ROMANS

PART ONE

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PREFACE

The late great preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones called the book of Romans "of first importance" in the New Testament epistles. He demonstrated this by preaching verse by verse, through the book every Friday night for 12 years! He preached a total of 366 sermons and only made it to Chapter 14 before he died. Those sermons were eventually compiled and edited into books and his Romans commentary set came in at 14 volumes with over 5000 pages!

Martin Luther said, "This epistle [Romans] is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. We can never read it or ponder over it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes."

John Wesley merely heard someone reading Luther's preface to the book of Romans and said that his heart was "strangely warmed." It was at that moment that he was converted to Christ and became the catalyst of the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century. The beloved (and second best-selling book in history) *"Pilgrim's Progress"* was written by John Bunyan as he studied the great themes of Romans while sitting in jail in Bedford. John Calvin wrote, "When anyone understands this Epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole Scripture."

"Romans: Part 1" is a two part series that contains 32 study guides for personal study or a group discussion and 192 devotions applying the truths to everyday life. *"Romans: Part 1"* will help convince you that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. *"Romans: Part 1"* will also convict you how to competently and confidently live out your salvation.

"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.'" Romans 1:16-17

Lesson 1

Romans 1:1-17

THE THEME

Pastor Chuck Lindsey

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" Romans 1:16-17 (NKJV)

1. What jumps out to you in this passage?

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The late great preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones called the book of Romans "of first importance" in the New Testament epistles. He demonstrated this by preaching verse by verse, through the book every Friday night for 12 years! He preached a total of 366 sermons and only made it to Chapter 14 before he died. Those sermons were eventually compiled and edited into books and his Romans commentary set came in at 14 volumes with over 5000 pages!

2. Does this surprise you? What verses or themes do you know about in Romans?

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Lloyd-Jones is not alone, nor was he first in his estimation of this book's importance. Romans is famously known for being the spark that began the Protestant Reformation. The great German Christian theologian, Martin Luther, was once a Roman Catholic monk. He was so impacted by reading the book of Romans that he went to spiritual war with the Catholic Church and its excesses in defense of the true Gospel. What he said about Romans reveals its impact on his life. He said, "This epistle [Romans] is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread

of the soul. We can never read it or ponder over it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes." It is true.

3. Are you familiar with the Gospel presentation Romans Road? What is it?

_____
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It was not just Luther who was transformed by the powerful words of this great epistle. John Wesley merely heard someone reading Luther's preface to the book of Romans and said that his heart was "strangely warmed." It was at that moment that he was converted to Christ and became the catalyst of the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century. The beloved (and second best-selling book in history) *"Pilgrim's Progress"* was written by John Bunyan as he studied the great themes of Romans while sitting in jail in Bedford. John Calvin wrote, "When anyone understands this Epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole Scripture."

4. What is your favorite book of the Bible? Why?

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5. Does it make sense that many theologians gravitate to Romans?

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Modern biblical scholars have agreed. Theologian J. I. Packer wrote, "All roads in the Bible lead to Romans, and all views afforded by the Bible are seen most clearly from Romans, and when the

message of Romans gets into a person's heart there is no telling what may happen." Pastor John Piper said Romans is "the most important theological, Christian work ever written." Donald Grey Barnhouse preached for 42 months (3 and 1/2 years) straight on this great book, and when he compiled his sermons on the book, they became a 10-volume set. The English poet Samuel Coleridge called it "the profoundest piece of writing in existence." F.F. Bruce echoes Packer and succinctly said, "There is no telling what may happen when people begin to study the Epistle to the Romans."

One thing is clear: a thorough understanding of Romans changes everything!

Now, as we come to the text itself, we find that the summary of the book is contained in two verses in the first chapter. Romans 1:16-17 (NKJV) summarizes the book by saying, ***"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"*** Here, Paul mentions several keywords that become the major themes of the letter. Let us take a look at a few of them.

The word ***"Gospel"*** sums up what the book actually is. It is a thorough explanation of what the ***"Gospel"*** is and what it is not. With careful detail, Romans chapters 1-3 lay out the bad news that we are all sinners and are (all of us) in need of salvation. In three short chapters, Romans makes it clear that every person is guilty of sin, under condemnation, and in need of salvation. Chapter 1 condemns the non-religious, chapter 2 condemns the moral person, and chapter 3 condemns the religious person as sinful. These great truths then make way for the rest of the book to reveal the Good News of what Jesus Christ has done to rescue us from our sins and provide salvation.

6. Is it (or was it) hard for you to accept that everyone (including yourself) is a sinner?

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"Christ," of course, refers to our Savior but is specifically the term used to describe His ability to save. He is the theme of this book. It is about His work, His ability, His goodness, His grace, His mercy, and His love.

7. What are some other titles for Jesus?

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"Power" is a theme throughout the book, revealing what it took to save sinful mankind. It took the ***"power of God."*** Salvation is nothing short of the greatest miracle that has ever occurred, and this happens through the ***"power of God,"*** which results in eternal ***"salvation for everyone who believes."***

8. How is ***"power"*** a good word describing the process of our salvation?

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"Salvation" is the end product of this book. This book explains what salvation is, how it was accomplished, and how we can obtain it. This book thoroughly explains what it means to be saved.

The word ***"everyone"*** is used throughout the book and is a reminder that salvation is available to anyone and everyone who will see their need and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

The word ***"believes"*** summarizes what becomes a detailed explanation in Romans of how we become saved people. Over and over, we are told that it is through simple belief that salvation is ours, and it is through unbelief that it is held back.

9. Everyone ***"believes"*** in something. What are some areas that miss the mark?

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"For the Jew first and also for the Greek" is a powerful discussion regarding salvation being available to all people, at all times, and through all of human history. It reveals that God has revealed Himself in many ways in order to save as many as possible.

10. How can a Jewish person be saved? How can a non-Jewish person (Gentile) be saved?

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In verse 17, the words ***"righteousness"*** and ***"revealed"*** again summarize the book but are more specific. Romans explains that to be ***"righteous"*** means to be sinless and blameless in God's eyes. To be ***"righteous"*** means that a person is acceptable to God and is saved forever. Romans shows that this is not possible apart from the work of God. Then, the word ***"revealed"*** shows that God had to make a way and then make that way known to us.

Finally, the word ***"faith"*** previews another massive theme of the book.

11. What is ***"faith"***?

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Romans answers this question over and over. ***"Faith"*** is explained, illustrated, and applied.

So much more can and will be said about this book as we study it together. I would encourage you to go into this book prayerfully and with great expectation that God will do deep and lasting work in your heart. Pastor John MacArthur highlights the possibility of what Romans can do when he said, "Most, if not all, of the great revivals and reformations in the history of the church have been directly related to the book of Romans." May the Lord use it to revive His people in every way.

NOTES

DEVOTION 1

BELONGING TO GOD

PASTOR JUSTIN DEAN

Many search their whole lives looking to belong to something. They try clubs, hobbies, and internet fan clubs all in search of that feeling of belonging. The search can be grueling and still many do not find the place where they truly belong. Paul opens the book of Romans assuring the believers in Rome that they belong. Have you ever felt you belonged somewhere? Where was it?

Romans 1:6-7 says, ***"…including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."***

Paul reminded the believers who belonged to the Roman church that they belonged not only to the church but also to Jesus Christ. More than this, they were called to belong, be loved by God, and be given grace and peace from Him. God's recruiting team is more than effective, and His offer is priceless. The same truth that Paul reminds the believers in the Roman church is true of you and me as believers today. We belong to more than just our River Church locations but to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In what ways do you feel called to belong to the body of Christ beyond your River Church location?

Reflect on a time when you felt God's love and grace in your life. How has it impacted your relationship with Him?

This reality of belonging should bring us a sense of peace. Instead of having to find or search for where we belong, we have been sought out by Christ. He has made peace between us and God

with the shedding of His blood on the cross and His resurrection. Through the Gospel, we have been given grace and peace. This is the foundation of our faith and should bring us great encouragement.

What does it mean to you to be loved by God and to receive His grace and peace?

Paul is establishing this truth as he affirms the believers in Rome and continues to flush it out throughout the rest of his letter. As we continue to study the book of Romans, remember the intense love that God has for you and the call that He issued to you to belong as one of His people.

DEVOTION 2

THE FOUNDATION OF TRUTH

PASTOR CALEB COMBS

In a world where truth often feels elusive and subjective, it can be challenging to discern what is real and what is merely opinion. Today, many people speak of "my truth," as if truth can be molded by personal feelings. However, as we delve into the book of Romans, we encounter the profound and unchanging truth found in Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul begins his letter with a compelling reminder: Jesus was foretold by the prophets. Romans 1:2-3 tells us, ***"… which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh."*** Over three hundred prophecies in the Old Testament point to Jesus, affirming that His arrival was not a mere coincidence but a divine plan fulfilled in history.

When we consider these fulfilled prophecies, we are reminded that God's truth is consistent and reliable. In a world that shifts and sways, let us anchor ourselves in the promises that have already come to fruition. Furthermore, Paul emphasizes the resurrection of Jesus as a pivotal fact of our faith. In Romans 1:4, he writes, ***"And was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."*** This powerful declaration is not just a statement of belief; it is backed by the testimony of over five hundred witnesses who encountered the risen Christ.

The resurrection is the ultimate affirmation of who Jesus is - our Savior, our Truth. It assures us that the claims of our faith are grounded in historical reality, giving us hope and confidence in a world that often denies absolute truth.

As you navigate your day, remember that Jesus is the foundation of truth. In John 14:6, He declares, ***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."*** When the world presents a shifting landscape of ideas and opinions, we can turn to Him for clarity and assurance.

Let the truth of Christ permeate your heart and mind. In moments of uncertainty, reflect on the prophecies fulfilled and the reality of the resurrection. Allow these truths to guide your understanding and shape your perspective, making Jesus the unwavering anchor in your life.

DEVOTION 3
THE LOVING TONE

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

As we begin our lengthy study through the book of Romans, it would be helpful to see how others have viewed it. Romans has received much praise. Here are a few quotes from some influential fathers:

- Martin Luther - Romans "is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. We can never read it or ponder over it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes."

- John Calvin - "When any one understands this Epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole Scripture."

- J. I. Packer - "All roads in the Bible lead to Romans, and all views afforded by the Bible are seen most clearly from Romans, and when the message of Romans gets into a person's heart there is no telling what may happen."

- John Piper - Romans is "the most important theological, Christian work ever written."

Romans is clearly special. However, before we wrestle with concepts like predestination, sanctification, propitiation, justification, the Law, and the wrath of God, it is comforting to notice the tone of the letter. Paul writes from the heart.

Romans 1:8-11 records, ***"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you."***

There are at least three key elements to this section of the introduction. First, Paul tells them he is thankful for them: ***"I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you."*** He is straightforward with the concept. It is a powerful phrase. Are there people you are thankful for? Have you told them? Has anyone ever told you they were thankful for you? How did it make you feel? It is a powerful statement. Paul is thankful for them!

Second, Paul says he prays for them: ***"Without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers."*** Paul regularly prays for them. He loves them, so he prays for them. He prays for them, so he grows in love for them. It is a beautiful cycle.

Third, Paul says he wants to be with them: ***"For I long to see you."*** We all have family and friends we look forward to seeing. Paul expresses this sentiment. He is excited to see them and watch them grow even more in the Lord.

As you read through the book of Romans, please accept the depth of material as from a loving friend. Listen to the tone from One who will do and has done everything for you. Feel His embrace as you grow in knowledge and faith.

DEVOTION 4

OWING THE GOSPEL

PASTOR JOSH YATES

"I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." Romans 1:14-15

I am going to let my "geek" out for a minute as we begin today. This is probably one of the most maligned characters in the *"Star Wars"* movies, but I kind of liked Jar Jar Binks. He talks weirdly, has long ears, and is really lanky, but he sure tries hard! During the course of the storyline, Jar Jar's life is saved by Qui-Gon Jinn, and he has to enter into what is called a "life debt." He is now tied to Qui-Gon and will serve him until that debt has been paid. "Jar-Jar owe ya da life debt…" Okay, I am done with geek time.

We hear stories like this in movies and even in real life. Someone's life is saved and that person feels like they owe something to the one that acted. Sometimes this is cultural and required, other times it is simply an indebtedness of gratitude.

For those who have come to the cross of Christ and found Jesus to be the Savior of their souls, salvation has come to them. Their life, their real life, has been saved. This Good News, this Gospel, is free to all that will come, believe in their heart that Jesus is Lord, and confess with their mouth that God raised Him from the dead.

Paul writes to the Romans at the beginning of his letter to set the tone for the rest of what he is about to write. This entire letter establishes just what Jesus did for all of humanity on the cross. He will soon talk about what we have been saved from, what we have been saved to, and just how Jesus did it.

However, he says something interesting at the beginning of this letter. He says he is ***"under obligation"*** to pretty much everyone. What is he ***"under obligation"*** to do? It is to ***"preach the gospel."***

He has been saved from his sin. He has been transformed from a man that murdered people of the Way (Jesus-followers) to a man that met Jesus on the road to Damascus, becoming a Jesus-follower himself. When he met Jesus, he was forced to look at his sin, realize that it was killing him, and fall on his face in surrender to his Savior.

