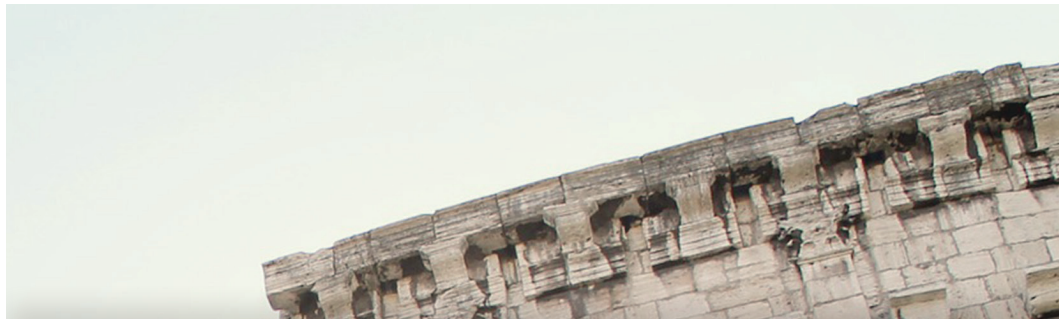




SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOK OF
ROMANS

30 Day Devotional



foundations
daily devotional

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ROMANS

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DAY 1**READ:** Romans 1:1-17

As we enter the book of Romans Paul sets the stage for the entire book by magnifying Jesus. It's *really* ALL about Jesus – the book of Romans and our Christian walk. Since it's easy to lose sight of the greatness and central place of Jesus, Paul starts here. As he does, he emphasizes that Jesus is both man (“as to his human nature” v. 3) and God (“was declared with power to be the Son of God” v.4). In many churches the true identity Jesus is under attack. All that follows in the book of Romans – salvation through faith in Christ – hinges on recognizing that Jesus is both God and man. We do well to worship and follow Him based on who He really is! We need to stand up for Him when others question that He is God! We need to have this boldness.

Paul then highlights that we are called to obedience! (v. 5) Salvation *should* lead us to obedience. Faith is vital in salvation, yes, but the purpose is to bring us to a place where we obey God. Romans spends the first 11 chapters describing the power and beauty of the gospel, then the final five chapters speak of specific obedience. Practically, this means that our daily walks with Jesus should involve much thinking and praying about obedience. Further, as we interact with other believers, we need to encourage them towards and support them in their own obedience. What a vision this is for our lives! The “success” of our families, churches, region and country is dependent on this obedience.

Of course, Paul's pleas and writing is not without emotion. He's passionate about the people and places he writes about in his books. Verses 8-17 display this clearly. We should be passionate, similarly, about the people we know. This is the way of God's people! *However*, and this an important key – our passion for people or specific places should not cause us to lose sight of the most vital thing. What is this? Well, Paul declares, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . .” (v. 16) The gospel about Jesus – yes, Jesus – is so glorious that we need to be consumed by bringing this to people and places.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Spend some time magnifying Jesus for who He really is! Worship Him as the worthy God-man. We may not understand all the implications of who He is, but He is Saviour, Lord, Gracious, Truth and the Word. Worship Him!
2. Our salvation should lead to obedience. Ask God to prepare your heart to make adjustments as you read through Romans. Pray for a soft heart. Then pray through your circles of influence, that they too would have soft hearts, ready to obey God.
3. Paul was passionate about people. Look at the people in your life, and ask this question in prayer – do I care about those who have not accepted the gospel? Is this a primary concern in my life? Am I more concerned about enjoying people and places, then about their salvation?

DAY 2**READ:** Romans 1:18-32

This next section starts with a very serious thought. It speaks of God's wrath being revealed from heaven against godlessness (v. 18). The reason? Because people suppress truth by their wickedness! We need to realize that the denial of truth is *driven* by the desire to be selfish and wicked. More often than not we sin and struggle with unbelief

because we want to go our own way, not because God hasn't displayed His goodness. God's response is to show His wrath. His wrath is not who He is, but His actions brought about by His Holiness and Love. That's an important difference! God does not equal wrath but when His ways are blatantly disregarded He will pour out consequences. This wrath doesn't just come in the end. It comes now as well! God is active now! An example is found right in Chapter 1, in v. 26. "Because of this . . ." – that is, because of their wickedness, "God gave them over to shameful lusts." A part of God's wrath is God letting us have our way by withdrawing His Hand from our lives. Normally, God resists our attempts to be completely self-centered. However, there's a point where He pulls back. This is scary, isn't it?

Some might object to this by arguing, "but how was I supposed to know about Him?" Paul points out that they have no excuse due to the reality that creation points to Him (v. 20). Their thinking had "become futile" (v. 21). It's fascinating that a part of walking apart from God relates to poor thinking and the desire for wicked things. We must guard against these things in our own lives. This is one reason why we have the Scriptures and the beauty/complexity of creation – it sharpens our thinking.

The Scriptures also have lists that describe wickedness. There's safety in lists! Verses 29-31 includes one. By placing our lives under examination in light of such verses, we can know if we're self-deceived or giving ourselves over to anything that can incur the wrath of God. For sure, God is patient! Also, none of us are perfect. However, we need to be diligent in watching our lives. This is one of the reasons Paul is writing such things – to keep believers alert.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. If you clearly belong to Jesus, thank Him for sparing you from the wrath to come. Also thank Him for the consequences that He initiates in order to urge ourselves and others to turn. Even His wrath is connected to His love!
2. Creation is known as a "natural miracle." Spend some time in creation today, even if only looking out a window. Ask to speak to you about what creation says about Him. Then worship Him in response! This is a huge part of not allowing our thinking to become futile.
3. Work through verses 29-31. Ask God to reveal to you any wickedness in your life. Confess it to him, and if need be (if you have no sense of peace or forgiveness), confess it to others. Let's take this seriously!

DAY 3



READ: Romans 2:1-16

The apostle Paul concluded the first chapter of Romans by clearly noting obvious acts of wickedness. He begins Chapter 2 by calling God's people to repentance. It's always so easy to see the fault of others, but Paul makes it clear that we need to look carefully at our own lives. God knows the truth of where we're at, or in Paul's words, "now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth" (v. 2). We might as well repent, because our acts of sin cannot be hidden. And what is our motive for such repentance? God's kindness. In fact, Paul labels our unwillingness to repent as, "contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience . . ." (v. 4). Such *incredible* kindness should propel us towards repentance! If we are stubborn and harden ourselves to the call to repent, we are then in danger of the wrath of God, according to verses five and six.

Rather than live by wickedness we're clearly called to a life of doing good. In fact, listen to how Paul states it, "To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life" (v. 7). What does it mean to "do good?" The one who desires to know this, who is hungry for God, will spend much time in the Scriptures and in prayer in seeking to get God's heart on this matter. This life of "doing good" is clearly contrasted with the life of "self-seeking" (v. 8) to which many in the world commit.

Finally, Paul revisits the idea of obedience in the remainder of Chapter 2. He encourages people to think about the demand to not only hear the law, but obey it (v. 13). It is easy to hear and feel justified by our hearing. But this isn't enough. There must be action. And what about those who have not heard the law? They too will have little excuse, due to the reality that even the consciences of men, women and children testify to the difference between right and wrong (vv. 14-15). For sure the consciences of people are seared, but they still have a general idea. And before God one day, all of us will stand to have our secrets judged (v. 16).



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Journal about your past journey with repentance. Can you think of something you've overcome that took you a long time to repent of? Can you also think of something you did, but that you repented from quickly? Thank God for His kindness and patience!
2. Is your life full of doing good, or self-seeking? Ask God to reveal examples of both.
3. Ask God to remind you of an example of when your conscience clearly highlighted a right OR wrong. Praise Him for speaking through this God-given part of our soul! Then ask Him to make you sensitive to His promptings regarding obedience.

DAY 4



READ: Romans 2:17-29

Already in Romans Paul has stated plainly that obedience is of great importance. However, he continues on and begins an argument that will carry on for a few chapters. When we hear that obedience is vital, we may be tempted to "rely on the law" (v. 17), as the Jews did. Yet Paul begins to punch holes in this overreliance on obedience, or as some put it, "self-justification." It simply leads to judging others and endlessly trying to convince ourselves that we are of great pleasure to God. I think we've all made attempts to justify ourselves before God. We must regularly watch for this in our lives! Paul so strongly desires to get his point across that he challenges them on specific commands, such as stealing (vv. 21-24). Of course, he spends much time correcting the Jews, because they were the original receivers and keepers of the law. But again, we must watch for this in ALL of our lives.

