school. For Christmas that year, my dad bought me a short bed, single cab, red F-150. It was old and janky, and I absolutely loved it. My dad bought it that year for a very low price, with the idea that this thing would drive, but I would have to put some work into it. The truck was awesome and drove very well until it did not a few months later. My friends, who knew much more about cars than myself, helped me work on the truck. We would replace parts, sensors, fuses, and basically everything that we could think of. Every time we would put a new part into it, I would go sit behind the wheel, pause before I tried starting it up, and say to myself, "I hope this works." Unfortunately, it never did. That short bed, single cab, red F-150 only lasted a few months, but I will never forget those memories.

1. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of hope? Do you have any funny stories of things you hoped would happen?

_____
_____
_____

Read Romans 12:12.

We are going to be looking at three marks of a true believer that are mentioned here in verse 12. The first one that I want you to talk through is ***"hope."*** Now, the hope that we are going to talk about is different from the funny story I just shared. I think it is important for us to define what hope means biblically so that we can live out what Paul is describing in the first part of this verse. Read these few verses to help you get a definition of what biblical hope is:

- ***"For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."*** Romans 8:24-25

- ***"And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."*** Romans 5:5

- ***"And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you."*** Psalm 39:7

2. Define in your own words what you think hope means.

_____
_____
_____

This sets us up to understand the rest of this verse. ***"Rejoice in hope,"*** is the first thing Paul is telling us to do. It is about more than just having hope but rather rejoicing in hope. The reason Paul adds this little addition is that it is not always going to be easy to have hope, especially when it is for something that we do not see. At times, you will experience struggles, hardships, persecution, or bullying for your faith. We are told to always be rejoicing in hope so that we can sustain through those trials. We may not be able to see what we are hoping for at the moment, but we can have joy in knowing that what we hope for is more real and true than anything else in the world.

3. What are things that cause you to rejoice?

_____
_____
_____

4. How can we have the same reaction towards these things as we do in our hope?

_____
_____
_____

What flows from rejoicing in hope is being ***"patient in tribulation."*** As I said about hope, we are going to experience tribulation. This

is not just like getting a little scratch on our hands. What Paul is talking about here are big storms, trials, and struggles in this life. Whether it is a sickness, being talked down to because of our faith, or something like that, we are told that these are things we are going to go through. In order to be patient during those times, we must first be rejoicing in hope. Being patient through our tribulations means that we remain firm on the foundation of Jesus Christ's love for us. Jesus gives us a picture of what being in tribulation looks like in Matthew 7:24-25, ***"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock."***

5. Would you consider yourself a patient person?

_____
_____
_____

6. When are times that you find it hard to be patient?

_____
_____
_____

7. Has there been a time when you were patient during a hard time in life, and you saw God work it all out for good? Share that story.

_____
_____
_____

The last part of this verse is the one that many of us know we should do but probably struggle with. It is being ***"constant in prayer."*** This is more than just praying before you go to bed or before you eat meals. Being constant in prayer is about regularly taking your anxieties to God, talking to Him about what you struggle with, and seeking His guidance and wisdom when you do not know what to

do. It may seem like the easy Christian answer, but it is our greatest tool when it comes to sustaining our walk with Christ.

8. Is it hard for you to remember to pray? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____

9. What makes you believe that prayer actually helps you?

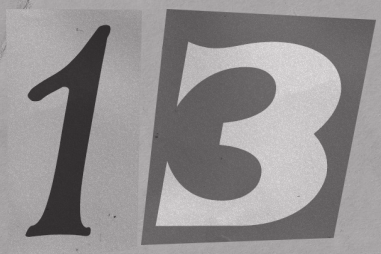
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"Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." It is important to understand that these are not just three different marks of a true believer; they all go hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other. My encouragement to you is to keep rejoicing in the hope you have in Christ because it will help you to be patient and trust in God when hard times come. Then, through all of it, go to your Heavenly Father in prayer because that is where you will find the strength to ***"rejoice in hope"*** and to be ***"patient in tribulation."***

10. Take a moment with your group and share which of these three things (hope, patience, and prayer) that you struggle the most with. Write out ways that your group can help each other with those struggles.

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NOTES



LOVE CARES

PASTOR GARY WRIGHT

Several years ago, I had a pastor friend, Roger, and his wife, Wendy, come up from Ohio to speak at my church. After we were finished at church, my wife and I took them out to dinner. As we were getting out of the car at the restaurant, a young man came up to us and asked for money so he could put gas in his truck. I honestly would have just told him, “No,” and went on my way. Roger, however, had a different idea. Roger had the young man meet us across the street at a gas station, and he put some gas in the guy’s truck. Then Roger bought him a meal at Burger King. Roger used this opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus with him. I am not telling you this story so you will go help every person who asks you for money. Truthfully, we need to be very careful in situations like this. The reason I am telling you this story is because I saw the love of God in action through Roger that night. I learned that love cares.