He knew what he was saved from. He had to tell others what they were saved from and what they were saved to. He owed the "life-debt" to Jesus and so he had to testify.

Has Jesus saved you? Do you remember what He has saved you from? Do you know what He has saved you to? If so, it is time to tell others. They are drowning, and they do not even know it. We have been given salvation to change our eternal destiny and to be ambassadors for Jesus.

Carry the name of Jesus and His salvation everywhere you go. You owe your life, your everything, to Him.

DEVOTION 5
THE GOSPEL
PASTOR RYAN STORY

"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." Romans 1:16

I love looking deeper into the meaning of something. Whenever I read a text or book or listen to someone talk, my brain is wired to look deeper into what is said. I am big into semantics. Now, there are times when being a "semantical" person has major pitfalls, but looking deeper into word choices can also bring so much to any conversation. When my wife says, "I love you," the reference, implication, emotion, and logic of what is said have an entirely different meaning than when I hear it from my children. Both are meaningful, but the depth of such simple statements can open a whole new world of understanding.

Romans 1:16, in my mind, is the thesis statement of the entire book of Romans. While I was tasked to write about this verse, my heart could not stop itself from diving into the deep end of every aspect of the semantics of every word. The references, implications, emotions, logic, and God's divine truth saturated my heart.

"I am" - Paul, a Roman Citizen, was reduced, redeemed, restored, and repurposed by Jesus on his way to destroy Jesus' church.

"Not ashamed" - He was determined not to back down, shy away, or pretend anything different.

"The Gospel" - This is the Good News of Jesus Christ. This news is that Jesus was born a virgin and dwelt among men as Immanuel. He lived a life perfectly obedient to God and died on the cross as

payment for God's wrath. That payment should have rightly been paid by humanity because of the sin of all of humanity.

"For it is the power of God" - ***"It"*** refers to the Gospel. The Gospel is the power of God. The same truth and attribute about God's power ***"is"*** the same as that of the Gospel. The Gospel did not gain power or grow in power. Therefore, it cannot lose power or be overcome. The same power that is God as Alpha and Omega is the same power of the Gospel. The Gospel is the power of God.

"For Salvation" - Salvation is what all men long for and look for. Mankind's heart is wired to find peace, life, and hope. Sadly, the sick heart finds salvation in things, objects, activities, and passions outside of Jesus. The Gospel is the only means to salvation.

"To anyone who believes" - Ephesians 2:8-9 says, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*** Why use my words when God's Word is much more powerful?!

"To the Jew first and also the Greek" - There is no ethnic group or cultural group that Jesus did not die for. There is no person who God does not love.

Today, I challenge you today to read that verse various times throughout the day and write down the truth that God lays on your heart.

DEVOTION 6

THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

PASTOR JOHN CARTER

A very common quote in the church is, ***"The just shall live by faith"*** (Romans 1:17, NKJV). It is a great phrase to slap on your accent wall, decorate in your living room, and blast out on your Facebook page. However, what is the actual context of the phrase? What is the intended meaning of it? Do you hold to it as being a true, life-changing sentence in your life?

Romans 1:16–17 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.'"***

Very few people understand that Paul is quoting Habakkuk in this passage. Seriously, when was the last time you heard a preacher teach from Habakkuk? In Habakkuk 2:4, God is the One who says, ***"The righteous shall live by faith."***

The context in Habakkuk is rooted in the cries of the prophet. God is answering Habakkuk's complaints against God. He cries out to God with words like, "How long should I cry out for help, and you not hear me?" Habakkuk makes bold complaints like, ***"So the Law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted"*** (Habakkuk 1:4). Habakkuk doubles down, complaining to God in Habakkuk 1:12–13, ***"Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof. You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at***

wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?"

I am not so sure I would be so bold to question God the way Habakkuk does. I would be lying, though, if I said I never had those thoughts myself. God, where are You? How do You allow the evil to get away with so much? Is there any actual justice that we can see? Why do You not do something? Why does it seem like You are so quiet? It is in these very real and very hard questions that God answers, ***"The righteous shall live by faith."***

Habakkuk 2:2–4 adds, ***"And the LORD answered me: 'Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end - it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.'"***

Kenneth Barker explained, "The righteous are those courageous enough to accept God's word of promise in a world dominated by the horrors of Babylonian power described in the preceding verses. To look for salvation in a world dominated by persecution requires faithfulness."

So powerful is God's answer to Habakkuk that Paul uses it in several of his letters. We find it written to the Roman church (Romans 1:17), to the church in Galatia (Galatians 3:11), and by the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 10:38).

I love how God, in Habakkuk, is pointing to the future, ***"It will surely come; it will not delay."*** Paul, in Romans, points to the conclusion. ***"It is the power of God for everyone who believes,"*** and ***"the righteousness of God is revealed."*** No longer are we waiting. No longer do we await the appointed time because it has been revealed to us through the cross of Jesus Christ and the work

He accomplished there with the shedding of His blood. If you really want to complain about injustice, consider the injustice Jesus went through for your sins and my sins there at the cross.

The conclusion is Jesus! It is what God pointed Habakkuk to in understanding that in a broken world full of sin, there is only one hope. It is the righteousness of His Son, Jesus!

Lesson 2

Romans 1:18-32

BARE NECESSITY

Pastor Noble Baird

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such

things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them." Romans 1:18-32

On October 18, 1967, the animated movie *"The Jungle Book"* was released. In very Disney fashion, this fictional movie is about a young baby named Mowgli who is found and raised by a pack of wolves. Taking place in the jungles of India, the film is filled with animals who talk, and Mowgli finds himself a bear friend named Baloo. While on their travels to get the now 10-year-old Mowgli to safety, they sing songs to pass the time. One of those songs is the classic *"The Bare Necessities."* Within this fun song and dance, Baloo explains to Mowgli what it means to just have the necessities of life, nothing more and nothing less. One of the final verses of the song reads:

> And don't spend your time lookin' around
> For something you want, that can't be found
> When you find out, you can live without it
> And go along not thinkin' about it
> I'll tell you something true
> The bare necessities of life will come to you

1. When you think about some necessities of life, what comes to mind?

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2. What is the difference between a need and a want?

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In order for something to be needed, it must be essential or required for something or someone to function or exist. As Paul begins his letter to the church in Rome and to us, he begins with the greatest problem in the world - sin. Through this problem, he conveys the

people's need for a solution, their need for redemption, and the need to be saved through Jesus Christ. Beginning in Romans 1:18, Paul writes, ***"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."*** Paul puts it all on the table: the wrath of God is real, and it stands toward all of the ungodliness and unrighteousness of the world. This means that all those who continue to live in an ungodly, unrighteous, and sinful nature will experience the wrath of God.

3. When you hear the phrase "sin of the world," what comes to mind?

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4. What is the wrath of God?

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Continuing in Romans chapter 1, Paul expounds on the depth of the depravity of this world. In Romans 1:19-23, he writes, ***"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things."*** Here, Paul shares how the Lord does not hide Himself or His righteousness from the world. The Lord is not trying to play "hide-and-seek" or have some

gold hidden only to be found by treasure hunters. On the contrary, Paul teaches how the Lord has revealed Himself to the world and is continually doing so through creation.

The world's response to God's revelation of His power and deity is laid out here in verses 21-23. We have not honored or given thanks to Him for all He does and provides. This happens when we choose to worship self and creation over the true living God. Finally, mankind ignored seeking His wisdom and leading for pride and selfish desire. So, what is the Lord's righteous response to the world's ignorance and continued disobedience? We find this in Romans 1:24-25, ***"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."***

5. When you are disobedient at work, at home, in your marriage, or maybe your kids are disobedient, what are some of the consequences?

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6. Do you feel that the Lord's response to the world's disobedience is unfair, or is it just?

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Reading about and discussing the depth of the depravity of our world is never easy. In fact, as followers of Christ, we should bring an emotion of empathy, remorse, repentance, and ultimately, a desire to share the truth of the Gospel! However, it is also essential for us to fully understand the depravity of our world and why our

world needs to be saved. Paul finishes this section in Romans 1:26-32, writing, ***"For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."*** As Paul ends, it feels hopeless. Yet, Paul intentionally begins his letter this way. He knows that in order to share the truth of the Gospel and the need for redemption, reconciliation, and ultimately, salvation, he must lay the foundation of the true nature and depravity of our world.

7. Do you remember the time when you were lost, living for yourself, living disobedient to the Lord and ignorant of His teachings and power? What was that like?

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8. When was it that you understood the depth of your own depravity and the need for salvation through Jesus Christ?

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Now that we have read through and understand the need for salvation and the need for Jesus Christ in our lives, what is our call? Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, ***"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*** We have been called to be ambassadors of Christ. Our world is filled with the constant desire of "want" and "more." Yet, we as followers of Jesus Christ, we know what the one true "bare necessity" of life is, and that is Jesus Christ. That is what our world needs, and we have the incredible calling and privilege to take that necessity to a totally depraved world in need of Him!

9. Who can you share with and pray for this week, the Gospel of Jesus?

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NOTES

DEVOTION 1

DON'T JUST KNOW, WORSHIP

CHRIS MONTVILLE

Bertrand Russell was a well-known atheist, mathematician, and philosopher during the 1900s. He was once asked what he would say if he was wrong in his views and stood before God on judgment day. He replied, "Don't blame me God, there wasn't enough evidence."

In our passage today, Paul directly refutes this idea that there is not enough evidence for God.

Romans 1:19-20 says, ***"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."***

Here, Paul directly says that God has made Himself plainly known through creation. However, we must know that there is more to our relationship with God than simply knowing He exists. As verse 21 points out: ***"For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."***

It is not enough to simply know that God exists, but we must also ***"honor"*** and ***"give thanks"*** to Him. Humans have been refusing to give God His proper honor and thanks since the beginning of time. Our longing to be the god of our lives is the root of all sin: we think we know better than God. Adam and Eve first made the choice to eat the fruit in the garden of Eden against God's command and sin entered the world. We are all born with the same inclination. We have all made that choice in our own lives in one form or another.

This is why we need a Savior. Our own actions are never enough to save us from God's righteous wrath. It is only through the perfect sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross for our sins that we are made righteous and whole again.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, we read, ***"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."***

The odds are that if you are reading this devotional, you believe God exists. However, take time today to ***"honor"*** and ***"give thanks"*** to Him for what He has done in your life.

That is the key to our walk with Christ; it is not enough to simply know He is real. We need to have a personal relationship with Him, where He is the Lord of our lives. He is our Lord and our King. He is worthy.

DEVOTION 2

THE NEED WE HAVE KNOWN

GRANT GRIMES

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." Romans 1:18-23

We have all seen movies about superheroes and the imminent threats that follow. Everything seems normal and calm; the world is perfect. Then, suddenly, a great need for a savior arises, and that is when the superhero steps in to defeat evil. This scenario resonates with us because the human heart has a special place for a superhero story. However, the story Paul describes in Romans is very different from the movies we watch.

Paul begins in Romans 1:18 with the danger to mankind: God's wrath. All unrighteousness and everything evil in God's sight will be destroyed. However, verses 19 and 20 reveal something different about this story. The coming catastrophe has been revealed to us; God's reasoning for destroying sin is shown. Paul goes so far as to say that we can see the reasoning behind following God through nature around us. God's creation explains His law and shows the depravity between us and God, ***"They are without excuse."***

Paul organizes this paragraph carefully: the punishment leads into the cause for wrath (the divine law of God) and then he finishes with the response by mankind. Despite knowing God, we fail to honor or thank Him, becoming futile in our thinking and darkening our hearts. Claiming to be wise, we become fools and exchange the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, animals, and creeping things.

God's perfect law, which abhors unrighteousness and ungodliness, is far from being fulfilled by humanity. Paul articulates the desperate need for a superhero to step in for us, someone to bridge the gap between God and humanity. The perfect, holy, and supreme wrath of God stands against a world of persistent sinners.

At this point, it might seem like God is set to destroy the world, but that is where the miracle of God's grace and mercy shines. John 3:17 tells us that the Son of Man did not come to condemn the world but to save it. Instead of sending His wrath, God offers us a way to be pardoned, freed, and paid in full. The great need for a Savior was met, and all Christ asks of us is to recognize this need and accept salvation. Romans 10:9 says, ***"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."***

The world has a need, and that need is for a Savior. There is no excuse and no waiting. Call upon the name of the Lord and recognize your need now.

DEVOTION 3
WITHOUT EXCUSE

NATHAN ELLIOTT

There is a long-standing question surrounding Christianity that has been around for centuries, and that question is: “How can God hold people accountable for their sin if they were never taught about sin?” Maybe in your daily conversations with family, friends, and coworkers, you have encountered this question. Maybe you do not have a firm answer yet, and that is okay. Ultimately, this is an excellent question and one we should ponder as Christians. My goal, through this devotion is to give you some tools to use through the Word of God to better equip yourself to answer such a question.

In Romans 1:19-20, Paul addresses this exact challenge to our faith: ***“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”*** What Paul is saying is the attributes of God exist within His creation for His glory. Practically, what does this mean? In creation, we see beauty, power, order, purpose, and design. As humans, God has also given us reason and critical thinking skills. As we look at nature, we know instinctively that there must be a Creator. Next time you overlook a beautiful scene in nature, ask yourself, “Is this a result of a random explosion, or is this designed by a Creator?”