So, if we cannot justify ourselves through the law, though obedience is important, how can we be saved? Verses 28-29 give a clear answer to this vital question. Salvation is not through perfect obedience to the law, or through religious acts such as circumcision. Instead, what is needed is a, "circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit." It is not enough to ask, "Am I doing this and that and am I avoiding this and that?" Rather, we should be asking, have I let God into my life to change my heart? This is the foundation of salvation – the work of God inside of us!

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Can you think of times when you've tried to justify yourself before God with religious zeal? Ask Him to show you where you're trying to impress him in a way that isn't necessary.
2. Spend some time recording how God has changed your heart. Ask Him to give you insights into what has changed over the years. Then praise Him for His Work.
3. Spend time in intercession, asking Him to work in the churches in Canada, convicting those who have attempted to justify themselves, but have not had their "hearts circumcised." Pray for a spirit of genuine renewal, rather than mere religion.

DAY 5**READ:** Romans 3

In Chapter 3 Paul relentlessly argues for something he brought up in chapter 2. Specifically, we cannot rely on the law to save us or make us right before God (righteous). Paul clarifies in verses 1-8 that this doesn't mean we can simply do what we want. Rather, he is emphasizing that, "there is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" (vv. 10-11). In fact, he quotes the Old Testament to support his argument. Whether Old Testament or New Testament believer, or current-day believer, it's not in our nature to seek God, and even if we do, we could never attain to the righteousness He expects.

So can anyone be made right with God? This is what the word "righteous" means! Our familiarity with the answer should never allow us to take for granted the magnificence of what God has done. We can be made righteous through faith! Or in Paul's words, "but now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace . . . (vv. 22-24). Praise God – it is FREE! It's not earned. We are justified – that is, declared right – because of the free gift of God. He also goes on to point out that the death of Jesus also relates to God's justice (vv. 25-26). Since a just God *has* to deal with sin, the sacrifice of Jesus accomplished much more than freeing us. This is something worth praising God for – He made a way!

Since Jesus did something we could not, we have no room for boasting (v. 27). Since the only thing we have to do is trust in Jesus (that is, have faith), we cannot take credit (v. 28). Too many Christians, though they're aware of their wickedness without God, take credit for their salvation. They act as if they have saved themselves. This diminishes what Jesus has done! And let's remember that His death was so *effective and powerful* that anyone can be saved through faith in Him, Jew OR Gentile (v. 29). Again, praise God!

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. It's important that we occasionally think about how wicked we are in deed AND thought – whether past or present. This "habit" gives us a great appreciation for what God has done. Spend some time recording your sinful tendencies, past and present. Then praise God for "making a way" to be saved.
2. Think about what it's like to receive a gift. Perhaps record 2 or 3 of your favorite gifts of all-time. Then ask God to show you the significance of the gift that you've received through faith in Him. Thank Him that this is an eternal gift!

3. Ask God to show you if you've taken credit for your salvation in any way. Have you boasted (even in your heart) that you contributed to your salvation, beyond saying "yes" to Him? If there's been any boasting, spend some time in confession.

DAY 6**READ:** Romans 4:1-8

In Chapter 3 Paul pointed to the gospel, this wonderful truth that we can be made righteous through faith in Christ! The word "faith" carries a lot of meaning and importance. What is a faith that leads to salvation? Put another way, what kind of faith is God looking for? This is the kind of faith we should seek to have! Thankfully, Paul makes it very clear by using Abraham as an example.

First, Abraham had a faith that was very specific. It "believed God" (v. 3). Faith isn't enough. It's faith in the God of the Bible. This is a very important distinction, because many in our world insist that it doesn't matter what you believe in, as long as you believe. This is not what Paul teaches at all! Abraham believed in Yahweh and even a quick reading of the Old Testament will show us that this God distinguished Himself from all other Gods. So we can say that God is looking for us to have a very specific faith in the One who is revealed in our Bibles.

Second, God desires a faith that doesn't trust in one's works, or good deeds. This is the kind of faith of Abraham, and as Paul points out, of David (vv. 5-6). Did God anticipate and expect that these great men would do good deeds? Of course! But were they perfect? No, far from it. And yet they were counted as God's people because of their faith. It is no different with us. We are expected to obey, as already discussed in Romans, but a faith that saves doesn't trust in these good deeds. Indeed, "blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him" (v. 8).

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. In today's entry, we are taking a look at the faith of Abraham. The Bible often uses the faith of a child as a way of understanding the faith God is looking for. What can we learn from the faith of a child?
2. Since a faith that saves is very specific (in the God of the Bible), pray for those in your circles of influence (co-workers, family members, neighbors) to understand who the true God is. Cry out to Jesus for them!
3. Spend some time thanking God for the reality that you don't have to work for your salvation. Not only is this impossible, but it would be terribly exhausting. Praise Him for this powerful reality – that we are saved not by our works.

DAY 7**READ:** Romans 4:9-25

Today we will carry on with our look at the faith of Abraham, a faith that leads us to salvation. A third quality of true faith is that it believes that God will apply the work of Christ to anyone. It is for both the circumcised or uncircumcised, says Paul (v. 9). And, may we add, it is for male or female, any race, any age, any person of any background. Praise God for His Love! Right from the beginning of God's initiation of the plan of redemption, He had the whole world in mind. If only we (and they) would place their faith in Him! Our society still has forms of racism and discrimination. As believers in Jesus Christ, we must

search our hearts and ask – would I withhold the gospel from anyone because I don't think they deserve it? We should let God search our hearts on this, for sure! Everyone deserves to hear of the great love of our God. Everyone.

A fourth quality of Abraham's faith, and the kind of faith we're to have, is that it chooses to be blind to circumstances (vv. 4:19-20). Abraham and his wife Sarah were very old when God spoke to them about His promise to make him into many nations. How could this be? At times, God calls us to trust Him even when we have no idea how God would fulfill His promise. This can be hard, but this *is* the kind of faith that God desires from His people. This may seem like blind faith, but it's far from it! In fact, it was Abraham's faith in the One who "had power to do what he had promised" (v. 21). For sure, our circumstances may not look hopeful, but with God on our side, faith is the expected response from God's people. It's this faith that results in "righteousness" being credited to our accounts (v. 23).



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Thank God that He is willing to save everyone! Find an atlas, or a map of the world online, and commit to praying for the salvation of people in 3 different countries. Pray that many would come to Christ, by putting their trust in Him for salvation. Pray that God would use whatever means necessary to save them.
2. Can you think of times where you trusted God, even though the circumstances looked very bad? Thank God for helping you through these times, and for growing your faith. Then ask God – is there anyone I know that could be encouraged by me sharing this story with them?
3. Ask God to give you a promise that you can put your faith in. Don't force it, but sometimes He desires to reveal more of His glory in our lives through specific promises and the eventual fulfillment of them.

DAY 8



READ: Romans 5:1-11

The book of Romans has a variety of ways to describe the results of our salvation. This is very important! We absolutely *need* to grasp the greatness of what God has done! What God has done is our *motivator for devoted lives*. It's also what results in deep and sustained worship. God deserves this glory! In this section of Romans, Paul speaks of us having "peace with God" (v. 1). What a stunning thought! We have peace with a Holy, Perfect God who hates sin. Wow! Wow! Wow! Separation from God is the greatest tragedy that a person can experience and so this peace is literally *priceless*. Paul highlights this same peace by noting that, "we have now received reconciliation" (v. 11). Have you ever been reconciled to someone? It's a wonderful experience! Tension and division cause much pain! Of course, we needed to be brought back together with God and this is accomplished by what Jesus did. We have peace with God. We've been reconciled! And this LOVE came to us while we were STILL sinners (v. 8).

These wonderful truths, however, should not cause us to think that life will be easy. This isn't a promise of the gospel at all! Paul reminds us that we will suffer, yet rather than promoting self-pity, he declares a couple things about our suffering. First, we can *rejoice* in our sufferings (v. 3). Do you rejoice in your sufferings? One of the ways we can measure our spiritual maturity is through the consideration of what we do with suffering. Do we complain? Do we turn to worldly comforts to deal with them? Or do we rejoice in them? We need God's help to become believers who have this kind of heart.