1. Have you ever had the opportunity to help someone in need? What did that look like?

_____
_____
_____

2. How did it make you feel to be able to help?

_____
_____
_____

A couple of weeks ago, we learned about love.

3. Just for a review, what is love (agape)?

_____
_____
_____

4. Where does that kind of love come from?

_____
_____
_____

Read Romans 5:5, ***"And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."***

Over the past couple of weeks, we have been talking about the marks of a true believer. In other words, it is the actions that we see in our lives when we truly believe in Jesus. Love is one of the actions that we should see. When we are true believers, love will show up in how we care for others. Paul says it like this in Romans 12:13, ***"Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality."***

5. When we are true believers, what are the two ways that Paul says our love cares for others?

_____
_____
_____

6. What does contribute mean? What are the needs? Who are the saints?

_____
_____
_____

7. What does Paul mean when he says, ***"Contribute to the needs of the saints"***?

_____
_____
_____

In the book of Acts, there is a great example of how the early church "contributed ***"to the needs of the saints."*** Read Acts 2:45-46, ***"And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts."***

8. What examples do you see in this passage that ***"contributes to the needs of the saints"***?

_____
_____
_____

Paul continues in Romans 12:13 and says true believers should ***"seek to show hospitality."***

The literal meaning of hospitality is "the love of strangers." We are to meet the needs of not only fellow believers, but also unbelievers.

9. When you hear the word seek, what comes to mind?

_____
_____
_____

10. What does Paul mean when he says to seek to show hospitality?

_____
_____
_____

Read Genesis 18:1-8.

11. How does Abraham show hospitality to the three strangers?

_____
_____
_____

Read Hebrews 13:2, ***"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."***

12. Who might we show hospitality to by accident, according to Hebrews 13:2?

_____
_____
_____

Read 1 Peter 4:9, ***"Show hospitality to one another without grumbling."***

13. What should our attitude be when it comes to showing hospitality to others?

_____
_____
_____

Read 2 Corinthians 8:9, ***"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."***

14. How did Jesus show us hospitality?

_____
_____
_____

15. What are some ways you can ***"contribute to the needs of the saints"***?

_____
_____
_____

16. What are some ways you can ***"seek to show hospitality?"***

_____
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_____

Galatians 6:10 says, ***"So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."***

NOTES

A NOTE FROM PASTOR RYAN

When I was in high school, the guy I sat next to in my homeroom asked me if I believed in Jesus, and he began to explain the basics of the Gospel. I scoffed, mocked, and insulted him. In reality, I was hurt, lost, and defensive. I have looked back on this moment and realized a few things.

1. God is always working.
2. Faith in Jesus is so courageous to live out.

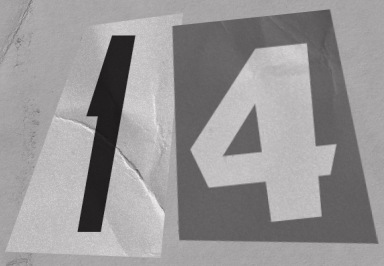
The third truth has been a truth I have been unpacking for a few years. The reality is that the relationships we have here on Earth are capable of influencing our view of God. I do not want to get lost in the weeds, but at that moment in high school, I was so angry at the way my life was heading. For years, I wanted to blame my life on my upbringing, but the more I have grown, the more I have come to realize that even if my upbringing was perfect, my own desires, rebellion, and need for self-rule would have caused just as much friction with others. The moment my friend told me about the love Jesus had for me, I was so angry at people (and myself) that I could not fathom the type of love that Jesus had for me. Since I was so blinded by the hurt I had experienced in my life, I was incapable of seeing God at that moment in my life.

3. A vertical relationship with God impacts a horizontal relationship with others. In the same right, horizontal relationships with others impact our vertical relationship with God.

Over the next three weeks, we are going to be looking at the marks of a true believer but focusing on how a believer should interact with the world around them.

My prayer for every leader, student, and, hopefully, parent who reads these lessons is able to take any hurt, disappointment, letdowns, and unforgiveness to the cross in order to worship Jesus more fully.

Pastor Ryan Story



STARTS WITH YOU

PASTOR RYAN STORY

I have four amazing kids. I love watching them grow up. Watching them go from little guys and a little lady to individuals who have thoughts, desires, passions, tendencies, and personalities is such a blessing. One aspect that fascinates me is watching the sibling dynamic. I have seen my kids be the best of friends, and I have watched them be the worst of rivals. One truth I go back to very frequently with them in the midst of tension, turmoil, and tattling is the idea, "You are only able to control yourself." That response is generally met with, "But, they…" I always remind them, "It starts with you."