Paul continues in Romans 1:21-23 saying, ***“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”*** Paul is saying that all humans, by nature, know God; however, they choose

to suppress that belief and darken their hearts. This is a warning to not replace God with science and human wisdom. This mindset is what leads to elevating the creation over the Creator and, in so doing, becoming fools and idolaters. Here lies the two-edged sword of the testimony of creation; it both saves and condemns. For those who see creation as the work of God, it points us to the truth and validity of the Bible. For those who see creation as an accident, the creation itself becomes more valuable than God.

Ultimately no human is without excuse of sin. We know innately that there must be a Creator and a Designer to our world - although we are fallen and sinful, God has made a way for redemption through His Son, Christ Jesus*.* In 1 Timothy 1:15 we read, ***"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."***

DEVOTION 4
TOO EASILY PLEASED

PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

I read a quote by C.S. Lewis a couple of years ago that has stuck with me ever since. He said, "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." The last sentence in that quote is what has made me ponder my relationship with God ever since - we are far too easily pleased. In Romans 1:16, Paul gives us an amazing reality, ***"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."*** There is no greater truth than that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is enough to save anyone in this world. It truly is the best news. However, for that news to be good for us and for it to really impact and change our lives, we need to understand why it is Good News. In order to fully grasp this, we need to understand what has caused the need for this great salvation. We need to hear the truth of the bad news.

This is exactly what Paul does as he begins to lay out one of the greatest defenses of the Gospel throughout the book of Romans. In fact, his defense of the truth is so great that law schools will use the book of Romans to teach future lawyers about how they are to make a defense for their case! Through verses 18-32, Paul explains in great detail how fallen, depraved, and helpless mankind is. He gives examples such as sexual immorality, covetousness, and envy. I think, however, the root issue of all of these examples and why we are so fallen comes in verse 25. He writes, ***"Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."*** We have taken the infinite worth of the holy,

righteous, and perfect God and have exchanged it for the things of this world that make our bellies full for a few hours. How sad is it, as C.S. Lewis said, that we are like little children who would rather make mud pies in the slums because we do know what it means to be offered a holiday at the sea? This is how desperate the need of the world is.

Christian, you were once in this state. As Ephesians chapter 2 says, we once were in darkness like the rest of the world, but God, through His mighty grace, made us born again. Take the truth that has changed your life and go tell this fallen world that is in desperate need of it. Tell them that there is a God who loves them so much to send His own Son to the world to die for them and that with Him, we can have more joy than this world can ever offer.

DEVOTION 5

THE WORLD NEEDS TO BE SAVED

JASMYN BICKNELL

"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them." Romans 1:24-32

This passage opens with such a discouraging image, ***"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves."***

Multiple times through Romans chapter 1, Paul mentions God giving us up. Why on earth would God willingly give us up to sin? Does God not save us from our sins, carry our burdens, and try to protect us from the evil of the world? In short, yes, which sounds sort of

contrary to what is taught in this verse. However, it is important for us to understand that though He saves us from all the bad, He exposes us to it so we know what we are being saved from.

If you think about it, when someone says, “Heads up!” we do not always put our heads down and try to cover ourselves or run away from the area. We look up to see what that person is warning about. We do not typically live a life of blind trust; our human nature is too curious. I think of this when I read this passage. We really should have blind trust when it comes to following the Lord, but I think He knows our curiosity gets the best of us at times. So, in His patience, even though He knows best and is only trying to protect us, like a rebellious teenager, we run right towards the dangers. We run right toward what will lead to our downfall because we think we know best. More often than not, it does not end up going how we thought it would, and we get burned.

This is not to say we should give in to the temptations of the world. That will only bring about more destruction in our lives. Instead, we should use this knowledge to help protect ourselves from the ways of the world.

Thankfully, the Lord is abundantly gracious, guides us toward the truth, and forgives us of all our mistakes no matter how big or small. We need to simply ask for His grace and mercy, reach out and grab the hand that He has extended to us.

DEVOTION 6

CHOOSE YOUR PATH CAREFULLY

JOANNA MONTGOMERY

"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them." Romans 1:24-32

God is loving, holy, and righteous. He has a beautiful path for us, but He does not force us to walk there. He gives us the ability to know truth, then allows us to seek Him. If we choose Jesus Christ as our Savior, we will live a fulfilled life seeking God's path. However, not everyone chooses to follow Christ.

In Romans 1:24-32, Paul writes about lost people who were seeking wicked things. Instead of seeking truth and finding God's way, they

chose to turn away from God to worship things He created rather than worship the Creator. Because of their behavior and denial of God's existence, God let them have exactly what they were seeking.

The progression of their descent is sad but easy to see. It started with uncontrolled lust - desiring something they did not have but wanted. God finally allowed them their lust. Did that fulfill them? No. Uncontrolled lust caused them to passionately pursue the objects of their lust. Their passion sought to fulfill the burning created by lust. God gave them over to their passions. Did this satisfy them? No. Passion for evil gave them a debased mind - a mind that failed to know the truth and sought only to obtain the object of their lust. This consumed their thoughts with every evil they could invent. God eventually gave them over to their debased mind as well. They were either passionately absorbed into the evil, lustful acts of their debased mind, or at the very least, they supported those who did all those things. What a sad state - to lust for something that would harm them and others and would never fulfill their longing but only create more lust. Eventually, God allowed them exactly what they were fighting to have, and their choice only made them more evil and unfulfilled than they were before.

God has a path He wants us to seek. If we take His hand and walk that path, our lives are full of joy and fulfilled, and He holds us up when we stumble or are exhausted. God does not force us on this path. If we would rather walk through the rough terrain, or slip on the uneven way, He will not prevent us.

When I chose Christ, He sent the Holy Spirit to fill the dark places in my heart. While I still find times when I desire things that are not Christ-honoring, the Holy Spirit helps me realize what it would lead to and that it cannot bring happiness. God has given us the truth to enjoy and fulfill life, but we must seek Him and His truth in the Bible.

The progression to the assent of what life in Christ provides is also easy to see, and is joyous to follow. Read His truth and seek His way. If we know His truth, we will long for those things that bring us closer to Christ. This will make us passionate about sharing Him with others which will give us a mind full of His truth, wisdom, kindness, and love.

Lesson 3

Romans 2:1-16

GOD'S HOLINESS DEMANDS

Pastor Roy Townsend

It is amazing that mankind has a hierarchy of sins that we deem worse than others. I mean, it seems clear that our driving laws deem just a “little” speeding as a smaller infraction than reckless driving. How about crimes that are misdemeanors or felonies? We do not have to study the law much to know that felonies are more serious offenses. Even when we look at the Old Testament laws, we see more serious consequences for certain infractions.

1. Are there infractions that you do not deem very serious but are technically wrong?

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2. If you only struggle with “lesser” offenses, do you look down on people with “bigger” offenses? Why or why not?

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Kent Hughes writes, “Mankind does not accept God’s assessment of human sin and the imperative of divine judgment. This is not to say that men will not admit they are sinners,...but it is almost impossible to get him to realize the gravity of his sin.” It is often said that civilized mankind will agree when there are sins like murder or treason against the country. Hughes goes on to say, “However, that God’s wrath should fall on those guilty of such lesser sins as envy or arrogance does not seem quite right to them.”

3. Do you agree with Hughes’ statement that mankind struggles with God’s realizing that lesser sins are a problem towards God’s holiness? Why?

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4. What is the reasoning behind this struggle? Please explain.

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In our continued study of the book of Romans, we are looking at Romans 2:1-16 where the Apostle Paul explains the need for "religious people" to be saved from their sins, even if we rationalize that our sins are not as bad as everyone else's sins. Romans 2:1-4 reads, ***"Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man - you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself - that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"*** Especially at this time, the Jewish people believed that their sins were not of the same level because they were God's chosen people of the Old Testament. They were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So, they let the fact that they had a covenant with God blind them to the facts of their own sins or sinful behavior. They could not rationalize that God cared about their sins as He cared about the sins of other peoples (the Gentiles).

5. Have you ever seen situations where people believed their privileged status made their wrongs not as serious? Explain.

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6. It almost seems like childish behavior to believe that our position with God would allow Him to accept our sins as okay. Do you believe Christ's followers today rationalize their sins in the same way? Explain.

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Romans 2:5-11 reads of God's impartiality toward different peoples, ***"But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality."*** Here, we see a warning directly from the Lord that God's holiness demands that He is impartial to humans. We are in a condemned state, but Jesus came to save the world. For those of us who believe and have accepted Jesus Christ, we will account for and be rewarded for our works but not saved because of them. However, the unbeliever is condemned by the evil works that they do.

7. Why do people struggle with the understanding that mankind is in a condemned state?

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8. What will be your defense before a holy God concerning your condition or state?

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We know that many people, including believers, struggle with the question of the condemnation of people who have never heard God's Word. Romans 2:12-16 reads, ***"For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."*** Hughes writes, "We see the perfection of God's judgment because He judges everyone with faultless discrimination. Again, our text stresses that whether a person has access to God's Word or not, he will be judged by his deeds and when he falls short he will indeed be lost."

9. At this time, this question is causing many young people to struggle to believe the Scriptures. Do you believe the Scriptures even when the Scriptures offend your sense of fairness? Explain.

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10. Did you notice that God will judge the ***"secrets of men"***? Usually, man is only punished for his actions, but God will judge the thoughts and intents of the heart. Remember that our justification comes through the payment of Christ's death on the cross and that payment covers the secret thoughts and intentions.

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NOTES

DEVOTION 1

I AM NOT AS BAD AS THE OTHERS

SIERRA COMBS

I am often amazed at how a letter written to the church over 2,000 years ago is the very same letter that today's church needs to hear. God's Word is absolutely incredible. It is evergreen and always applicable. The book of Romans is no exception. The parallels to our world today are quite astounding! Take, for example, the descriptions of the people of the first century. In Romans 1:29-32, Paul states, ***"Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."*** It seems that some things never change. If Paul were alive today, he would write the same thing about our own society. Our world is a mess. People are extremely problematic, completely lost in their sin. Humanity seems to be on the brink of collapse at any given moment. This is all true, but it is not what we are going to talk about today. Instead, I want to discuss a subtle but profound issue that is just as prevalent in today's church as it was when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans: the temptation of moral superiority and religious self-righteousness.

It would be very easy for a religious or morally upstanding person to read the verses above and feel a sense of smugness, "I'm not like them. I'm way better than that. *They* are what is wrong with the world; why hasn't God wiped them out yet?" However, Paul quickly

shuts down this false sense of security, turning the focus on the moralist. He is the one who prides himself on living a moral life or one who believes their religious devotion and goodness will exempt them from God's judgment.

I love how Romans 2:1-5 (NLT) combats this mindset, ***"You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things? Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed."***

I am ashamed to say that I have lived in this place. As someone who is naturally a rule follower, pride, hypocrisy, and judging others have all been a major struggle for me. It is so easy to see and condemn the sins of others while overlooking the sins in our own hearts. We like to read through that list above and pull out the overtly immoral (murderers, haters of God, ruthless, heartless, and faithless inventors of evil) and wonder, "Why does God allow these people to go on committing their crimes? Why can't He just judge them now?" All the while, we tend to give a pass to the hidden and less offensive sins in our own lives (covetousness, envy, disobedience, and gossip). We sit there in our own self-righteousness, harboring pride and a judgmental spirit, all of which are just as offensive to God. His judgment goes deeper than the surface; it searches the heart.

While we may outwardly conform to God's law and may be respected by others for our shiny moral standing, we stand just as condemned as the vilest of sinners. No one can escape God's judgment by relying on their own religious activities or moral performance. We are all sinners in desperate need of a Savior. However, the incredible news is that His kindness, patience, and mercy are available to lead us to repentance. May we humble ourselves before the Lord, recognizing our need for His grace, not trusting in our own righteousness but instead trusting wholly in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. It is only through Him that we can escape the judgment that is to come and experience the gift of salvation.

DEVOTION 2
AMERICA'S GOT TALENT

STEPHEN BILLINGS

One of my favorite shows to watch with my wife is *"America's Got Talent."* We enjoy watching the variety of different talents people have. If you have not watched *"America's Got Talent"* before, the basics of the show entail a person performing their talent before four celebrity judges. These judges then give feedback on what they think about each contestant's performance. Each judge's feedback is based on their past experiences and what performance acts they believe to be the most talented. Some of the performances which I enjoy watching the most are ones which get mixed reviews (both good and bad). The reason for this is that it always sparks an opportunity for the audience, and those sitting on their couches at home, to share their own opinions. The fun really begins in my home when my wife and I disagree on whether an act is good or bad. It can be so enjoyable to discuss why we each think the way we do.

In the book of Romans, the concept of judgment is brought to our attention. The aspect of judgment, which is talked about there, is much deeper than the judgment that takes place at a talent show. While the concept is still the same (good or bad and right or wrong), the Apostle Paul, the author of Romans, tells us that we have ***"no excuse"*** or reason to look at another person and condemn their actions. Romans 2:1-2 (NIV) shares, ***"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself because you who pass judgment do the same things."*** Paul shares this because he wants his Jewish audience to think about how they are judging other groups of people, the Gentiles in particular. Paul is not making a blanket statement to never judge but to make sure there is a correct attitude behind our judgments.