Second, Paul makes it clear that our suffering is *purposeful* (vv. 4-5). Look at what happens when we embrace our sufferings? We develop perseverance, character and hope! These are incredible qualities that carry us through much! And why hope? When we grow in maturity we gain great confidence for trials in this life and for that day when we'll stand before Jesus. On the other hand, if we *refuse* to grow in and through our sufferings we'll be on shaky ground indeed.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask God to show you the value of *peace and reconciliation*. Also think about our natural tendency to forgive someone AFTER they've apologized. God died for us while we were STILL sinners! Thank God for what He shows you about what He's done. We are created to praise Him!
2. Take a look at your past and present. How do you normally respond to suffering? Record good and not-so-good examples of responses. Also ask God to show you where you've grown in perseverance, character and hope through your sufferings.
3. Pray that God would make you strong so that you can face anything that the future holds. Also pray for a deeper understanding of what He has accomplished through Christ.

DAY 9



READ: Romans 5:12-21

Often we appreciate something more if we compare it to *what could have been or could be*. For example, a cold snap is more bearable if we realize that some face this kind of cold without proper shelter or clothing. More importantly, our appreciation for what God has done for us grows when we realize what He saved us from. In v. 12 we're told that the result of sin is death. No one loves the word "death" nor should they. Death is an enemy. We physically die because of sin and we also face spiritual death because of this same sin. We ALL face this penalty because "all sinned." And YET this horrible penalty is cancelled for those who have faith in Christ. Did you notice that word, "cancel"? Praise God! We would do well to regularly think about what God has saved us from!

Of course, not only are we saved from so much, but we're also GIVEN much. In v. 18 we're told that what Jesus did, "brings life for all men." One of the deepest desires of the human heart is to FEEL alive. This is possible through Jesus! It really is! Some believers struggle with this thought because they're not experiencing this life. Well we have to be bold here and speak the truth – in many cases it's because we've placed our hope in this world, not in Christ. To experience the forgiveness and life of Jesus involves much more than a lukewarm commitment. It requires wholeheartedness and the greatness of what God's done means that such commitment *isn't* too much to ask.

And when we walk with Jesus we experience more than just being ALIVE. We get all the help we need through His grace, as referred to in v. 21. This grace, when tapped into, will carry us right through this life into "eternal life." What a Wonderful God we have!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. How often do you think about what the consequences of sin are? This is an important habit that fuels gratitude. Spend time in confession if you sense that you're lacking in thanksgiving.

2. Do you experience the life of Jesus? Do you feel ALIVE in your relationship with God? If not, spend some time asking Him to show you where lukewarmness exists.
3. Spend some time thanking God that the life He offers is eternal for those who stay in Him. Pray for those who are wavering in their faith. Pray that God would show them His Love, Grace and Mercy.

DAY 10

 **READ:** Romans 6:1-14

We concluded the final day by noting the grace that is available to those who walk with Jesus. It's a *forgiving* grace and an *empowering* grace. Thank God for His help! Unfortunately, it's human nature (sin!) for people to take advantage of this grace. In Paul's day there obviously were people who thought that the grace of God provided the motivation and open door to keep sinning. We may look down on such people and hold judgment against them. But haven't we all done this? In fact, the reason that we don't always genuinely repent is connected to our cheapening of God's grace. Let's carefully consider Paul's words – "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? . . . just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (vv. 2-4).

A huge part of not taking God's grace for granted is to understand the *power* of what God has done for us. Can you imagine what power it takes to raise someone from the dead? The point behind vv. 5-10 is that this SAME power is ours, a power that *enables* us to live holy lives. Put another way, holiness IS possible! Or, in the words of Paul, "because anyone who has died has been freed from sin" (v. 7). They are freed because it doesn't end with death, but resurrection!

Does this mean that we just sit around and wait for God to make us holy? Not at all! In v. 11 we're commanded to count ourselves dead to sin. Living a holy life involves *making a choice*. Many continue to struggle with repetitive sin because they haven't decided *with their wills* to be done with sin. Yes, we still need God's help, but this choice is vital because He doesn't work against our wills. Holiness also requires us to *make an effort*, or as Romans says it, "do not let sin reign in your mortal body . . ." (v. 12). This effort will include getting inner healing, eliminating things that trigger sin in our lives and being careful who we keep company with day after day.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. If we continue to take lightly any specific sins in our lives, we are cheapening God's grace. Spend some time in confession for this rebellion and ask Him how you can move to genuine repentance.
2. Ask God to give you words, thoughts, pictures or verses that will help you understand the power that is accessible to you, to live a holy life.
3. Did you realize that living a holy life involves much effort on our parts? Pick a sin that you still struggle with . . . Ask God to show you how to "make a choice" and "make an effort" in overcoming this sin.

DAY 11

 **READ:** Romans 6:15-25

In this section Paul is directing us to ask ourselves a life-altering question. Are we a slave to sin or to obedience (v. 16)? We must also admit that we can be a slave to obedience in some areas of our lives and yet a slave to sin in other areas. The scope of God's Love for us requires that we move to holiness in every area of our lives. V. 23 reminds us of the *gift* that God has given to us. Because of this gift, we have to look carefully at our lives and consider where we're still a slave to sin. Do we ever get tired of "looking for sin"? We all do. However, it is to freedom we've been called and to this end we must move toward. We must know that God is greatly pleased by our growth in obedience. Think of how joyful a parent is when their child chooses the right thing, especially when it's hard. God receives the same pleasure when His kids are slaves to obedience.

And if pleasing God isn't motivation enough for us, there's also the truth that sin leads us to horrible places. Or in the words of verse 21, "what benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of?" Any kind of sin will lead us to shame at some point. Put another way, we'll reap what we sow. It's prideful to insist or live otherwise. Just as we can assume that gravity will work, so we can be assured that there are consequences for our choices. We must get our lives on the righteous path. There's even a place to warn others if they choose slavery to sin. Of course, we need God's wisdom, grace and truth to play this role, but let's commit to discipling others in this way.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Write down on a piece of paper the following areas – marriage, parenting, financial giving, financial spending, sexual purity, work ethic, integrity (keeping promises), and honesty. Then ask God to show you where you're a slave to righteousness and where you're a slave to sin. Thank Him for the good stuff and ask for help to overcome the sin.
2. Spend some time in prayer for your church, region and country. Ask God to bring more people to a place where they are "slaves of righteousness."
3. Spend some time recording examples of where sin led you to shame. This can be a painful exercise, but can also motivate us to stand against temptation.

DAY 12

 **READ:** Romans 7:1-6

Paul continues to hammer away at some of the same questions and issues in Chapter 7. Don't we often need to hear things repeatedly to spur us on to consider a change? Paul is repeating so that his readers (and us) get it! Let's keep our hearts humble and soft as we walk through this section!

First, Paul emphasizes that we are free from the law (using an illustration from marriage), but that this freedom is intended to create room for us to "bear fruit" (vv. 1-4). Think of any fruit tree! Isn't it much more enjoyable for the owner of that fruit tree if you get lots of fruit? This is what God desires from us – plenty of fruit. And what kind of fruit is He looking for? Thankfully God is good and the Holy Spirit, through Paul, highlights the answer to this question in the final five chapters of Romans.

Second, v. 5 uses the phrase "controlled by the sinful nature" to describe the previous life of an unbeliever. The skeptic would argue with this claim, but it's completely true! And the

result of this kind of life is the bearing of a different type of fruit – death. As believers we must think about such realities, ensuring that we are not controlled by the sinful nature. We must act according to our new identity in Christ!

Third, how is it even possible to consistently bear good fruit, and to avoid living by the sinful nature? Romans 8 will provide us with more teaching on this, but v. 6 of Chapter 7 gives us a hint. Listen to what it says – “. . . we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit . . .” A new way of the Spirit. We cannot walk in the steps Paul has given us without the Spirit! It’s important that we regularly think about this vital truth!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Are you bearing fruit for Jesus consistently? Ask God to show you what kind of fruit tree you are – how much fruit are you producing for Him? Praise Him for His grace in pruning us!
2. Think of times in the past when you were controlled by the sinful nature. Thank Him for helping you overcome! Thank Him for calling us to something greater! Listen in prayer – how did He help you overcome?
3. Ask God to show you what the Spirit does in and through our lives. Make a list, and thank God for the ministry of the Spirit and how it motivates us to stand against temptation.

DAY 13



READ: Romans 7:7-25

While we’re not justified by obeying the law – Paul has made this clear in the first seven chapters of Romans – the law is STILL good. (v. 12) Here’s the question then – what is good and useful about it? The primary reason Paul gives is this: we *don’t* know what sin is without the law being stated (v. 7). Many walk around in guilt due to conviction over their sin. The starting point towards freedom is having a label for this sin. The law provides that label! And when we realize that we *have* sin, we can get discouraged. What do we do with this discouragement?