It is very important to understand that God has blessed you with free will. You can make choices. Sometimes, those choices are bad, sometimes right, and sometimes, we do not see the gravity of a decision until later in life. With our focus being on how we interact with others, it may seem like an odd place to start with looking at yourself. However, we must look inward first before we focus on people or circumstances that are out of our control. In Romans chapter 12, God is directing Paul's pen to record the marks of a true Christian. Tonight, we will be looking at seven "starts with you" traits that only come from resting in your relationship with Jesus.

Romans 12:14-16 says, ***"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight."***

The seven "starts with you" traits are:

- Bless those who persecute you.
- Do not curse them.
- Rejoice with those who rejoice.
- Weep with those who weep.
- Live in harmony with one another.
- Do not be haughty.
- Never be wise in your own sight.

1. From this list, what trait do you feel you are able to live out, and what trait do you struggle with the most?

_____
_____
_____

I. Hurt people, hurt people.

2. What does God's Word mean when it says, ***"Bless those who persecute you"***?

_____
_____
_____

3. What does it look like when you ***"curse"*** someone who hurts you?

_____
_____
_____

"It starts with you" is such a hard truth to walk out. The reality in life is that people will hurt you. Sadly, this can be purposefully or unintentionally. While it can be easy to always think that we are the ones always getting hurt, the truth is that we hurt people as well. The toxin of sin is in all of humanity, and sin brings pain. Since everyone is sinful, everyone has the capability to hurt. God's Word tells us that we, as followers of Christ, should not respond in the same manner.

4. How did Jesus bless hurting people?

_____
_____
_____

II. Be others focused.

I have learned this lesson the hard way. Hurt can drive you to isolate yourself. Sin's ultimate ramification was the separation from God. If

sin causes us to be separated from the One who loves us more than we can comprehend, then the effects of sin are also seen in how we interact with others. Sadly, when a person hurts us, it causes us to close off to those who have never done a thing to us. “It starts with you” because if you see someone hurting, you should have a heart that breaks for that person in the same way that Jesus did for all who rejected and refused to believe in Him. Three of the seven “starts with you” traits are others-focused. We are called to weep, celebrate, and live peacefully with those around us. Do not let hurt take away your passion to love people like Jesus.

5. Why can past hurt cause us to be less trusting in the future?

_____
_____
_____

6. Why does God’s Word tell us to be with people in triumph and tragedy?

_____
_____
_____

7. Where is it easiest to live in harmony with others? Where is it most difficult?

_____
_____
_____

III. You reflect what you worship.

“Starting with you” is so crucial because before we walk through how to forgive and navigate relationships, we have to take a look at our hearts. One of the sad realities I have witnessed in life is the inability of people to admit that they might be wrong. I see it with myself more often than I care to count. Sadly, at the root of a person who cannot give in to the idea that they might be wrong is the worship of oneself. I have come to realize that self-worship is not a neon sign that can

be spotted from miles away. Self-worship is subtle. Self-worship could be found in not associating with those who are less than you. (I am not condoning or giving a license to hang out with people and allowing them to influence your walk with Jesus in a negative way.) Jesus' heart was fully worshiping His Father at every moment. Our worship dictates how we interact with others. Sadly, when we put ourselves at the center of the universe and think we are rulers and standards of goodness in this world, we are in a dangerous place. People who are into self-worship interact with others in a way that is cold, cliquish, and self-serving. Their favorite worship lyrics include the personal pronouns of me, my, and I.

8. How does worshiping Jesus allow us to love others more like Christ?

_____
_____
_____

9. Why do we have to start with our worship of Jesus before we start focusing on how we interact with others?

_____
_____
_____

NOTES



LET GOD

PASTOR RYAN STORY

This week may be a sensitive topic for someone. While I may not know exactly what you are dealing with, know that I have prayed for you.

We talked last week about how "hurt people, hurt people." You may be that person who has been hurt. I was that person for many years. I was hurt. Sadly, because I did not know what to do, I kept hurting myself because I did not work that hurt out with God. Eventually, when Jesus saved my soul, I was shown the truths we are going through today, and Christ began to fix my broken heart.

Romans 12:17-19 says, ***"Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"***

1. What sticks out to you about the verses above?

_____
_____
_____

When navigating through the hurt of my life, the hard truth I had to learn was that I was not God. Now, that seems like a "duh" statement, but for many of us, when we have been hurt, we feel like we have to avenge our hurt.

I. Repay nothing.

2. Why can the truth, ***"Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all,"*** be a hard verse to live out?

_____
_____
_____

3. Have you ever been hurt and retaliated? Did it make the situation better or worse? Why?

_____
_____
_____

Stay with me. We have to start with this truth and add to it. God's Word tells us not to do evil when evil has been done to us. Have you ever read Joseph's Bible narrative? Joseph's brothers despised him, a bit because they were jealous and a bit because Joseph was not always the quietest about being the favorite. Joseph's brothers threw him in a pit, and eventually, this led to Joseph being in an Egyptian jail. Even in all of that, Joseph knows God well enough to say, ***"You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good"*** (Genesis 50:20). I would never say that evil is good, nor does God. Hurt is hurt, and bad is bad. However, it starts with you.