The reason for this is that we do many of the same actions, which we then judge others for doing. We know that we are allowed to judge others with kindness and a humble, gentle heart, based on other passages of Scripture. Matthew 7:15-16 (NKJV) shares, ***"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?"*** Scripture is saying that we will know others by their "fruit." That means we can make judgments about others based on their actions (a.k.a. fruit).

However, just as a judge in a talent show should be fair and just, they are also to be humble and kind when sharing their judgments. The same is to be true for all of us. We are to judge with care, knowing that we are sinful, too. Just as others may sin, we choose to disobey God. That is why God sent His one and only Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. As your week moves forward, remember the grace shown to you by Jesus, and make sure that His grace is kept at the forefront of your mind.

DEVOTION 3

MORALITY IS NOT ENOUGH

PASTOR MITCHELL HOLMES

If you grew up with siblings, you know the pain of watching your brother or sister get a slice of cake that is just slightly larger than your slice. It was a common occurrence for one of my sisters and I to lose our minds and say to our mother, “That’s not fair!” As humans, we like to think in terms of fairness and right or wrong. We like to think that we can figure out the moral standard that we should live by, and at times, we feel like we need to hold others to that moral standard that we have set. Fortunately for us, that work of setting a moral standard has already been done for us by our Creator. Unfortunately for us, we can struggle at times to agree with His standard, or we can find fault with what is just in His eyes because it does not seem fair in our eyes. Some people see morality as a thing to be chased and sought after for the sake of living a good life by checking off the boxes of a morally just person. There are others that flagrantly defy the notion of morality as a whole. Our passage for today addresses both of these ideas.

In Romans 2:6-11, we read, ***“He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.”*** Paul is saying that God will judge all the same. Regardless of what we think is moral or how many checkboxes we successfully fulfill in our moral checklist, no matter how religious we are, we will be judged equally to someone who is living in obvious sin. Only a person who has never done

evil can avoid the tribulation and distress of God's judgment. We are all in need of a Savior, is the point that Paul is making here. We cannot do it alone. We cannot try to decipher what is fair and just because none of us are righteous. We cannot set the moral standard because, at our core, we are not moral beings. We are all flawed because of our sinful, fleshly nature.

However, there is One that can save us despite our sins. Moral or depraved, we all need the saving grace of Jesus. He is Jesus, who left Heaven to live on Earth and suffer as a man. He never sinned and paid the price for all sins on the cross. If we repent of our sins and believe in Him, we can be saved. If you are living your life in open defiance to God, turn from your fleshly desires and run to Him. If you are living your life by your moral code and hoping that you have been good enough to make it to Heaven when you die, let go and turn to the God that died for you. To those who are saved: do not let your loved ones be fooled by either of these tempting pitfalls. Help guide them to the hope and love found in Jesus.

DEVOTION 4

COMFORT AND REVERENCE

MELVIN FRICK

"He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality." Romans 2:6-11

My two-year-old daughter recently found out how to play hide-and-seek and currently requests to play multiple times a day. She prefers to be the seeker, which is based on the fact that every time she finds me, I pretend to be overwhelmed with surprise. If you have never played hide-and-seek with a toddler, I will give you a fair warning: depending on how well you hide, it can get boring!

This sobering passage of Scripture makes one thing very clear – there is no playing hide-and-seek with God. Every action, thought, and intent of our hearts will be evaluated by His just and holy nature. No matter how hard the moral person tries to hide behind their good deeds, and no matter how hard the religious person tries to hide behind their religious heritage, God will always find them. Make no mistake; He will render His judgment according to their works.

This truth should not be mistaken for a false message – that by doing good works and remaining patient, God will grant someone eternal life. This is simply not the case. The apostle Paul makes salvation abundantly clear when writing to the church in Ephesus, where he wrote, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And***

this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). So, although believers will give an account of their works, their judgment will not be based on them. Rather, their judgment will be based on the finished, atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The difference is clear: those who walk in obedience and faithfulness are promised peace, while those who walk in rebellion will face distress. As believers, this should encourage us as a reminder that God shows no partiality. It does not matter who we are, our background, race, or economic status; God's standard is the same for everyone. His offer of grace is available to all, but so is His righteous judgment. This should bring us both comfort and reverence. Comfort, because we know that God's justice is fair; reverence, because we know that our lives are accountable before Him.

DEVOTION 5
LAW & ORDER

JEANNIE YATES

Several years ago, I was called upon to fulfill my civic responsibility of jury duty. I was actually chosen to sit on the jury, but it was not anything like what I was expecting. This experience definitely destroyed the image of the shiny, majestic courtroom I was imagining. I thought I would be walking onto a set for the TV show *"Law & Order."* Although it is not realistic, that courtroom drama scene is exactly what I imagine when studying the book of Romans.

Romans 2:12-13 says, ***"For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified."***

Can you picture the courtroom? We do not usually like to focus on the attribute of God's justice. Grace? Yes. Mercy? Yes. Love? Absolutely. However, when we remember that God is also just, then we have to consider how He will judge. God is the perfect Judge and is holy (perfect) in the way He displays justice. What a better Judge than the One who sets the boundaries for all morality? He alone is the Author of the Law, determining what is right and what is wrong. In this passage in Romans, Paul points out that God will impartially judge everyone for sinning against what they know to be right; everyone is guilty. Matthew 5:45 speaks to God's impartiality, ***"For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."***

The next chapter of Romans reminds us that we have all missed the mark or ***"fall short of the glory of God"*** (Romans 3:23). This is not to make us all feel guilty, but rather to remind us how desperately we

need the Gospel. Author Jen Wilken writes, “Those who do not cast themselves upon the perfect sacrifice of Christ will spend their lives attempting to make atonement by offering their own good works to a God of their own imagining. They will seek to justify themselves by whatever means they can.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, ***“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*** This is the Gospel. The atonement that we all desperately need came as a gift; we do not have to pursue futile attempts to right our wrongs. The perfect Judge does not play favorites, and He rules with complete fairness. In His fairness, He also shows mercy. Knowing the way to redemption, He pronounced the guilty verdict and yet still provided the payment through His son, Jesus. Kristin Schmucker wrote, “By the cross, God both requires payment for sin and becomes the payment.” Take a few moments to thank God for His Law, His justice, and His sacrifice.

DEVOTION 6

THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS NEED SALVATION

ELIJAH EDWARDS

To begin this devotion, I want us to picture a scenario. Imagine you are a baseball coach and you have a mix of different kinds of players. Half of the players have been playing baseball for their whole life and know the game inside and out. While the other half of the players, are brand new to the sport and have never played a game in their life. This week you lost a game.

1. Out of these two types of players, who do you feel is to blame more for the loss? Why?

Now, regardless of how you answered the question, I have had coaches in the past who have never taken sides or put blame on a single type of player. However, in most cases, we can see that the players who were experienced might take most of the blame because they know the rules and what to do. The other players are new to the game and are still learning. Why is this the case? Why is it that even though they did not know the game as well as the more experienced players, a coach would still blame their play as well?

Romans 2:12-16 says, ***"For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."***

At first glance, this passage paints a pretty clear picture of a divide between those who know the Law and those who do not. In slightly less broad terms, Paul is referring to the judgment of the Jews versus that of the Gentiles.

2. When referring to the Law of God, who would know it better, a Jew or a Gentile?

When thinking of laws in general, who is more at fault for breaking them, the one who knows the laws well or the one who does not know the law at all? Of course, it is the person who knows the law! I know it feels like I am throwing softballs here with these questions, but I want us to really grasp what Paul is getting at. Paul is attacking the ideals of the religious Jew or the Pharisee's way of living. Pharisees knew the Law well and acted on it not for the love of God but for the love and acknowledgment of themselves.

3. Has there ever been a time when you have done something right or godly and felt pride in yourself rather than doing it out of obedience and reverence to Jesus?

This passage is a warning to all of those who know Jesus and the Word. We are meant to be ambassadors of Christ. When we deliberately go against His will and His Word, we are judged harsher than those who sin without the knowledge of Jesus. This is why it is important to recognize that even those of us who are religious are still in desperate need of a Savior.

Going back to the baseball analogy, the players that know the game better still lose the game, meaning that they themselves still need practice to put in the work to become a better player. Any good coach would still put the same amount of work on a player that knows the game well as they would someone who is new to the game.

4. Why would a coach put the same work and practice into both types of players?

This all leads to the fact that everyone needs salvation. Everyone needs continuous sanctification and growth in their relationship with Jesus. From the new to the seasoned, we all need saving. Romans 3:23 adds, ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."***

All have sinned and all fall short. It is not your morals or how well you know the Bible that saves you. It is not the good works you do that save you because no matter what we do we still fall short. Jesus saves and we all need that daily.

Lesson 4

Romans 2:17-38

MIRROR, HAMMER, MASK

Pastor Keaton Washburn

"But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth - you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'" Romans 2:17-24

Paul's words are fighting words! Here, he speaks strongly to Jewish people who are using the Old Testament Law as a reason for them not to follow Jesus as the promised Messiah. Yet, they all failed at the Law. Paul had just shown in the previous section that the standard for salvation is perfection, yet none have achieved that, and no one is even able to. Paul asks in Romans 2:21-22, ***"You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?"*** Paul then concludes this thought by saying in verses 23-24, ***"You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'"*** The very thing that the Jews were boasting about, they had not even upheld (both individually and culturally). Paul hammers this home in verse 24 by quoting Isaiah 52:5, where the Israelites were called out for poorly reflecting on the character of God through their disobedience, which resulted in their exile to Babylon.

John Barry puts it well by saying, "Obedience and action are more important than ethnicity."

1. How have you seen the name of God blasphemed by someone who claims to be a Christian yet does not live in a way that reflects that true character of God?

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One of the great tragedies of church kids (kids whose parents are generally believers and have been involved in church their whole life) is that they think that because they have been in church their whole life, that is good enough for God. Furthermore, there is a tendency that because they have grown up in church, they know the stories, and they have heard hundreds of messages that cause them to believe they are morally superior to others. I can point this finger at church kids because that is my story. However, everyone needs to be saved, even church kids. No one is grandfathered into the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. What things might people give for reasons other than the Gospel for why they believe they are saved?

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3. Why is this dangerous?

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Just recently, news broke of a well-known reformed pastor, preacher, and teacher who had a moral failing due to an inappropriate relationship with a woman other than his wife. This man was renowned for his teaching ability and knowledge of the Word; yet, he still fell. I did not know him personally, but I wonder how all his knowledge affected him. Did he think he was too good to fall? Did

he feel he was strong enough to fight off the temptation of Satan? A pastor who knew him well mentioned that this pastor was known for traveling all around the world to teach, and almost always, he traveled alone. We must always remember, "There, but for the grace of God, go I" (John Bradford). In 1 Corinthians 8:1, we read, ***"'Knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up."***

4. How have you seen the study of God's Word lead someone to be puffed up instead of leading them to love others better?

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5. Why is it easy to point fingers at others instead of first examining ourselves?

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Romans 3:25-29 adds, ***"…whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also."***

Paul is expecting a rebuttal from his Jewish readers. He gets out in front of it by jumping right into one of their most sacred acts of keeping the Law: circumcision. This idea of circumcision of the heart is foretold many times throughout the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25–26; Ezekiel 44:9).

Ezekiel prophecies that when the Messiah comes, followers of Him will receive the Holy Spirit and be made new, ***"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules"*** (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Paul, as the prophet to the Gentiles, was communicating to Jewish people that they also needed this promised Messiah to be saved from their sins. For those Jews that rejected Christ, the Old Testament Law and their Jewish heritage was a stumbling block. How, then, do we correctly interpret the Law?

Marvin Pate, in his commentary on Romans, shares Martin Luther's three metaphors for the Law to help us interpret it today, "The Law is a mirror that shows sinners who they really are before God. The Law is a hammer that crushes human arrogance when humans see who they are before God. But the Law is also a mask: behind this mask is the mercy of God, to which the Law drives the sinner and the saint."

6. How is the Old Testament Law like a mirror? What mistake were Jewish people making at this time in regard to the Law revealing their shortcomings instead of their strengths?

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7. How is the Old Testament Law like a hammer?

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8. How has God used your failures and sins to bring Himself glory?

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9. How is the Old Testament Law like a mask?

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Romans 3:1-8 says, ***"Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, 'That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.' But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world? But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come? - as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just."***

Being given the Old Testament texts (***"the oracles of God"***), the Israelites were entrusted with much. As a result, much was expected of them. However, they failed and disobeyed over and over. Even though they were not faithful, God is still faithful in keeping His promises to them. Paul then borrows from Psalm 116:11, saying, ***"Let God be true though every one were a liar."*** Even when we fall short, our unrighteousness acts as yet another opportunity for the Lord to show His faithfulness to us. That is the beauty of the Gospel! It is not about us measuring up, but about the truth that Christ has already measured up to the perfect standard of the character of the Father!