First, we can be encouraged that we’re not alone in our struggles. Even Paul speaks of his incredible struggle against sin (vv. 15-20). While this isn’t an excuse for our sin, it can keep us from feeling crushed as we battle. If we walk in discouragement, it’s likely that our sin will increase, not decrease! Paul even gets very detailed and notes that his sin includes both doing what he doesn’t want to do AND not doing what he wanted to do. These are called sins of commission (what we do) and sins of omission (not doing what we should do).

Second, we can be encouraged because Jesus is powerful! Jesus is so powerful that He can help us overcome anything. Yes, anything! Paul says, “what a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death” (v. 24)? What a question! But here’s the answer – “thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!” *Through* Jesus Christ there is hope to overcome our sin. Any kind of sin. No longer how long we’ve struggled with it. Amen! Praise God!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Thank God for giving us His law and commands. If you’re a parent, think of how important these are for your home! Thank Him for not leaving what godliness looks like a mystery.

2. Ask God to speak to you about Paul’s struggles. And guaranteed, your current leaders have the same struggles. See what God wants to say about this . . . Ask Him who He wants you to talk to about your struggles (and their struggles). This can be scary at first, but encouraging in the end!
3. Ask God to show you what struggle He wants you to overcome through His power in the near future. Commit to praying into this for the next bit.

DAY 14



READ: Romans 8:1-17

On the final day, we saw that the only way to bear fruit for Jesus and overcome the sinful nature is through the Spirit. Chapter 8 of Romans refers to the Spirit in thirteen separate verses. We cannot overemphasize the work that the Spirit can do in our lives. The Spirit does lead to freedom (see v. 2), a freedom that we all crave. It’s impossible to be the right kind of “slave,” a slave to righteousness, without His incredible empowering. It may be said that while Jesus made our freedom possible, the work of the Spirit in our lives helps us fulfill our potential in Christ.

But how do we access His power, and receive His help? What a vital question! Vs. 5-8 speak of the role we play. Specifically, those who “live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires” (v. 5) We must *intentionally* think about and dwell on good things. We must not allow our minds to drift to evil things, or to things that are unhelpful for our spiritual health. Truly, what we think about has a dramatic impact on whether we’ll live by the Spirit or by the sin nature. If you stare at the sun, you’ll experience negative physical results. If we “stare” at sin or negative things, we’ll quench the work of God’s Spirit in our lives. But thankfully, the opposite is true. The fire of God’s Spirit will reign in our hearts if we meditate on the good.

And when God’s Spirit is operating fully in our lives, we receive the wonderful result of fear being crushed. Or in Paul’s words, “for you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship” (v. 15). When we walk in step with the Spirit, fear doesn’t have the same influence in our lives. This is because an overpowering testimony of our identity in Christ will rise up within us (vv. 14, 16). What a wonderful reason to give ourselves over to the ministry of the Spirit!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Read over Romans 8 in its entirety, even if you’ve already done so. Pause on each verse that discusses the ministry of the Spirit. Let it soak in what God is saying about His incredible work. Then, ask for Him to fill you to overflowing!
2. Ask God to show you if there are negative/sinful things that you tend to dwell on. After recording any that arise, ask Him to give you something else to focus on *in replacement*. Also ask Him if there are media choices in your life that is stirring up a mind that is set on what the sinful nature desires. If yes, ask Him if you need to do some form of fast from media.
3. Think about times where God has made it clear to you that you belong to Him. Now ask Him to speak to you about your relationship with Him.

DAY 15 **READ:** Romans 8:18-39

The final half of Chapter 8 of Romans contains much that can encourage us. We'll highlight three things. First, the Holy Spirit is available to help us pray! Praise God for this help. We all struggle to pray. What should we pray for? How should we pray for it? How can we have the energy to keep going? The answer, according to Paul, is to access the help of the Spirit. Listen to these words – " . . . the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (v. 26). All we have to do is ASK. "Holy Spirit, help me pray!" God loves to answer this prayer!

Second, not only do we struggle to pray, but we also face difficult challenges. Praise God, we're told in this chapter of God's goodness! V. 28 says that good will come from all things! Yes, ALL things! Do we believe this? Of course, there's a condition on this, namely, that it's for, "those who love him." We can't expect His constant goodness if we don't passionately go after Him! V. 32 also refers to His abundant goodness, that, "he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also . . . graciously give us all things?" Wow, what a God that we're invited to serve!

Third, as if to emphasize His goodness and help in our trials, the chapter ends with an awesome declaration that nothing can separate us from the love of God (vv. 38-39)! Again, there's a condition, for those who are, "in Christ Jesus our Lord." However, the responsibilities attached to this condition pale in comparison to the greatness of His love. While we'll face many things, His love will overpower them all as we stay in Him. Praise God! Praise God indeed!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Record some thoughts on your journey with prayer. What has helped? What's been hard? Be honest. Then practice what you've read today. Set aside a half hour to pray and ask the Holy Spirit help you pray. Watch what happens!
2. Ask God to show you where He has displayed His goodness in your life, especially arising out of difficult things. As you receive answers, praise Him in response.
3. Read over Romans 8:38-39 again. Ask God to provide you with words, thoughts or pictures that arise from this verse. Ask Him what He wants to say to you today out of this verse.

DAY 16 **READ:** Romans 9:1-17

In Chapter 9 there is a strong shift. For the first eight chapters of Romans Paul has been highlighting the importance of faith, of holiness and the need for the Spirit in walking as a Christ-follower. Now he turns to discussing His people, the Jews. In the first five verses of chapter 9 he unashamedly displays his passion for Israel! This passion is such that he declares that he would rather be cut off from Christ, if this would only mean the salvation of his people (v. 3). Wow, what passion! Is this our passion for others? What about for our family and those in our friendship circles? Of course, Paul's passion for Israel echoes God's desire for them. After all, God has done much in and for that wonderful nation. Or in Paul's words, "theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises" (v. 4).

Does this mean that being Jewish gives one an automatic pass into God's kingdom, including heaven one day? Not at all! Paul puts it this way, "for not all who descended from Israel are Israel" (v. 6). And to make this entirely clear he also notes that, "it is not the natural children who are God's children" (v. 8). It is vital that we as non-Jews have a proper attitude towards Jews. We should definitely acknowledge their special place in God's plan – past, present and future. At the same time we must not forget that our race, family background or physical location does not secure a place in God's kingdom. We must hold both of these truths in balance.

When it comes to the question – "who will be saved?" we need to understand that God is the one who decides. To the Jew, salvation for the Gentile seemed scandalous. Sadly, for many early "Gentiles" and many through history, salvation for the Jews is also seen as impossible. But this is the point Paul is making – as our Creator and Redeemer, what GOD says is all that matters. He is Sovereign over ALL questions. Paul proceeds to use various examples, *illustrations* which highlight that God can do what He wants – not indicators of who is saved (vv. 9-17)! God sovereignly decided to elevate Jacob, over Esau. He also determined to use Pharaoh to show His glory in delivering Israel. The skeptic might scream – "Look! God doesn't really give people choices!" However, if we practice good biblical interpretation (i.e. Scripture interprets Scripture, and context influences interpretation) we know that neither Pharaoh nor Esau were bound to destruction. Rather, Pharaoh had clearly hardened his heart initially, and THEN God sovereignly decided to use Him for His purposes. Again, it's an illustration of God doing what He wants. And though God elevated Jacob over Esau, it was the latter's poor response to God's decision that caused him and his descendants so many problems (the nation of Edom).

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. We've seen Paul's incredible passion for the Jews in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you – do you have the same passion to see people saved? If the answer is no, ask Him what's putting "water on the fire." This is a vital issue in our lives!
2. Spend some time checking your heart – are you open to seeing salvation come to those who are closest to you, whether family or friends? Write down a prayer for those who don't know Christ in your closest circles.
3. Ask God to provide you with words, thoughts and pictures about His Sovereignty. It is SO good to have a God that is in complete control. Ask Him to show you a time where He displayed His sovereignty in your life and praise Him in response.

DAY 17 **READ:** Romans 9:18-33

We concluded the final day by focusing on the reality that God can do what He wants. Some view this in a fearful way. Oh no, God is in complete control! Yes, He is! But *what is this God like*, other than Sovereign? Well, here's some really good news! He's also merciful and compassionate! Yes, He will harden people such as Pharaoh, but He will also show mercy on many others (v. 18)! While others may have tossed us aside, while others may not see us worthy of God's kingdom, the reality that God decides gives us GREAT hope! You may notice a lot of exclamation points in this section and for good reason! We can completely trust God to make the right decisions about salvation. It's not based on our works, but on His goodness and mercy. Wow! What a marvelous God! No wonder the Bible so often highlights His mercy, grace and compassion!