II. God makes boundaries.

One of the greatest truths that I was ever taught was that a Christian is not meant to be a doormat. This means that while you may not be able to control what others do, you do not have to put yourself around people, emotionally or physically, who continually hurt you. God established boundaries between space and the Earth, and boundaries of the sea to the land. He set boundaries on what is ***"good."*** God's Word gives us words to discern situations, ***"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."*** This is a complex verse to walk through, especially for a student.

4. When should you set a boundary with someone?

_____
_____
_____

III. Trust God to be God.

Romans 12:19 says, ***"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"***

Anytime you read the word ***"beloved"*** in the Bible, take a second to realize its emotional magnitude. Not only is Paul writing this with great love for those in the church of Rome, but it is our God Himself directing that pen and the emotion. The above verse is not made with a tone of anger; this statement is made with a heart of care and love. Paul is pleading, and God is instructing Paul's pen to see that God is with those who are hurting. As a father, I feel the words of our Heavenly Father lovingly telling His children, "I will take care of this."

5. Why is it hard to trust that God will ***"repay"*** all the wrong that you have experienced?

_____
_____
_____

6. What is God's wrath? How was that paid?

_____
_____
_____

People have hurt you. People will hurt you in the future. You have hurt people in the past and most likely will do so in the future. However, when we stop allowing God to be God, we are inadvertently telling God we are more capable of dealing out punishments than He is. Sadly, when we are hurt, it sometimes blinds us to the reality that the person who hurt us is super far from Christ. We have to live in a manner that allows us to be so trusting of Christ that we do not try to remove Him from being God.

NOTES



ANGRY BIRDS

PASTOR RYAN STORY

I cannot recall where I heard this, but it was in a sermon I listened to years ago. The preacher said that not forgiving makes you an Angry Bird. Now, time is showing me that I am older than I realize, but *"Angry Birds"* is a game in which some pigs stole eggs from birds. The birds' solution was to make a slingshot and hurl themselves into walls to destroy the pigs and get the eggs back. I get the protection aspect of being a parent, but the illustration holds true. If you have an unforgiving heart, you are not hurting the person who hurt you; you are hurting yourself.

This week, we are having a lesson with fewer questions and more worship. Each River Student Director will be taking time to walk you through some praying prompts provided below.

Romans 12:20-21 says, ***"To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."***

I. Do not let hurt stop you from seeing Jesus.

We live in a fallen world. Hurt will happen. That hurt comes because sin has entered this world. We praise God for sending His son, Jesus, to die on the cross to rescue all those who put their faith in Him and His saving work by dying for the world. That love is meant to be shown to all, even those who are hurt. Reminder: you hurt people sometimes, too, and I bet you like to see the love of Christ as well.

Take some time to praise God for the love He has for you.

- Take some time in prayer to ask God to reveal any areas of your life that are hindering you from being able to walk closer to Him.

- Pray to God for opportunities to be used as His ambassador for His Kingdom.

II. Attitude is everything.

In 2 Corinthians 5:14, Paul says, ***"For the love of Christ controls us."***

In a broken world, it starts with those who know Christ as Lord and Savior to show His goodness and power. If you scoffed a bit, I feel you. The reality is I do not always feel that I want to as well. Inside of us is a sinful heart that wants nothing more than to do its own thing. Sadly, that sinful desire is not what is best for us. We must have a heart posture of worship. Our worship reflects what is in our hearts.

- Pray to God to give Him permission to allow His love to be the controlling force in your life.

- Pray to God for forgiveness for the times we wish to make life about ourselves.

- Ask God to fill your heart with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Take some time here and ask God to help you with each one.

III. Act like the cross is a reality in your life.

Jesus loves you. He loves you so much that He took on a cross and died for you to live. Take a second to reflect on each of these statements.

- There is nothing I can do to make God love me more.
- There is nothing I can do to make God love me less.
- There is someone who loves me more than me.
- I worship the God who created me.
- I worship the God who loves and knows me.

As a Growth Community tonight, take some time to pray. This can be done as a group or as individuals.

NOTES

OUR VISION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, "We don't go to church, we are the Church." We believe that as God's people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

The goal of weekend gatherings at The River Church is to glorify Christ in all we do! Whether it be through singing, giving, serving, or any of the variety of ways He has gifted us and called us together, Jesus is at the center of it all. We celebrate that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it's not only a refresher, it brings life-change!

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***"all things in common."*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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