10. How do you find yourself trying to measure up instead of reminding yourself of the Gospel and the work of Christ?

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John Piper talks about the idea of preaching the Gospel to yourself daily. When you think of how much you talk to yourself, is it generally positive or negative? If I am honest, I am usually negative in my own mind. However, the call of the Christian is to have the mind of the Psalmist that we see in Psalm 42:11, ***"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."***

11. When was the last time you hoped in God? What does it look like for you to preach the Gospel to yourself daily?

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NOTES

DEVOTION 1

SINNERS IN NEED OF GRACE

JOSH THAYER

I have been going to church for a long time. I am currently 34 years old, and I have actively attended church ever since I can remember. That is a great positive in my life, but it can also be a negative. Sometimes, it is easy for me to think I know it all because I have been "churched" since early childhood. Today, I want to look at the idea that even the most moral or religious among us still need to be saved. We will realize this as we dive into Romans 2:17-3:8.

Paul starts out strong in Romans 2:17-20, talking to those who think they have got it all figured out: ***"But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God…if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness."*** He is talking to people who are proud of their spiritual knowledge, those who think they are exempt because they know God's Law, or those who feel they have already checked all the boxes.

Then Paul flips the script. He basically says, "Okay, you know the Law - great! But are you actually following it?" In Romans 2:21-23, he hits them with some tough questions: ***"You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?"*** He is pointing out that knowing what is right and doing what is right are two very different things.

Here is the thing: being moral, religious, or even deeply knowledgeable about Scripture does not mean you are exempt from the need for salvation. Paul is telling the religious Jews, "You might think you are safe because you follow the Law, but even you fall short."

Romans 3:23 drives this point home later: ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** It is easy to think that being a good person or following religious tradition earns us some kind of free pass. However, the truth is that no amount of good works or rule-following can make us righteous before God. We all need the grace of God.

So, what is the takeaway? Even if we are the most religious, moral, or rule-following person, we are still in need of a Savior. Knowledge of God's Law is not enough. Good deeds are not enough. We all need Jesus. Whether we have grown up in church or are just starting to learn about faith, every single one of us is in the same boat. We are all sinners in need of grace.

This truth is freeing. It levels the playing field. No matter how good we think we are, God's love and grace are what saves us, not our efforts. Let us lean into that grace today, knowing that salvation comes through faith in Christ, not through religious duty or moral perfection.

DEVOTION 2
JESUS GIVES US LIFE

DEBBIE GABBARA

"You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law."
Romans 2:23

One day, I was talking to a young lady that I was very close to about her relationship with the Lord when she asked, "Do you think I am a good person?" I do! She is a wonderful person. She loves her family and is kind. She is responsible, honest, and trustworthy. I would call her a good person, but not that lovely lady, or anyone else, is good enough to earn their way to Heaven.

Religion puts a lot of emphasis on works and being good, even "righteous." So many people think that being a good and moral person is all that is needed to go to Heaven.

The Bible explains that we cannot work hard enough, be good enough, or ever be righteous enough to cover our own sinful nature. All through the New Testament, we find encounters that Jesus had with the Pharisees (the religious leaders at that time). They knew all the rules and followed them with boastful pride. They looked down on those they thought were not as devoted to the Law as they were. God reminds us in the book of Isaiah that we are all infected with sin that makes us impure, and our attempts to be righteous are like filthy rags to the Lord.

Religion says to work to be a good person, but the book of Romans says that there is no good in us. We are made alive with Jesus, as these verses in Ephesians chapter 2 explain so clearly:

"Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the

world, obeying the devil - the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." (Ephesians 2:1-10, NLT)

Jesus came to give us life. Being a good and moral person is wonderful, but without humbling ourselves and asking for forgiveness of our sins, we would never be good enough to spend eternity with God. Our sin is a debt we could never pay with our works or goodness. However, God made a way. Romans 10:9 says, ***"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."***

DEVOTION 3
OUT OF THE HEART

CATHY STORY

"For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God." Romans 2:25-29

At first glance, Romans 2:25-29 might be a passage you want to speed read through. It may cause you to question how reading about being circumcised or uncircumcised can speak to us today. It is important to not just assume this section has nothing to do with us and skip it.

At the core, Paul is addressing that it is not an outward expression that identifies us as being saved. The list of good things we can do as Christians in and of themselves does not save us! In many well-intended Christian circles, people have used church attendance, clothing, tattoos, or hairstyles (just to name a few things) to draw a conclusion regarding whether someone may truly know Jesus or not. Now, many of these things are not bad and may flow out of a heart of knowing who Jesus is and striving to live for Him, but that does not make good things a checklist for having a true relationship with Jesus.

A genuine relationship with Christ is more than just doing or saying good things. One reminder Paul gave to the Jews that is important

for us to remember is that true change has to be inward, from the heart. Luke 6:45 reminds us, ***"For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."*** This heart change does not come by our own effort or collection of good deeds. This heart change, as Paul says, is by the Spirit. The only one capable of changing a heart, of bringing us change, is Jesus Christ.

The emphasis Paul gives here is that no amount of doing good is capable of bringing the true change that we all need. Paul desired the Jews to recognize that the good they thought they were doing which they believed saved them, did not. Paul closes with the reminder that the praise we seek is not from man but from God. I would encourage you to pray today that God will align your heart with seeking Him and not praise from others.

DEVOTION 4

IT IS A MATTER OF THE HEART

ZACH HONNEN

"For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God." Romans 2:25-29

We have come to a very interesting and important passage in our study of Romans. God had ordained circumcision in the Old Testament to set His people apart from the other nations, and now the Jewish people wanted to require this command be placed on their Gentile brothers.

So, how does Paul respond? With truth! You see, Paul wants to make a point that if you are outwardly obedient but inwardly a rebel, you are no better. If I raise my hands to worship and look the part but on the inside have a heart that hates God's Law and I only put on a show for my church or peers, then I have missed the whole point. The purpose of circumcision was to set them apart from the world. As Christians, we have something different that sets us apart.

What is it you ask? Well, it is love.

John 13:35 says, ***"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."***

We also see this in 1 John 3:10, ***"By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."***

Here is where we need to ask ourselves a few questions:

1. Are we more concerned with the traditions and practices we prefer, or are we focused on the heart of those traditions?

2. Specifically, are we set apart by our love for one another?

3. What are things that we allow to get in the way of the heart of the Law and get in the way of fellowship?

I feel the need to clarify. I am not suggesting that we do away with the Bible or the stances it has on sin, truth, or the Gospel. If you read the rest of Romans, you will see that we cannot make that argument. However, I am saying that my view on how we should worship, what color carpet we should have, or even what Christmas songs we sing this December is not the Law and should be held with open hands with a focus on the love of the brothers and sisters. We follow God's Word; where it is clear, we do not budge, but our default should always be love. That is how we are to be set apart from the rest of the world, just like God once set apart Israel. We will be known by our love.

DEVOTION 5

GOD IS FAITHFUL

MARK PITTENGER

"Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, 'That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.' But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world? But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come? - as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just." Romans 3:1-8

Wow, that is a lot to take in; what a breathtaking passage! What is Paul saying here? Paul was facing some arguments against his teachings: Are Jews superior to Gentiles in the grace of God? Of what value are the Jewish traditions? Is sinning okay because it shows God's mercy? Paul addresses these arguments by explaining that the Jews were chosen by God to pass on His Word, and while traditions are a good thing to hold on to, we all are sinners. Then the argument arises that if the Jews are not faithful to God, does that mean that God will not be faithful back? Paul addresses this with what could be his favorite response "mē genoito", which in Greek literally means, "let it not be" or "may it never be so." English translations often say, "God forbid," "Not at all," or ***"By no means!"*** These show an emphasized exclamation from Paul, who repeats this phrase throughout Romans! There must be a serious issue being addressed!

Have you ever heard someone say that they can do what they want because God forgives them? They treat God's grace as if it were a get-out-of-jail-free card. In the words of Paul, "mē genoito!" Paul is telling them that all people sin and are unfaithful to God and our unfaithfulness to Him has no impact on His faithfulness to us. God is faithful and just to forgive (1 John 1:9), just as He is righteous and just in judgment (Psalm 89:14). The arguments Paul faced were a direct question of God's character. Is He really faithful? Paul references Psalm 51:4 when he says, ***"That you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment."*** In this Old Testament passage, the psalmist is describing God's character. God will always keep His Word and remain faithful to His people no matter what we do, and His words and His judgment are justified! He will always follow through on His part of the covenant.

This is great news for us! As we all know, we fall short of His glory on a daily basis. However, God followed through on His promise to send us a Savior (See Genesis 3:15, but really all of Old Testament prophecy). Jesus came, and He bore the punishment of our sins. He carried the weight of our shortcomings on His shoulders and ultimately paid the price that we would never be able to afford. We can never pay Him back. So, are you living with hope? Are you walking confidently in the truth that God is faithful? My prayer for you is that you never forget what God did for you when He sent His Son, Jesus! He followed through on His promise!

Romans 1:16 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."***

DEVOTION 6

GOD IS EXACTLY WHO HE SAYS HE IS

KATIE PETTIBONE

In Romans 3:1-8, Paul is addressing three different questions:

1. What advantage is it to be a Jew?

2. Will Jewish unbelief lead to God's abandonment or loss of faithfulness?

3. If our sin leads to His goodness, will God still judge us?

Paul's answers to all of these questions can be summed up as follows: God is exactly who He says He is. If we compare Paul's answers to the questions that are being asked in this passage, we understand that Paul is simply reminding the people of the loving God they follow. He answers:

1. The advantage of being a Jew is having the Living Word of God.

2. God is faithful even when we are not.

3. God is righteous, and His righteousness is good.

These answers also apply to all Christians today.

In 1 John 2:2, we read, ***"He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."*** God's Word is open to everyone in this world. He is already faithful to all of us. His righteousness is sovereign over every single one of us. Even in our trials and through change, God is exactly who He says He is.

This passage led me to think about a time in my life when I experienced a similar type of change that the Jews did.

From the ages 6-8, I endured a lot of change. I had a great life at the age of 6, as most might agree. I had great friends, I loved playing in my backyard, I loved my church family, and I was always excited to hang with them every Thursday and Sunday. I had a set routine in life, and it felt good. Yet, like most people at that age, I did not understand the hardships that others were going through. I had no idea the turmoil my parents were facing financially. It was to the extent that my dad needed to reach out to family that lived out of state to help us. With that, we left my favorite backyard, friends, and family and said goodbye to our church community. For a whole year after that, we moved to three different states, lived in apartments and hotels, and with friends and family in their basements. It was a whole year and a half of change, one thing after the other.

Looking back now as a grown adult, I can see God's hand through all of it. He provided for us every step of the way. He used people to house, shelter, and feed us. He also introduced us to churches that accepted us with open and loving arms, showing us Christ's love through it all. I would say it was cool that we got to travel. However, what was cooler was the fact that even in my doubt as a 6-year-old child, God's character was the same. He was still faithful to my family. He provided and loved us through the storm.

I am very grateful to be following a God who is exactly who He says He is. One who keeps promises and loves endlessly.

Maybe you have not spent enough time thanking God for all He has brought you through. Maybe you are going through something and need to be reminded about the true character of God. Some truths that I know are God's Word is true, God is always faithful, and God is righteous over all. God is exactly who He says He is. I encourage you to spend some time with our amazing God and be reminded of how amazing He is.

Lesson 5

Romans 3:1-20

BORN SINNERS

Pastor Philip Piasecki

For two years of high school, I went to Orchard Lake St. Mary's. This school is well known for its athletic prowess. For over 100 years, the school has had some of the best teams in the state of Michigan. I will never forget how happy I was to make the JV basketball team my sophomore year. We had what we thought would be a great team, with many of us looking toward the day we would get to play on the varsity team. We thought that we were better than everybody else and did not plan on losing one game all season. Then, in the second game of the season, we played Notre Dame Prep and lost by two on the final play of the game. I can always say that I made history at that high school; as it turned out, we were the first team in the 100-plus-year history of that school to lose to Notre Dame Prep in any sport. We thought we were better than them. It turns out we were exactly the same, but we did not know it at the time. Many of us have been in this position before, we think we are better than the competition, smarter than the test, or overqualified for the job, only to find out the hard way that we are not.

1. Share a time that you have had a situation like this happen to you.

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Romans 3:9 says, ***"What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin."***

2. How did the Jewish people view themselves compared to the Gentiles?

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We see Paul trying to solidify the truth that the Jewish people were no better off spiritually than the Gentiles. The Jewish people continued to view themselves as God's chosen people instead of recognizing that they were sinners in need of a Savior in the exact same way that the rest of the world was. Sin is an everybody problem. It is something that a pastor needs saving from as much as the person locked up in a maximum security prison. As believers, we first have to look at our own hearts and make sure that we do not judge ourselves as being better than others based on where they are spiritually.

Romans 12:3 says, ***"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned."***

3. Do you struggle with judging the world for their sin? How can this verse help you with that?

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As Christians, when God looks at us, He no longer sees our sins, but instead, He sees us as forgiven by Jesus Christ Himself taking our sins upon Him on the cross. I absolutely love Hebrews 8:12, ***"For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."*** Each person is just one decision of giving their life to Jesus Christ away from being viewed as saved and forgiven in God's eyes, just in the same way that He sees us. This should change the way we view those who do not believe in Jesus. Yet, as Paul says, ***"All, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin."***

4. How does this change your perspective on the struggle of sin in your life and the lives of others?

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Paul then continues in Romans chapter 3 to help his audience understand just how serious sin should be taken. To illustrate his point, he goes on to quote the Old Testament to his Jewish listeners, knowing that these are Scriptures they would have been familiar with.