But here's THE question. We've seen in this chapter that God decides who will be saved. This is wonderful, but also a various serious matter. So, *who is saved*? This is where Paul returns to a major theme in the first eight chapters of Romans. Specifically, it's those who have faith. Paul highlights once again that the Jews tried to pursue a righteousness by obeying the law, while the Gentiles turned to faith because they *knew* they were apart from the law (vv. 30-32). It is by faith a person is saved. This is the Sovereign God's decision. It is secure and sealed, this decision. Birthright or good works are not the determining factors, but faith.

Of course, this *saving faith* isn't a vague faith in just anyone or anything. Instead, it's clearly faith *in Jesus*. This is something that the Jews had trouble grasping. Or as Paul declares about Jesus, "see, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame" (v. 33). Many throughout history have attempted to place their faith in something other than Jesus. It never works and it never will. But for those who make this choice, who trust in Him, we will never be put to shame! There's another exclamation point and it hardly does justice to the power of what God does for us in Christ! No shame! Wow!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Meditate on what it means for God to be merciful and compassionate. Think of times when He has shown you mercy. Spend some time praising Him for His willingness to save you from your sin and rebellion.
2. Faith is vital. Ask God to show you when you've walked in faith, and when you've acted out of unbelief. Ask Him to strengthen your faith, using whatever means necessary. This may seem like a scary prayer, but the fruit that results is incredible! An increasing faith is truly amazing, as it draws us closer to God.
3. Think of times where you've felt shame. Thank God for His cleansing power! Now, ask Him if there is any shame that you still carry. Often, we've buried such shame because it feels ugly. If any shame surfaces, ask Jesus to speak about it. Ask Him to give you comfort, words of encouragement, healing words and direction on steps to take.

DAY 18



READ: Romans 10:1-13

At the beginning of Chapter 10, using Israel as an example, Paul provides a warning about zeal *without knowledge* (vv. 1-2). Many of the Jews were incredibly passionate. *However*, in their zeal it can be said that quite a few of them strayed off the path of Yahweh, the One about whom they claimed to be zealous. What Paul says is much more than a declaration of what happened in the past. It is also a warning to us, since the Word of God is living and active. Zeal is good, but a zeal with knowledge will be directed towards who God says He really is, be consistent with His Word and will be saturated with Biblical love. Many of the Jews failed on all three counts, especially the religious leaders of that day, and many make the same mistakes today. Let it not be us, in any way!

A significant part of the Jews zeal without knowledge is highlighted by their attempts to establish their own righteousness (v. 3). Does God desire us to walk righteously? For sure! So when do we fall into the same trap as these early zealots? Two indicators are as follows. First, when we begin to condemn, judge or become obsessed over things that aren't clearly sin. Second, when we feel that we have somehow reached God through our own efforts, even if our actions are holy outwardly. Of course, if we feel that we've slipped into these

traps, our response is not to delete zeal, but to add knowledge to our zeal – i.e. that we are only saved by grace.

True salvation, indeed, is by grace. What *kind* of response to His grace is God looking for? Verses nine and ten highlight the answer. For one, we need to confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord. Such "confession" is far beyond the mere speaking of words, but a *recognition* of Jesus' supremacy, greatness and right to direct our lives as our Creator. Secondly, we respond to God's grace by believing in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead. Such "heart" belief speaks to a passionate acceptance that God has a plan for redemption, the power to take such actions and the wisdom to make a way for us to be saved. How we can praise Him for His incredible salvation!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Consider your life up to this point. Have you been zealous/passionate for God? Can you think of examples when you've displayed a zeal without knowledge? Ask God to show you any current examples from your life and how you can make adjustments.
2. Allow God to search your heart – are there ways that you're trying to establish your own righteousness? This is a difficult question and difficult thing to discern in our own hearts – it takes God's help. Then praise Him for declaring us righteous *because of what Jesus has done*.
3. Read over the last paragraph of today's devotional again. Ask God if your heart, words and life *reflect* the response to His grace that is discussed. Now is the time to get things right, rather than when our lives come to an end, or Jesus returns.

DAY 19



READ: Romans 10:14-21

The greatness of what God has done through Jesus has been declared from many angles up to this point in the book of Romans. Hopefully, our hearts are full of thankfulness, praise and passion as we marvel at the *gift* of God. As chapter 10 continues, the conversation shifts to the need for us to share truth with others, specifically the truth that we can be saved through Jesus, by faith. Or in Paul's words, "how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news" (v. 15)? It is truly our *obligation* to respond to the greatness of what God has done for us, by doing something beautiful for others! Is this our heart? Is there room in our lives to take Jesus to others? Do we let fear consume us, or the love of God motivate us?

As we go to others, we announce the goodness of God. However, v. 17 reminds us that "faith comes hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (v. 17). This "word" of Christ is a "rhema" word, reminding us that though we are faithful to take the message, it takes a work of God to bring someone to Himself. Put another way, we're partners *with God* in this journey of bringing others to faith. We do our part and God does His part! What a wonderful privilege this is, as participating in someone's salvation is one of the greatest joys we'll ever experience.

So let's be faithful! And let's be realistic. Not *everyone* will respond. Some people will be "disobedient and obstinate" (v. 21). Many people shrink back from evangelizing and outreach because they anticipate pushback. However, we need to persevere regardless, remembering that God rewards us for our obedience, not our results. This is something worth pondering as we consider the people around us (i.e. family, friends, neighbors, co-workers) who do not know the grace of Jesus.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Do you share the good news about Jesus with others? This question can cause conviction for many, but we must not run from the conviction. Jesus tells us in Matthew 10 that if we are ashamed of Him before men, He will be ashamed of us before the Father. Humbling and serious words. Ask God to help you to overcome any hindrances to evangelism, including fear, selfishness and lack of love.
2. Spend some time praying for people you know, who do not know Christ. Invite Jesus to speak a “rhema” word to them this very day, and to bind the efforts of the evil one to steal any seeds that have been planted.
3. Spend some time reflecting about whom God has used in your life, to bring you good news and/or encouragement. Thank God for their role in your life.

DAY 20**READ:** Romans 11:1-24

In chapters nine and ten, the apostle Paul was clear that being a part of Israel does not guarantee one salvation, as salvation is obtained through faith. This is the gospel, the salvation that we experience is because of God’s grace! However, Paul wants to make sure that his teaching is balanced. In chapter 11 he strongly declares that He is not done with Israel. Far from it! As he says, “I ask then: did God reject his people? By no means!” This is a vital truth, as in our current day and age, Israel is seen as irrelevant, an annoyance, even worthy to be cast aside! This is not the teaching of Scripture at all! In verse five Paul speaks of a remnant, “a leftover” of the people Israel that He has chosen by grace. Even the very existence of Israel today, that they are in the promised land, is a reflection of this grace. Praise God! He never forgets His people!

To those in the early church who felt “smug” about their position, as Gentiles who have received salvation, Paul provides a stern warning. In verses nineteen to twenty one he challenges them to think deeply about the reality that they could be cut off, or broken off, from the promises connected to salvation. He tells them, “do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.” There is a healthy *fear of the Lord*, where we continue to seek Him and walk with Him so that we stay *in Him*. Many in Israel hardened their hearts, a possibility for all of us.

God is both kind and stern, as verse 22 notes. To pursue Jesus is to place ourselves in an “ocean of kindness.” To ignore Him is to face sternness. Of course, even this sternness is intended to serve the purposes of drawing us back to Him in wholehearted obedience. He truly *longs* for salvation to come to all, whether Jew or Gentile. His plan is good! Here is the question then – will we follow Him, in faith, or run away in unbelief and disobedience?

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Spend some time praying for Israel. Pray for its safety, for national repentance, for wisdom for its leaders and for humble dependence on God.
2. Spend some time reflecting on this question – do you have a healthy fear of the Lord? If you don’t understand what this means, ask Jesus to give you insights into what it would mean to fear Him.
3. Ask God to show you where He has shown you kindness. Record what He shows you. Thank Him in response. Then ask Him where He has shown you sternness. Again, thank Him, this time for loving you enough to steer you back toward the “narrow road.”

DAY 21**READ:** Romans 11:25-36

“The deliverer will come from Zion . . .” (v. 26) is a powerful statement of both PROMISE and DESTINY. God is promising deliverance, an amazing declaration when we consider the current evil days and darkness still to come. Paul is also highlighting that the land of Israel will be the center of all action. This truly is the “epicenter,” that small portion of the earth. God, in His great wisdom and grace, has a clear plan that no woman, man or child can thwart. He is Sovereign. We can place our trust fully in our God, when we realize that He always fulfills His Word.

In verse 32 Paul makes a statement that is difficult to understand. He says, “for God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.” What could this mean? We know from elsewhere in Romans that, “all have sinned.” One of the consequences of our willful disobedience is that God leaves us to experience the fruit of our desire to sin. This “fruit” includes out-of-control disobedience. In fact, even those who think they are good people, yet who live out goodness separate from God, are sinfully full of pride. In this sense then, God binds us all over to disobedience, because all have sinned. *However* (and this is HUGE) these consequences can awaken those who are willing to humble themselves to their need for mercy. Put another way, no one would even pursue God’s mercy without realizing (even through experience) that their lives are a mess. Therefore, God binding us over to disobedience increases the chance that we’ll turn to Him for mercy. What a great and brilliant God!

The insights that we find in chapters nine to eleven are lofty and admittedly challenging to fully grasp. Sometimes we need to dig deep to understand Scripture and boldly ask for the Spirit’s help. However, some of our difficulties relate to the reality that discussion about God and His Ways will cause us to come into contact with mysteries too great for us to grasp. Paul knows this and it’s why he concludes with a powerful declaration at the end of chapter 11, “oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out . . . for from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (vv. 33, 36).

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Praise Jesus for His promise to return and to bring deliverance. Praise Him for His sovereignty over all nations, including Israel. Ask Him to show you an area where He wants to work out deliverance *in or through (to others!)* your life. Ask Him for any steps you need to take to partner in this deliverance.
2. Praise God for allowing us to experience consequences and conviction, as these can drive us to His mercy! Ask Him to show you any present consequences and/or conviction that you’ve been ignoring.
3. Read Romans 11:33-36 out loud. Then memorize v. 36. To have this declaration embedded in our heart and mind will bear much fruit!

DAY 22**READ:** Romans 12:1-8

Chapters One to Eleven are filled with theology, the “meat” of what the gospel is according to Paul, as inspired by the Spirit of God. With the beginning of Chapter 12, we get a significant shift. Now the apostle Paul begins to declare what is required of us as a result of what *God has done*. He tells us “in view of God’s mercy,” or put another way, BECAUSE of God’s mercy we are to “offer our bodies as living sacrifices” (v. 1). This is worship, says Paul. Worship is so much more than singing on Sundays. Worship involves giving our entire lives to Jesus. Too many people act as if this is the scariest thing, something to avoid. Many believers think this way! However, if this God, in His mercy, would die for us – why would be reluctant to yield to Him? After all, He doesn’t cease being merciful!

A significant part of offering our bodies to God is to avoid being conformed to the pattern of this world (v.2). We may view sin too narrowly, seeing it as only the obvious sins. However, we need to understand that living for God involves steering clear of this thing called, “worldliness.” It takes incredible amounts of time in the Word, and reduction to our exposure to media, to cleanse our lives from worldly patterns. This is hard work, but vital work in light of what love God has shown us. In reality, what is happening is the renewing of your minds. The wonderful fruit of this is noted at the end of verse 2, that, “. . . you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Wow – who wouldn’t want this!

Of course, a key outworking of “offering our bodies” involves activating our spiritual gifts. As we avoid thinking of ourselves too highly (v. 3), we need to seek to identify and use our gifts. Verse 8 powerfully declares that we belong to each other, a very counter cultural thought. As such, we must use our gifts in a way that brings great joy to God and others. If we give, we do so generously, if we lead, we do so diligently and if we show mercy, we do so cheerfully. Essentially, God is calling us to go *all out* since He held nothing back in redeeming and restoring our lives.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. “Offering yourself as a living sacrifice.” Spend some time journaling your thoughts and emotions about this command. Is there fear? Joy? Anticipation? Ask God for a response to what you’re thinking and feeling.
2. Spend some time thinking about how your thought patterns have changed since you committed to Christ. Praise Him for working wonderfully in your life! Then ask Him to show you where worldly ideas have crept in. Let Him search your heart on relationships, on finances, on work habits, on marriage, on parenting.
3. Do you feel that you offer yourself to other believers? Do you feel that you use your spiritual gifts? Romans 12:8 says that we belong to each other. Ask God to show you any attitudes or patterns that would cause you to shrink back from this calling.

DAY 23**READ:** Romans 12:9-21

Paul continues to highlight what it means to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, as a response to God’s mercy. Much of what he says is rapid fire, and easy to skip over. We do well to meditate carefully on some of what He says, committing to living out His words with His help. In verse 9, we are urged towards a “sincere” love. Love that is sincere comes from deep in our hearts. This is where we need God to transform us from the inside-out.

This love is also, “devoted to one another.” This devotion requires that we honor others, even above ourselves. How radical this is, but also life-transforming. Paul is calling us to a life that is actually freedom. Many in our world, in their relationships, love what is evil and hate what is good. Paul points us to the exact opposite, to, “hate what is evil; cling to what is good” (v. 9). Wow, *cling* to what is good. This is love!

We see that the passion of Jesus should echo in our lives with an incredible zeal. The bar is high, to “never be lacking in zeal” (v. 11). This isn’t just *any* zeal, but a zeal that is centered on serving the Lord. Many have zeal without knowledge, where their zeal is harsh, or their zeal and passion is directed towards wrong things. Even our zeal for service must be submitted to the Lord, ensuring that we’re doing the right things at the right time.

Such zeal and sincere love is so deep and wide that Paul continues on to state that we *must* love our enemies, or in his words, we must bless those who persecute us (v. 14)! To the early church, this would’ve been shocking. Love the Romans! Bless them! Then he tells us to seek to live in harmony with others, to be willing to associate with, “people of low position” (v. 16). We need to seek peace. It all seems so hard, and at times, we can be so unwilling. Even if we choose to obey these commands, we wonder, but what about those who truly are wicked and out to hurt us? We can’t guarantee that they will reconcile with us (v. 18), but God *does* guarantee to bring about justice in His time and way (v. 20). We can freely and passionately love others and “overcome evil with good” because God will take care of things. Praise His Name!

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Take a look at the relationships that you have with people in your home, in your extended family and in your workplace. Do you have a sincere love for each of these people? Ask God to reveal your heart on this question and to change your heart, where necessary.
2. Would others say that you have a zeal for God? This is a vital question. We want to be ready for the return of Jesus. More importantly, what would God say? In Scripture, we are to interact with Jesus as His passionate bride.
3. Do you have any enemies, or people you struggle to get along with? Ask God to show you what love, and blessing and seeking to live at peace with them would look like. Ask Him to empower you to live out His instructions.

DAY 24**READ:** Romans 13:1-7

This chapter begins with a statement that would’ve been at best, shocking to early church, at worst, offensive. Paul says, “everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established” (v. 1). The governing authority at that time, the Romans, treated their “subjects and citizens” fairly poorly. It’s also very likely that the people Paul was writing to would receive even poorer treatment. So, how could he even dare to suggest submitting to such tyrants? And what about us? Are we willing to submit to our current government authorities? This command to submit is completely tied to the reality that God is sovereign and has a purpose for who He places in leadership (vv. 2-6). This principle can be seen even more clearly in the Old Testament. As we scan the entirety of Scripture, we learn this reality – that to rebel against governing authorities is equal to rebelling against God, *unless they’re asking us to deny our faith in any way*. This truth should humble us all, especially in our culture where it’s popular to critique and disregard any and all forms of government.

Our submission, Paul goes on to emphasize, should include paying taxes and paying respect (v. 7). We might add, it should also include respecting the laws of the land, where they don't clearly contradict God's laws. The argument that we shouldn't have to pay taxes because some of the money supports immoral goals is an empty one, because Paul uttered this command when the Romans were actively using "tax money" for many illicit purpose, including to venerate humans. Isn't it funny how we seek to avoid our responsibilities by providing justification that isn't Biblical at all? We must watch our lives carefully for this habit.