Romans 3:10-18 says, ***"As it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.'"***

5. What do you think it means to be ***"righteous"*** in God's eyes? Can anyone truly be righteous on their own?

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6. In verses 11-12, it says no one seeks God or does good on their own. How does this passage challenge the common idea that people are naturally good or can find God on their own?

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The struggle for the Jewish people, and still a common struggle with people today, is the belief that they are "good enough" to be righteous, that we can be viewed as good in the eyes of God based on what we do. The Jewish people thought that if they just followed the Law, they could achieve the relationship with God that they desired. This is a trap that we must ask the Lord to protect us from. Scripture clearly tells us that no one is righteous, no one seeks for God, no one does good. Paul is hammering home the point that sin is serious and that we absolutely need Jesus to deal with this problem.

7. Do you find yourself trying to do enough "good" to cover your sins from God?

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8. What stands out to you about verses 13-18?

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We see that sin affects absolutely every aspect of our lives. This is the absolute truth of all of our lives without Jesus Christ redeeming it. Our throats, tongues, lips, mouth, feet, and eyes all are naturally bent to sin. Verses 13-18 describe who we are before finding our salvation in Jesus Christ. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can we keep ourselves from continuing to sin in these ways. With Christ, our speech can be glorifying, our hands can work for His Kingdom, our feet can walk in His ways, and our eyes can see the glory of God and fall at His feet and worship Him!

Romans 3:19-20 adds, ***"Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable***

to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

9. Verse 19 talks about the Law silencing every mouth and holding the whole world accountable to God. How does God's Law reveal our guilt, and why is this necessary for understanding salvation?

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My daughter is just about to turn one. Currently, her favorite game is us telling her no and her turning away and crawling as quickly as she can away from us. She already has an understanding of what is right and wrong, and she already has the natural tendency to be sinful and disobey. We see in Romans chapter 2 that the Law is written on our hearts. Naturally, people know that there is a right and wrong. We now see in Scripture what the expectations are of a believer, and that should constantly remind us how much we need a Savior. The Law was there to show people how impossible it was going to be for them to follow it, ultimately revealing their sin. As we learn more deeply the truths of Scripture, our understanding of how deeply we need Jesus should grow. Our sins cannot be forgiven by following the Law, but our sins and need for a Savior are magnified through it.

10. If everyone is guilty and under sin, as these verses state, what hope does the Gospel provide in light of this truth? How does this realization lead to a need for Jesus?

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This section of Scripture feels like the darkness before the dawn. To truly understand the incredible gift that the Lord has offered us, we

must first understand the full depth of depravity that we were born enslaved to. Sin is serious, so serious that Jesus Christ had to die to take the sin of the world upon Himself. He took our punishment so that we could live. This Scripture shows us clearly that all are guilty and all need to be saved. Thank you, Jesus, for making a way for that salvation.

NOTES

DEVOTION 1

NADA

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

When I graduated from high school, I went on a short-term mission trip. After the trip, I needed to find a job, but no one was hiring. I lived in an area where there were a lot of small factories that fed the Big Three. I only had two months before starting my college courses, so I went door to door. Like I said, no one was hiring. I received a negative response everywhere I went for four days. Finally, I happened to walk into a factory and ran into the owner. He looked at me and responded positively. He then went into the factory and fired a guy who had been slacking.

Hearing a negative response can be discouraging. Imagine if someone told you, "No! Nay! Never! Nada! It is not happening! Nothing doing! On no account! By no means!" Hopefully, you will get the point. You would not bother to ask again. They made their point.

In Romans chapter three, Paul addresses a common question about whether or not anyone can be good enough in themselves to get to Heaven. He includes everyone (both the religious Jew and the educated Greek) in his emphatic answer. Romans 3:10-12 records his clear response. He repeats himself nine times:

1. ***"None is righteous,***
2. ***no,***
3. ***not one;***
4. ***no one understands;***
5. ***no one seeks for God.***
6. ***All have turned aside;***
7. ***together they have become worthless;***
8. ***no one does good,***
9. ***not even one."***

Paul's use of repetition makes his point. No one is righteous. We all need a Savior. We all need Jesus.

In verses 13 through 18, Paul uses eight descriptions to help picture our desperate need:

1. ***"Their throat is an open grave;***
2. ***they use their tongues to deceive.***
3. ***The venom of asps is under their lips.***
4. ***Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.***
5. ***Their feet are swift to shed blood;***
6. ***in their paths are ruin and misery,***
7. ***and the way of peace they have not known.***
8. ***There is no fear of God before their eyes."***

Often, we go to Romans 3:23 to point out we all have sinned, but this is not an isolated incident. God makes it clear throughout Scripture that we have a need that we cannot redeem by ourselves. The only One who can save us is Jesus.

Fortunately, when I was looking for a job, I got the message quickly that they were not hiring. I took action and went elsewhere. Spiritually, we need to realize that we cannot save ourselves. Stop focusing on yourself and look to Jesus.

DEVOTION 2

FREE INDEED

PASTOR GARY WRIGHT

"What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." Romans 3:9-12

When I was a teenager, a lot of the kids I hung around smoked cigarettes, so I thought I would try it, too. Truthfully, I did not like smoking, but to fit in, I continued doing it anyway. Eventually, my body began to crave cigarettes. I was addicted! I tried to quit several times, but when I did, it seemed impossible. I felt as though I was under the power of my addiction.

In Romans 3:9, Paul explains that every one of us is under the power of something. He says we ***"are under sin."*** Paul is not just telling us that we commit sin; he is saying sin is our nature, and we are under its power. According to Romans 3:10-12, the power of sin controls every aspect of our inner being:

- Our mind - ***"no one understands."***
- Our heart - ***"no one seeks for God."***
- Our will - ***"no one does good."***

Because we are controlled by sin, no one is righteous. Notice how many times Paul says ***"no one"*** or ***"none"*** in this passage. Paul makes it clear that according to God's standard for righteousness, none of us even come close.

I was eventually able to overcome being under the power of my smoking addiction on my own. However, when it comes to being

under sin, we cannot overcome it on our own. That is bad news, and it even gets worse. Sin has a cost. Romans 6:23 tells us, ***"For the wages of sin is death."*** Death means separation from God. Because of the power of sin in our lives, we are not only separated from God on this earth, but if we die in that sin, we are eternally separated from Him.

However, there is great news! The second half of Romans 6:23 says, ***"But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** Listen, God sent Jesus, His only Son, to this earth to pay the cost and die in our place. Jesus died on the cross so we could be set free from the power of sin. When we put our faith in Jesus, we will be set free.

Romans 10:9 says, ***"Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."***

Do you believe Jesus died for your sin?

Do you believe God raised Jesus from the dead?

Have you made Jesus the Lord of your life?

John 8:36 says, ***"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."***

DEVOTION 3
WHY THE BIBLE?

KARSEN THEEDE

In children's ministry, you will learn that kids will say anything that comes to mind. When I started to volunteer in the kids ministry, the director put out a question box for the kids. Any question they had, we, as leaders, would try to answer. Of course, we got many questions, more or less important or serious, but there was one in particular that was basically impossible to answer, "Why the Bible?" That was it, nothing more. We, as leaders, laughed at it, and it quickly became a joke, but that kid was kind of onto something. It is important for believers to ask this question. So, I challenge you, "Why the Bible?"

Right now we are going through the book of Romans. I want to specifically examine Romans 3:20. Paul states, ***"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."***

As many of us know, the Bible shapes our lives as believers. We do not have Jesus walking the earth anymore, so we use the Bible to understand what God desires for us. The Bible tells us how we should act as Christians. It is our moral compass and helps us to gain God's perfect wisdom and apply it to our own lives.

The Bible tells us in Romans 3:10, ***"None is righteous, no, not one."*** The Bible outlines how God wants us to act, and in turn, it shows us what we do that is not up to God's perfect standards. Thankfully, we are not left up to our own actions to earn God's favor. Another purpose of the Bible is to point us to Jesus, His death for our sins on the cross, and His resurrection.

So, now we know what the Bible does, but the question is, "Why the Bible?"

As Romans 3:20 says, no matter how much we read our Bible, how often we serve, or how good our deeds are, we cannot be justified on our own. The knowledge of our sin helps us to see the need for a relationship with our Savior. We, as believers, often get caught up in trying to do enough, and we often forget that Jesus already was and still is enough to pay the price for our sins.

The purpose of the Bible is to allow us to not only see how God intends His people to behave, but also to show us that our actions are worthless without a relationship with Jesus Christ.

DEVOTION 4

HELP: A SONG AND A SAVIOR

DAVID HUDGENS

During my youth, there were only two radio stations allowed to be played and enjoyed within the Hudgens family: the Christian music station and the Oldies station. On Saturdays, in particular, my dad would have the Oldies station playing while cleaning the garage or while out for a drive in the project car of the moment. On one such Saturday, while driving around town, I recall my dad singing confidently and with much enthusiasm along to the Beatles' song *"Help."* Surprised to hear his voice belting out the lyrics with perfect accuracy, I asked why this song connected so deeply with him. His vulnerable response remains with me to this day: "Because," he said, "I was once in desperate need of help - help from myself. I knew that I needed more help than could ever be provided by another person. So, I cried out to God, and I received in Christ all the help, and more, that I would ever need."

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he explores and expounds upon many critical areas of faith and practice. Within the opening passages, he addresses the confronting truth that all of humanity is in need of help. Drawing from Old Testament Scripture, Paul states, ***"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one"*** (Romans 3:10-12).

This is our shared human reality. Regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status, or geographic location, each one of us traversing this material plane is, in fact, in need of help. We are broken and cut off from our Creator due to our own rebellion. Our physical and spiritual status before God is corrupted. Relying solely upon human volition, there is no amount of achievement, moral

good, gained wealth, or anything else that can restore us to a right relationship with Him and with others.

Ephesians 2:4-5 adds, ***"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ."*** Furthermore, Paul continues in verses 8-9, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."***

Help is available in the Lord. Help is received when we acknowledge and confess our need to Him. Help is forever secured in Jesus.

Perhaps you need help today. All of us "need somebody, not just anybody." All of us need Jesus. Call out to Him today.

DEVOTION 5

SEASHELLS BY THE SEASHORE

KATRINA YOUNG

I love the beach. I love everything about it, from sunrise to sunset. My quiet time with God usually consists of long walks in the morning. It gives me a sense of humility, given the vastness of the ocean. I spend a lot of time looking for shells, hoping to add to my collection. On our trip this summer, there were not many to find. Looking down the beach, I could see piles of washed-up pieces, but only a few were intact. I started thinking about the journey and where they came from. The shells roll in from the depths of the ocean and, at high tide, find their final resting place on the sandy beach. I sometimes wonder what their journey was like. There are so many that could not hold up to the intense crashing of the waves and they were crushed. Finally, I found one that is perfect, fragile, and whole. What was the path that protected it?

Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV) says, ***"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."*** We are all sinners walking the journey through this life. Some paths lead to destruction, but there is only one path that leads to salvation. There are those who would say, "Simply being a good person and doing good deeds qualifies me for Heaven." There are others who say there are many paths. Romans 3:10 clearly disagrees with those sentiments, ***"None is righteous, no, not one."*** Paul makes the point that we are all accountable to God, and not even the Jews will be declared righteous in God's sight even though they were striving to observe the Law.

John MacArthur put it this way: “Whether you’re an immoral man, or a moral man or a religious Jew, you’re under the same condemnation. They’re all sinners. One is no better than the other. One may have the law of God written, one may have the law of God in conscience, but when it comes to guilt before God, they’re all the same and they all need salvation.”

Romans 3:20 adds, ***“For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”*** The Law does not justify us, but through the Law, we can become aware of how unrighteous we are and aware of our own sin. Paul explains that the only way to be righteous in the eyes of God, apart from the Law, is through our faith in Christ. Our paths all start out the same; we are sinners. There is only one path that leads to righteousness; it is by following Jesus and His Word that we can find our wholeness.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Psalm 119:105

DEVOTION 6
WE ALL NEED JESUS

ALYSSA FAIRSE

"Thus says the Lord: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." Jeremiah 17:5-8

For as long as I can remember, I have struggled with putting my identity, self-worth, and all of my trust in people. Every choice I made was dependent on what people thought I should do. Even after I moved out of my parents' house, my dad's opinions and thoughts held a stronger stance over my life than anyone else. Eventually, I moved on from my dad, and I held tight to the words of my best friend, then my secular friends, then my husband, and then my mentor. I called Jesus the King of my life, but in reality, people were. I often found myself in a puddle of my own tears, in panic attacks, and second-guessing every decision that led me to where I was at that moment. More often than not, I was there because I was no longer doing what was biblical or what God had called me to do, but instead what everyone else thought I should do.

I believe we have all been guilty of doing this at some point in our lives. We all crave acceptance. We crave for people to be proud of us, for people to think highly of us. We have all held the unbearable weight of not wanting to let someone down. It is okay to lean on each other and bring each other closer to the Lord. God has given

us community, family, and friends, so we can do that (Proverbs 27:17). However, we cannot use people as placeholders for God.

As people, God can use us to help bring someone to Him, but we are unable to give them salvation. As people, we can encourage and pray with others, but we are unable to forgive others of their sins. We are all guilty and are in need of a Savior. Romans 3:23-24 says, ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."*** It is because of this that we are always in desperate need of relying on Jesus. My dad, best friend, and husband are amazing people who love the Lord with all their hearts, but at the end of the day, they are not God. They will eventually leave me disappointed if I continue to put all of my trust in them and not in Jesus.

Lesson 6

Romans 3:21-31

RECEIVED NOT EARNED

Pastor Philip Piasecki

The “going to work” Pistons of the early 2000s were my favorite sports team in my childhood. I feel like I never missed watching a game. Ben Wallace was one of the players that I modeled my middle school and high school basketball career after. I will never forget one Christmas morning grabbing the first present, which was a Ben Wallace Jersey along with Pistons playoff tickets. Receiving a gift like that when you are a child is so meaningful because there was absolutely no way I could have paid for those tickets on my own. I could not earn them, and there was no way for me to get them outside of it being a free gift.

1. What is the most meaningful or unexpected gift that you have ever received?

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In the same way, righteousness is something we cannot earn, only something that can be received from Christ. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul presents a comprehensive explanation of the doctrine of righteousness. Righteousness is the idea of being in “right standing with God.” Romans 3:21-31 is a foundational passage that addresses the core of the Gospel message, explaining how righteousness is received and applied through faith in Jesus Christ. The Jewish understanding of righteousness was that it was something that could be achieved through strict adherence to the Law. In simple terms, the thought was that as long as we follow these rules closely enough, we will be righteous in the eyes of God. However, earlier in the book of Romans, we just learned that the purpose of the Law is to reveal our sin and our need for a Savior. It was not to give us a way to earn anything. Righteousness through the Law was not, and still is not, possible.

2. Do you often find yourself doing good works in the hope of achieving righteousness?

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Romans 3:21-26 says, ***"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."***

3. What does Paul mean by ***"the righteousness of God"*** being revealed apart from the Law (Romans 3:21)?

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In traditional Jewish thought, righteousness was often seen as something to be earned through obedience to the Law. However, Paul challenges this notion by introducing a righteousness that comes directly from God; it is independent of human effort. This righteousness, Paul explains, was always testified to by the Law and the Prophets, but now it is fully revealed through Jesus Christ. Jesus had made a way for sinful humanity to be made right in His sight without keeping the requirements of the Law. The shift here is from Law-based righteousness to faith-based righteousness.

Philippians 3:8-9 says, ***"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith."***

4. Is it easy for you to accept righteousness as a free gift realizing it is something that we cannot earn?

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5. How does understanding that righteousness cannot come from our works change your perspective on your faith and Christian life?

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We see in Philippians 3:8-9 that when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, His righteousness is now counted as our righteousness. This righteousness is what we call "imputed righteousness." It is not something that we can do on our own; it is Jesus' righteousness counted as our own when we put our faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Please notice that earlier in this passage in Romans 3:10, Paul reminds us that there is none righteous, ***"no, not one."*** Only Jesus Christ lived a righteous life, and He imparts that righteousness to us when we put our faith in Him. This stands in stark contrast to the belief that you can achieve righteousness through works. Works-based righteousness depends on human effort and obedience to the Law. However, because ***"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"*** (Romans 3:23), no one can attain righteousness by their own works. Faith in Christ,

then, shifts the focus from human striving to divine grace, allowing believers to receive God's righteousness as a gift.

6. How does Paul's teaching that there is no one righteous apart from Christ (Romans 3:10) shape our understanding of human effort and striving for perfection?

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7. What does it mean to be ***"justified freely by his grace"*** in Romans 3:24 (NKJV)? How does grace play a role in righteousness?

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In this verse, Paul says that believers are ***"justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."*** To be justified means to be declared righteous in God's sight. This justification is not something we can earn; it is given ***"freely"*** by God's grace. We are justified in an instant when we believe in the Gospel and receive the righteousness of Christ. When we truly understand the sinful nature that we are born in, how we are truly enemies of God from birth, the grace that God extends to us is absolutely staggering. We did not deserve any of this, yet God still sent His son as a sacrifice so that we could be declared righteous through Christ.

Titus 3:5-6 records, ***"He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior."***

8. What should your response be to Christ in light of this gift that He has given you?

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Just like the 2004 Pistons, it is time to go to work. There is this imputed righteousness that we are given when we believe in Jesus, but then there is a second type of righteousness, which is imparted righteousness. Imparted righteousness is practical, lived-out righteousness that we can only do through the Holy Spirit living inside of us. Prior to faith in Christ, we were incapable of pleasing God, as Hebrews 11:6 teaches us, but once we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we then have the ability to strive for righteousness in our day-to-day lives. Our only proper response to being made righteous through our faith in Christ is to then press on to actually live righteously each and every day. I want to do good works for Christ out of my love for Christ and what He has done for me.

Philippians 3:12 says, ***"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own."***

Romans 6:13 adds, ***"Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness."***

9. What does it look like to present yourself as an instrument of righteousness in your daily life? How can you live out this calling in practical ways?

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Paul says in Philippians that we are not perfect, but we press on to be more like Christ each and every day. We can present ourselves as instruments of righteousness in many different ways. We can serve Christ by being a light for Him in sharing the truth of His Gospel with other people. We should actively be looking to Scripture to see how we can better follow God's commands. When we follow Christ, obeying His Law, we know that our works are flowing out of our relationship with Him, not out of a belief that the Law makes us righteous. We all should be evaluating our own lives, seeing how we can better serve Christ.

Romans 3:27-28 says, ***"Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."***

John Piper wraps this up so clearly, "So, here's the glory and the mystery of the Christian life. We are already righteous in Christ, and so we have peace with God. And in the peace of that acceptance with God, we strive for righteousness in our daily lives not only because we know that this confirms that we are God's people, but also because this is the most deeply satisfying way to glorify Christ."

10. John Piper says, "We are already righteous in Christ, and so we have peace with God." How does having peace with God motivate you to strive for righteousness in your daily life?

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NOTES

DEVOTION 1

JUSTICE AND MERCY

LORENA NORRIS

In Romans 3:25, Paul explains a captivating truth about God's character: His righteousness collides with His divine forbearance. Paul says, ***"Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins."***

To fully appreciate this, we must explore what it means to be in the right relationship with God and others and why these two qualities matter so much.

"Righteousness" signifies being in a right standing with God. It reflects His perfection and calls us to align our lives with His loving will. When we embrace God's righteousness through faith in the Gospel, our lives are transformed. Our past mistakes are washed away, and we step into a relationship filled with grace.

"Forbearance" embodies patience and self-control, especially when faced with wrongdoing. God was so generous to send Jesus to rescue us. We are repeat offenders against God, yet He gives us time to repent and turn back to Him instead of rushing to judgment. When things get messy, forbearance is the ability to overlook offenses and give others the same mercy God gives us.

At first glance, the combination of righteousness and forbearance might seem contradictory. Righteousness insists on justice, while forbearance leads to mercy. Yet, in God's faultless nature, these qualities coexist beautifully. His righteousness does not diminish His mercy; it magnifies it. By practicing forbearance, God opens the door to redemption, reminding us that true justice is rooted in love.

As we soak in this profound truth, we are called to mirror these qualities in our earthly relationships. This means striving for fairness while also embracing patience and forgiveness. Instead of responding in self-righteousness, we are invited to approach others with understanding and grace.

In our daily lives, let us strive to embody this beautiful balance. When we encounter wrongdoing, we can respond with righteousness by choosing to practice forbearance, creating a space for growth and healing.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for the beautiful way Your righteousness and forbearance come together. Help me to embody these qualities in my relationships, extending grace and patience to others just as You have done for me. May my life be a radiant reflection of Your love and mercy! In Jesus' name, Amen.

DEVOTION 2
RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

ADELINE SANCHEZ

Many of us have heard of the Ten Commandments. Our minds recite, “Do not steal, do not murder, etc.” It is living a righteous life 101. The dictionary definition of righteousness is “the quality of being morally correct or justifiable.” In the Old Testament, God gives His people a standard for living righteously through the Law of Moses, but as we see throughout the entire Old Testament, no one can follow it properly. The greatest, most godly people from the Old Testament cannot even follow it perfectly. Moses, one of the greatest Bible characters, fell short of righteousness. His anger against the Israelites and his pride caused him to slip, even if it was just for a moment. He paid the price for it because God did not allow him to enter the Promised Land because of his disobedience. Psalm 53:3 says, ***“They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.”*** There is not a single person on Earth who is truly righteous and good. It is made abundantly clear in the Bible that God is the only truly righteous being. So, what does that mean for us?

Romans 3:21-24 says, ***“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through: the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”*** We can never be truly righteous because the standard for righteousness is God, and none of us have or ever will live up to that standard. Sure, we can come close to following the Ten Commandments, be considered good people, and follow the laws for the most part, but Paul makes it clear in Romans that the Law just cannot save us because we are still flawed and imperfect people.

However, God made a way for us to be made righteous through Him because we obviously cannot be made righteous by our own works. Jesus, a perfect man who knew no sin, died on the cross as the ultimate sacrifice for all of our sins, past, present, and future. It is through Jesus' death and resurrection that we can be declared righteous in God's eyes. It is through faith in Christ Jesus that our sins become justified, and we are made righteous. 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."*** Jesus paid the price (which was death) for our sins as a way to satisfy God's justice and ultimately show God's righteousness so that we can be set free from sin and be made right with God.

Finally, 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) says, ***"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."***

DEVOTION 3
RIGHT AND WRONG

ELIJAH EDWARDS

From the time we are starting to take our first steps, say our first words, and make our own decisions, we are told what is right and what is wrong. From simple things such as Michigan football is good and Ohio State football is bad (in my household), to more advanced things such as lying is bad and telling the truth is good. We learn from a young age what is right and wrong depending on what kind of house we grew up in.

1. What was right and what was wrong in your household?

2. How have these things affected your life now?

The truth with human nature is that the moment we are presented with a choice to do good or do bad we tend to side with the bad. The bad can make us feel good. It makes us feel we are in control. Yet, the good can also make us feel good like we did something right.

Romans 3:21-26 says, ***"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."***

Romans 3:23 paints a very vivid picture that every single person that has ever lived (or will live) has done wrong, and that wrong makes us ***"fall short"*** of the righteousness of God.

3. After reading these verses, what is the ***"righteousness of God"***?

4. Why is this something we cannot acquire on our own?

5. Why is God qualified to say what is right and wrong?

Because we sin or do wrong, we are unable to be righteous. The prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah 64:6, ***"All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment."***

6. What do you think Isaiah means by this?

The point of this entire passage is that we are only made righteous through the work of Jesus Christ. It does not matter if we have done a lot of good things. It does not matter that we know what is right and wrong or bad and good. As I stated before, those things can be different based on what we were taught. Christ is the only One who makes us righteous because of the work He did on the cross.

DEVOTION 4

SAVED BY THE LAW OR THE LAMB?

PASTOR JOHN CARTER

Can I be good enough to enter into God's good graces? Does the Old Testament Law actually save me from my sin? What is the purpose of the Law?

These are profoundly deep questions to wrestle with and work out in your life. It has been an incredible journey for me to examine God's Word on this subject. I cannot say that I have always been on the right side of the conversation regarding these questions. These questions have been something I have wrestled with for many, many years in my own life as a follower of Jesus.

I think it is necessary, before we examine a small portion of these questions, to encapsulate the wonderful purpose of the Law. In short, I can say that the Law of God that is written in the Old Testament is to point us to the very person of Jesus Christ in every way. I could spend hours expounding on that single sentence. Just take a minute to grasp what that purpose indicates; to point us to Jesus is one of the greatest purposes of the Law.

It is in this understanding of the purpose of the Law that we can begin to grasp some of Paul's teachings. As you study Romans, it may seem, in some ways, that Paul is back and forth in his thinking of the Law. Paul will sometimes come across as though he is condemning the Law; he will also regard it with great adoration and honor.

One of those passages is Romans 3:27–31, ***"Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God***

of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one - who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law."

Do we exclude the Law, or do we uphold the Law? Will God use the Law only for the Jews, or is there some purpose for it for the Gentiles? What position should we take then as modern-day Christians living in America?

Go back to that sentence: The purpose of the Law is to point us to Jesus in every way. Paul is dealing with a very confused church in Rome. He has to lay out the fundamental misuse of the Law that the Jews had mistakenly applied to their justification. They thought the Law was what saved them. They saw it as their hope. They missed the fact that the Law points out their sin and need for a Savior. They missed that the Law was all about pointing us to Jesus! The belief was that a Jew (or anyone for that matter) could determine their way into God's good graces by showing everyone else that they kept the Law. The Jews would go all over the world making proselytes (that is, converts to Judaism - Matthew 23:15). They would use it as a means of boasting, boasting about their works as good people who were righteous before God. The reality is we still have this same issue in our churches today, "I am not as bad as so and so. I am a pretty good person. I have never killed anyone. I have never stolen anything from anyone. Surely God won't send me to Hell because I am a good person."

Paul points us to the proper response to the Law; it points us to Jesus! Faith in your own works leads to a massive misuse and misunderstanding of the Law. The Law was never meant to save us; it was meant to point us to the One who could save us. It was meant to point us to the very fact that we need a Savior. That purpose applies to the Jews, as well as the Gentiles. Every single living

person needs to recognize their need for an almighty and wonderful Savior. The Law is what will point us to this fact! Paul points us to the role of faith. It plays a huge role! Faith in what, though? Is it the Law and keeping it? Earlier in the chapter, it is clear that this is what Paul is contending with.