The establishment of government authorities is part of God's answer to justice. We know that not every government is just, but this is a consequence of God providing free will. Rather than blame Him for such things, we should thank Him that He seeks to provide order in society by raising up an institution that is intended to provide justice. This "provision of justice" can even include punishment (v. 4), an unpopular idea in our day and age, but one that is essential to protecting society and bringing people to a place of potential change and repentance.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Since rebelling against government authorities involves rebelling against God, spend some time taking stock of your life. Have you been unsubmitive to any government in any way? If yes, spend some time in repentance and ask God to help you live for Him wholeheartedly.
2. Have you been upright with paying your taxes, which includes reporting all income? Ask God to show you any compromises. And do you show respect to government? If you are known for complaining about government, and avoiding all honor, ask God to show a different way to speak.
3. Spend some time praying for our current governments – municipal, regional, provincial and federal. Ask God to establish a sense of justice in and through their lives!

DAY 25



READ: Romans 13:8-14

Paul follows up on his command to pay our taxes with the statement to, "let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another" (v. 8). The law is *so much* more than individual commands, but a powerful urge to love, love, love! The specific commands that we find in the Old and New Testaments are simply expressions, examples and definitions of love. As followers of Jesus, we need to *often* think about what love looks like. Put simply, "love does no harm to its neighbor" (v. 10). Do our lives reflect this statement? This is what God would have us ask. What a wonderful vision God has for our lives!

Paul urges his readers to, "wake up" (v. 11). Isn't it easy to fall into a "slumber," to procrastinate, to fall into dryness spiritually? We must realize that judgment could be just around the corner, a humbling thought. Or, as Paul exclaims, ". . . our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed" (v. 11). What does a life that is "woken up" look like? Paul addresses decent behaviour and avoiding sexual sin, along with conflict and jealousy (v. 13). How easy it is to sin in these ways! We must stay alert to our hearts and habits! He is calling us away from these "deeds of darkness" (v. 12).

The alternative to a life of darkness is nothing less than to be like Jesus. We must seek to, "clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 14). As we fill our minds with what the life of Jesus looks like, we will walk in the power of the Spirit and quickly turn to God

when tempted. It will also mean immediate and quick repentance. Too few Christians are intentional enough in these matters. Let's be different, for the glory of God!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Why not take a look at one's life and write down any harm you've done to others in the past few years. Then ask God – where do I need to make apologies? Such steps can be so hard, but so powerful and life-transforming. This is living out the gospel!
2. Think about how difficult it is to wake up sometimes in the morning, or from a nap. Once we go to sleep, it's tough to get going. This has a spiritual analogy. Ask God to "wake" you up wherever you need. It's a scary, but necessary prayer. Then spend some time praying for others in your circles of influence to be woken up. The time could be short!
3. Ask Jesus to give you more of His life, His heart, His attitudes, His actions. Ask Him to show you what this will look like. Record your thoughts.

DAY 26



READ: Romans 14:1-16

After two chapters where love is *repeatedly* highlighted, Chapter 14 spends time describing what love would look like when there are disagreements on how to live out one's faith. Verse 1 contains a statement that is a great summary of the heart of the entire chapter – "accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgment on disputable matters." We need to recognize that there are many issues that passionate and godly Christians have disagreed on for hundreds of years. Rather than cause division over these, we need to accept each other's faith. This means: 1) not hammering away at the topic, 2) intentionally focusing on what we agree on and, 3) partnering to do God's work.

We must not look down on others, *even when we're convinced we're right*. We must give time for others to develop their viewpoints, allowing the Holy Spirit space to form what they believe. In verse 3, Paul uses what a Christian may or may not eat as an example. In verse 5, he talks about the Sabbath. In the middle of these two examples, Paul challenges us, "who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls" (v. 4). We can freely steer clear of obsessing over the small details of our faith because we can trust God to handle things now and in the future.

This is an overarching theme in this chapter and in Scripture, that we need not judge others because God will judge. Verse 8 declares that, "we belong to the Lord" and we can embrace the reality that, ". . . each of us will give an account of himself to God" (v. 12). Of course, we must remember that Paul is giving us guidance on disputable matters, not on obvious sin and immortality. Elsewhere in Scripture we are told to challenge a brother and sister in Christ who is persistently sinning, and even in doing this we move forward with love and much prayer. Overall, we see that what love really requires is that we desire to be *discerning* about when to "judge" each other and how. Disputable matters, Paul emphasizes, are off limits.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend some time asking God if there are things that you get over-obsessed about in your walk with Him, that would actually fall into the category of "disputable matters." If He reveals something, ask Him if you need to apologize to someone who you may have hurt in your "zeal."

2. Spend time thanking God for His power, wisdom and sovereignty, that He able to judge justly in big and small matters. Thank Him for taking this burden of judging off of your shoulders.
3. Spend some time in God's presence and ask Him to give you a *spirit of discernment*, so that you'll know when to drop an issue, when to challenge another person on their sin and how to love extravagantly in all situations. Ask Him if there any adjustments that you need to make in the present.

DAY 27

 **READ:** Romans 14:17-23

The previous day we began to look at Romans 14 and Paul's instructions on what to do when brothers and sisters in Christ are in disagreement over disputable matters. As Paul continues, he emphasizes that our *focus* must be on that which is most important. This seems obvious, but it's actually something we can lose sight of very easily. What is most important? Paul declares, "for the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). A fantastic test is whether our passion brings peace with others and sincere joy. When we are overzealous regarding disputable matters, division and discouragement begin to reign. God's goal for our lives is to please Him, but also where possible, be "approved by men" (v. 18).

Mutual edification, which means to build each other, is what we aim for (v. 19). *Is this your habit?* The opposite of this is to tear down, whether aggressively or passively through inattention (v. 20). It's so sad that many times we who carry the name of Christ cause each other great harm over the smallest details. It takes incredible effort to avoid such traps. Of course, a huge part of building others up involves considering our actions and assessing whether we might cause them to stumble. If we know that a fellow believer would struggle with some of our choices, even in disputable matters, it's on us to make the effort to show empathy by making adjustments. In speaking about food choices, a very "hot" topic in the early church, Paul declares, "it is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall" (v. 21).

Paul concludes this discussion by providing some practical advice. First, when we have strong convictions, we do well to keep quiet (v. 22). This is hard to do, because it's human nature to want to display our passion and knowledge! However, as those who are called to love, it's the right thing to do. Silence is often the best choice or, if we have to speak on a matter, very few words with great gentleness. Second, while we must be careful with our convictions, we are urged to get convictions. It's not as if we shouldn't have an opinion. Paul says, "but the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin" (v. 23). Our beliefs and actions can only come from faith when we get convictions. It's on us to, "figure things out," seeking the help of others if we need to.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Reflect on this question – would others say that your walk with Jesus is passionate, but also filled with joy and peace? Or are you known more as a grumpy Christian? There's a balance we need to find – incredible zeal with substantial joy! Ask God to shepherd your heart in this regard.
2. Write down the names of 3-5 believers that you know. Ask God to show you how you can *specifically* build them up.

3. Do you take the time to strengthen your convictions, so that you can live by a strong faith, that is difficult to shake? At some point a shaky faith is sin, according to v. 23. Ask God to show you questions that you need to settle in your heart and mind, so that your faith might be made strong.

DAY 28

 **READ:** Romans 15:1-13

In a bit of a follow-up to the previous chapter, Paul makes a powerful statement, one that is incredibly transforming within biblical community. He says, "we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (v.1). It is so common for us to boast, if not in word, at least in our hearts, when we are "more strong" than others. The problem with inward or outward boasting is that it directly or indirectly discourages and crushes others. "Bearing" with the failings of others, on the other hand, can create an environment where they feel lifted up, and even consider a deeper commitment to Christ. When we seek to please ourselves, we actually want to keep others "down and out." Oh, the wickedness of our hearts at times! Paul is calling us to aim for the Spirit of Jesus, "for even Christ did not please himself . . ." (v. 3).

Is it hard to keep this goal in mind, to be like Jesus? Do you find it hard to keep a clear vision of the *specifics* of what it means to follow God? This is where we must not neglect reading the Bible. Listening prayer is wonderful, but due to the corruption of our flesh, we can miss things even in prayer. While prayer is very useful to knowing the heart of God, Scripture is the foundation, the great baseline to evaluate our conformity to the life that God desires for us. Paul makes this point when he says, "for everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (v. 4). A life in humble searching of and obedience to the Scriptures will indeed bring us MUCH hope.

As we walk through the Scriptures, we see the calling is high. For example, verse 7 urges us to, "accept one another then just as Christ accepted you . . ." The expected result? " . . . In order to bring praise to God." In our normal human self-centeredness we lose sight that this is all about God. It's really all about loving God and by extension, loving others. Verses nine to twelve speak much of praise and rejoicing, which supports this reality. Thankfully God doesn't leave us alone in our attempts to obey this calling. As an illustration of this, Paul utters a powerful prayer in v. 13, pleading, "may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Make a list of some people you feel are weaker than you – physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Ask God to show you how you can bear with their weakness. Also ask Him for forgiveness where you have made life harder for those who are weaker.
2. Have you committed to a life in the Scriptures? Thank God for providing such a clear declaration of who He is and His Ways. If you are in the Word regularly, thank God for the strength and motivation. If you're not, spend some time in prayer asking God to show you what the hindrances are. Try to keep an open and humble heart in this process.
3. Praise God for providing the power of the Holy Spirit. Praise Him for calling us to a life that is worthy and valuable. Ask Him to help you to be faithful day-by-day.

DAY 29**READ:** Romans 15:14-33

As we've walked through the book of Romans, we can't help but notice the boldness of Paul. He even admits in verse 15, "I have written you quite boldly on some points . . ." As we personally seek to grow and fulfill our calling to make disciples, we also must seek to be bold. A lack of boldness can come from a lukewarm faith, or from a fear of man, rather than a fear of God. Sometimes a lack of boldness can be traced back to the belief that we have "nothing of significance to say." However, what Paul shared ultimately was not complicated. After all, he calls an aspect of what he's doing, "reminding." Certainly, there is something we can be bold with as we seek to minister to others? We don't want to shrink back from this, as there are various warnings in Scripture about the dangers of hiding our light.

Of course, we can *learn to be bold*. Even as we step out in boldness, we *must* not forget that such boldness needs to be *about Jesus, and for Jesus*. Or in Paul's words, "therefore, I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak anything except what Christ has accomplished through me . . ." (vv. 17-18). Some people have lots of boldness, but it's about them and/or done in a way that falls short of true Christian love. It's vital that we remember that our boldness needs to both glorify God and arise out of a love for others. A true love for others *will be* bold, but it will also be gentle.

How can we possibly keep this all in balance? Bold? Loving? Gentle? This is where we come back to an important refrain through the book of Romans. We do the work of God, *with God*. Paul was successful in being faithful because he was clearly filled by the Spirit. He in no way did such things in his own power. In verse 19 he says, ". . . by the power of signs and miracles through the power of the Spirit . . ." Will we ask God for such power? In verse 29 he notes, "I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ." God was going with Paul and if we desire to be bold, loving and gentle, we'll want Him with us as well.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Is your life marked with boldness? What hinders boldness? Ask God to reveal what holds you back. Then ask Him to speak to these specific hindrances. Ask Him for verses to memorize! This can be an effective way to increase boldness.
2. When you're bold, does it lift up Jesus and is it out of love? Think of examples of when people have been *effectively bold* with you. Why did you respond to their boldness?
3. Take a look at your life carefully. Are you living by the Spirit, or by your own efforts? Do you generally feel energized by doing His Work, or drained? Ask for a fresh filling. If you're too busy to get filled up, pray for the desire to humbly change your schedule so that there's room for regular fillings of the Spirit.

DAY 30**READ:** Romans 16

As we enter the final chapter of the book of Romans, Paul fully displays his love for other believers. Whether encouraging people to receive Phoebe (vv. 1-2) or greet others (vv. 3-16), Paul is indicating through his words that people *really matter*. As we scan our own lives we ask ourselves – is there a concern and care for others? Do we deeply love people? Are we passionate about their well-being, do we consider their legitimate needs, do we

"know them by name"? The church with Christ as Head must be full of loving concern for one another. Even the older tradition of the "holy kiss" was to serve as a visible declaration of the family aspect of the early church.

Of course, even as we seek to love others and to fully engage with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to be aware that there are some qualities to avoid. Paul is very specific in highlighting the qualities of these people. They "cause division" and promote things that, "are contrary to the teaching you have learned" (v. 17). They serve "their own appetites" and use "smooth talk and flattery" (v. 18). The character of such people will often give away their intentions. It's sad and unfortunate that such people have to be dealt with by avoidance. As we consider this reality we do well to remember that this is speaking of people who *intentionally* have turned away and try to get their way through manipulative and wicked means.

As we consider the seriousness of our call to love others and to be alert for those who might do the body of Christ harm, we may feel overwhelmed. This is normal, so don't be too hard on yourself. At the same time, this is why we must desperately pray for God to give us all we need. Paul knows that we are lost without such assistance. The wonderful prayer at the end of Romans (vv. 25-26) is one worth praying through regularly. It speaks of God's willingness to establish us, so that we (and others!) might believe and obey.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Spend some time in prayer asking God whom among your fellow believers you should increase your efforts with . . . Ask God *how* to love, encourage and bless them.
2. Is there anyone in your life that seeks to cause division, who seems to be severely manipulative? Commit to spending a couple of weeks praying for them. Then seek God if you need to set stronger boundaries with them.
3. Look at Romans 16:25-26. Write it out, but change some words to personalize it. Put this prayer somewhere where you'll remember to periodically pray through it.

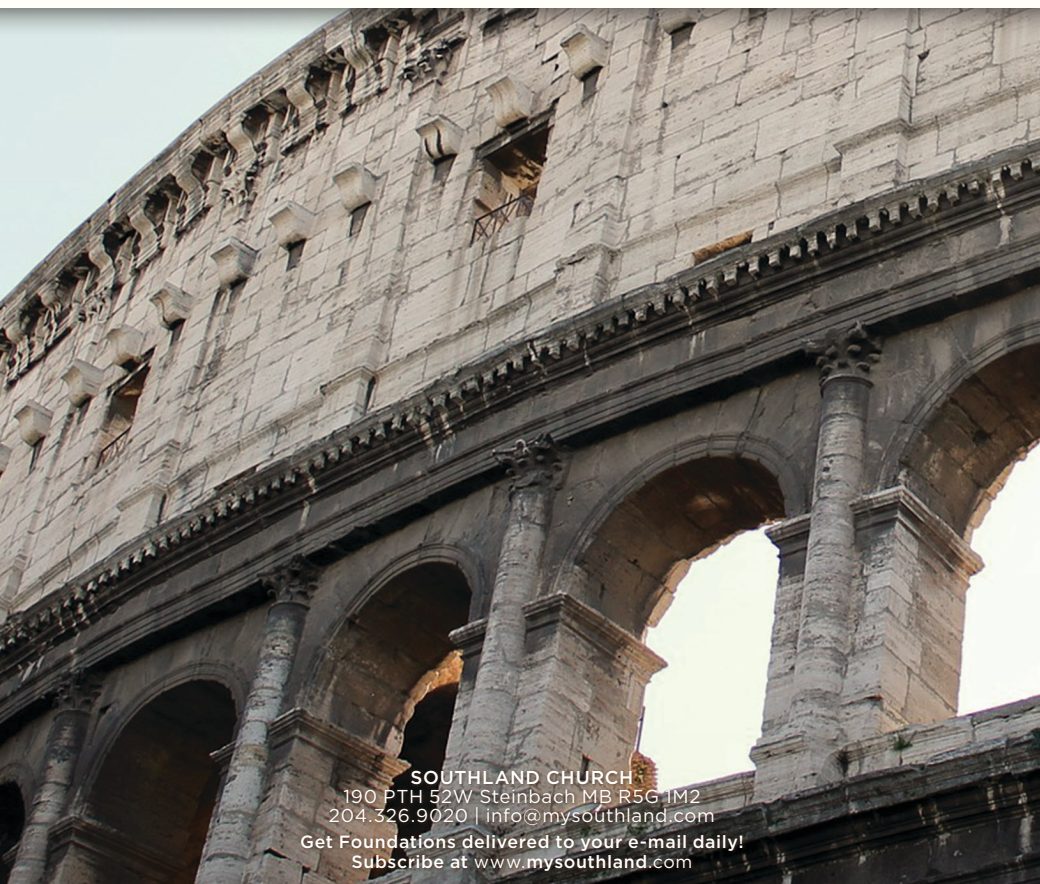
NOTES

The Book of Romans

The book of Romans is an incredible description of the *GOSPEL*, the good news that we can be powerfully saved through consistent and childlike faith! It also highlights the beautiful things that happen when we yield to Jesus and His Spirit. Finally, the obedient life of a Christ-follower is described in the final five chapters of Romans. When you finish this devotional, you'll grasp why Romans is viewed as the peak of Paul's letters.

Romans 4:7-8 (NIV)

"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."



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