Romans 3:9–10 states, ***"What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one.'"***

The misuse of the Law and the total misunderstanding of its true purpose is the subject of Paul's letter and writings on righteousness. As you start studying the Law, you will find that you are, in fact, guilty of breaking many of God's commandments. Just start with the top Ten. If we are 100% honest, we will all have to admit we have fallen short and are guilty to some degree of violating God's Law. We are, in fact, condemned! Paul and James will deal with this in their books; if you break even one, you are guilty of them all as a transgressor (sinner, violator, and lawbreaker). You cannot say you are innocent and have never broken God's righteous, holy Law (Romans 7:12).

So, what do we do with the Law? Does our faith then overthrow (make it null, void, abolish, render useless, do away with, or vanish away with) the Law? Not at all! Paul says the exact opposite! We use it for what it was intended for, pointing people to Jesus! One of my favorite Gospel passages is in the Gospel of John. It is where I got the title of this devotion. Just as John the Baptizer pointed people to Jesus, the Law was designed to do the same thing - point us to the Lamb, the Savior, the person of Jesus!

John 1:29 says, ***"The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"***

What is it you are putting your faith in? Let me, in the kindest way possible, tell you that if your faith is in anything other than the person of Jesus, it is hopeless. The power of the Law and the very hope of the Gospel points to our faith being in this single and amazing Person. Examine your faith, and ask yourself, what am I truly relying on? Is it Jesus? Is it the Lamb of God?

DEVOTION 5
IDENTITY IN CHRIST

SIERRA COMBS

I do not know about you, but there are many times in my life when I have felt the pressure to perform. Recently, I came across an old box full of my yearbooks from high school and middle school. Looking through them, I saw names and faces of people I had not thought of in decades, and reading through the words people wrote to and about me, led to laughter and some self-reflection. One common theme from all of my yearbooks was that my teachers loved me. I know teachers often write nice and encouraging notes to their students, but it was more than that. It was extremely evident to me and everyone else that I was a perpetual teacher's pet. This was not accidental. I wanted my teachers to know that not only was I going to be their star student, but that I was happy to go the extra mile to make them adore me. Give me a rule, and not only will I follow it, but I will follow it as closely to perfection as possible. Give me a contest, and I will win. Even with the subjects that I did not naturally excel at (I am looking at you, ceramics and calculus), it did not really matter because I could just charm my way to a higher grade. If, for some reason, I could not get that higher grade or could not be the best, my world would feel like it was crashing down. This did not just apply to my teachers but also to my friends, family, and even God. When I looked at my mistakes and failures, I would convince myself that if I just worked harder or charmed more, I could earn their approval. Much has changed over the years as I have matured and come to understand my identity in Christ, but it is still easy to fall into the trap of believing that my relationship with God is based on what I can do rather than who He is and what He has already done for me.

In Romans 3:27-31 (NLT), Paul speaks to the heart of this struggle, addressing an issue that was central to the early church but is just as relevant today. It must be a universal truth that human beings tend

to boast in our own efforts and rely on what we can achieve rather than rest in the grace of God. He writes, ***"Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law. After all, is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is. There is only one God, and he makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Well then, if we emphasize faith, does this mean that we can forget about the law? Of course not! In fact, only when we have faith do we truly fulfill the law."*** Paul makes sure that his listeners know that there is no room for pride and boasting in the Kingdom of God because our justification comes not from what we can do, but from our faith in what Christ has already done. This is so contrary to our human nature. We like to measure ourselves by our own accomplishments, validating ourselves by the things we achieve. However, this is not how things work in God's Kingdom! Our righteousness is not something we can produce on our own. We cannot just give a great performance and earn it. It is a gift from God, only made possible through Jesus Christ.

When I read this passage, I am reminded that my relationship with God does not depend on my ability to follow all of the rules perfectly. It is not about keeping a scorecard of all of my good deeds and showing others how well I have performed. It is about faith in the One who loved me so much that He made a way for me to be right with Him. Paul makes it clear that this truth applies to everyone - Jews and Gentiles alike. As was then, there is no distinction in God's eyes - all of His children are justified by faith alone. Regardless of your background or your heritage, what matters is that you place your trust in Jesus, the only perfect person to ever live, the One who takes our sin and trades it for His righteousness. That is great news! No matter what your story is, God's grace is available to you. You do not have to be weighed down by the pressure to earn His favor or

compare yourself with others. Praise the Lord that I no longer have to carry the burden of trying to prove myself to Him when I know that He has already proven His love for me by sending His son, Jesus, to die in my place. My worth is found in Christ, and His finished work on the cross is enough!

DEVOTION 6
THAT IS A BIG WORD!

JOSH THAYER

Hey everyone, today we are going to talk about something that can sometimes feel a little mysterious: righteousness. It is a big word that gets thrown around a lot in church, but what does it really mean? It helps to look at Romans 3:27-31 to break it down.

Paul, the writer of Romans, says in verse 27, ***"Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith."*** Basically, he is asking, "Can we brag about how righteous we are?" The answer is a solid, "no." There is no room for boasting in ourselves because righteousness (being right with God) does not come from anything we do. It is not like we can rack up a bunch of good deeds and say, "Look how awesome I am; God owes me." Nope. It is all about faith.

Paul goes on in verse 28, ***"For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."*** This is a huge statement. Paul is saying that righteousness is not about keeping all the rules perfectly. It is not about checking all the religious boxes. It is about faith. It is trusting in what Jesus has done for us, not what we can do for ourselves.

That is such good news! If righteousness were up to us, none of us would make the cut. No matter how good we try to be, we always fall short. However, the beauty of the Gospel is that God's righteousness is given to us through faith in Jesus. We are made right with God, not because we have earned it, but because Jesus took care of it on the cross.

Then, in verses 29-30, Paul asks, ***"Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,***

since God is one - who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." In other words, God's righteousness is not just for one group of people. It is for everyone. It is for the Jew, Gentile, religious, and non-religious. It is for anyone who comes to God through faith in Jesus. They are made righteous. That is amazing because it means no one is excluded. Everyone has access to God's grace.

Finally, Paul wraps it up in verse 31, ***"Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law."*** Paul is saying that faith in Jesus does not throw the Law out the window. Instead, when we truly live by faith, we honor the Law because we are following God out of love, not out of obligation or fear. It is not about rules anymore; it is about a relationship.

So, here is what righteousness really means: it is not about us being perfect. It is about trusting in the One who is. When we put our faith in Jesus, God sees us as righteous, not because of what we have done, but because of what Jesus has done for us.

As we walk through our day today, let us rest in the fact that our righteousness does not depend on our efforts. It depends on our faith in Christ. That is the beauty of the Gospel - righteousness explained, and it is all about grace.

Lesson 7

Romans 4:1-12

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Pastor Roy Townsend

1. If someone were to ask you to explain how you are justified before God, how would you answer this question?

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We have always heard and read that the Old Testament Jewish people were trying to be justified before God by their works and through circumcision. Here, in Romans 4:1-12, Paul is making the case that Abraham was justified by faith, not as a part of works or circumcision.

Romans 4:1-3 says, ***"What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.'"***

2. In verses 1 and 2, Paul asks the question as to what did Abraham gain according to the flesh. What did he conclude?

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3. So, how was Abraham justified? Or, how was he found righteous?

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Yes, Abraham was the forefather to God's people. If he had the power to follow all of the rules, then he would have had a reason to believe that he had earned his righteousness before God. He could have given himself a big pat on the back. However, Genesis 15:6 reads, ***"And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness."*** We know that being perfect is impossible, but

many today still struggle and try to prove themselves as righteous so that God will love them. Ephesians 2:8-9 reads, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."***

4. Why do we struggle to accept that it is through faith that we are saved?

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5. Please list all the works that were attributed to Abraham in Romans 4:1-3.

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The last question was kind of a trick question. One commentator wrote, "Abraham was justified by faith. It was just as simple as that. Works had nothing to do with it. They are not even mentioned." Romans 4:4-5 reads, ***"Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness."***

6. When you receive your wages for your work, do you think of your employer as gracious and kind? Why or why not?

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7. Verse five says that the justified man is the one who does not work and believes. Again, why do we struggle to grasp this?

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Now, Paul goes on to explain that King David, also a Jewish hero, had the same experience that Abraham had. Romans 4:6-8 reads, ***"Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.'"*** The Apostle Paul is paraphrasing Psalm 32:1-2 in this section of Scripture where David declared that his sin is forgiven and covered. Furthermore, these sins will not be counted against him because of what Jesus did for him. We must also recognize that this justification comes from Jesus forgiving sin so that God will not hold that sin against him. Remember, we see no evidence of David's efforts to earn this standing before God.

8. What was it that King David was referencing in his life? What were these lawless deeds?

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Picking up in Romans 4:9, we read, ***"Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness***

would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised."

9. This last section speaks to those who are circumcised and those who were not circumcised. Why was this a question?

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10. What effect do you think it had on the Jewish people to know that Abraham was justified before his circumcision?

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NOTES

DEVOTION 1

HE BELIEVED

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" (Romans 4:1-3, NKJV)

Abraham was saved because he was sure.

The word ***"believed"*** used there in verse 3 is the Greek word "pisteúō." That Greek word means to "be convinced or persuaded, to be sure about something." This is what belief is. It is not a wish. It is not like hoping or wishing that the weather will be nice this weekend. Real belief is being convinced or sure that something is true and settling into that certainty.

The father of the Hebrew nation was saved because he was sure.

You probably know the story. Abram and Sarai had been barren their entire married life. Yet, at the age of 90 years old, the Lord God came to him and told him that they would have a son. God's promise to him was not just that they would have a son but that an entire nation of people would come from that son. The promise was a heritage. The promise was a line of people. The promise was the Jewish people. To reinforce this promise, God told Abram to look up and try to count the stars. Then, the Lord promised that his descendants would be as innumerable as those sparkling lights in the sky. Incredible! Impossible! However, what happened next changed everything. Genesis 15:6 (NKJV) says, ***"And he [Abram] believed in the Lord."***

Abram's certainty was not primarily that he would have a child in his old age or even that a nation would come from him. He was sure of that, but that is not what saved him. Being sure that he would have a child at over 90 years old was the result of being sure about God. This is what saved Abraham. He was sure about God. He had become convinced that God was true, good, and able. He believed that God is [all that He says He is] and that ***"He is a rewarder [salvation!] of those who diligently seek Him"*** (Hebrews 11:6, NKJV).

So, we read again, ***"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness'"*** (Romans 4:3, NKJV). Right there, in that moment, Abraham was given the most important and needed gift that could ever be given. He was given (as a gift from God) right-ness, which means that Abraham became sinless in the eyes of God. This makes us ask, "Was he sinless?" No! However, this is the purpose of the book of Romans. Romans shows how God gives righteousness (total forgiveness of sins and salvation) to everyone who believes. Abraham is an example of one man who is convinced of who God is and is saved forever because of it. Everyone who believes and is convinced about God will be saved in the same way!

DEVOTION 2

BOASTING?

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

"What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.'" Romans 4:1-3

One of the problems with boasting is that while you are bragging, you are using up time when I could be talking about myself. I jest, but boasting or bragging is very self-serving and selfish. We need to be careful about only focusing on ourselves. In processing this, my mind revisits Proverbs 16:18, ***"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."*** I think we summarize it by saying, "Pride goes before a fall."

The word ***"boast"*** is used about 80 times in the Bible. In Romans chapter 4, Paul explains that the father of the Jewish nation (Abraham) was not even good enough in his own works to be deemed faultless. He has no claim to ***"boast."*** Abraham was only able to be found righteous through faith in the coming Messiah (who we now know is Jesus).

In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul makes it more personal for us today, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*** Our salvation is all about Jesus. It is not about us. It is only about Jesus. We have no claim for boasting. Boasting focuses on ourselves when we should fix our eyes on Jesus.

Paul takes another angle on boasting. In Galatians 6:14, he says, ***"But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord***

Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Instead of boasting about ourselves, we should be bragging about how amazing the Lord is. He died for us. He knew everything about us (even our future flaws), and He still died for us. Our salvation is a ***"gift."*** It is the best ***"gift"*** ever.

Finally, Paul makes our expected response very clear in 2 Corinthians 10:17, ***"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."***

God is good – all the time.
All the time – God is good.

DEVOTION 3

FAITH IN THE MIDST OF FEAR

PASTOR JOSH YATES

"What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.'" Romans 4:1-3

There is a phrase that floats around many Christian circles, especially the times in which we live that just does not jive with God's Word. I hear people say, with good intentions, "Faith over fear." The statement is used when someone is going through tough times and they are afraid of a potential outcome.

However, does anyone really have faith over fear? There are so many things in life that cause us to fear: financial concerns, health issues, international conflicts, politics, relational concerns, and career changes. There is a lot!

Abraham is the father of the nation of Israel. He had the faith to pick up and move his family from his home when God called him. He had the faith to believe God when he was told that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars, even though he was in his geriatric years. This faith was credited to him as righteousness. He was not saved by his works; he was saved because of his faith in God.

However, this did not mean that he never feared. In the account of his life in Genesis, he often feared. He was afraid of what different kings would do when he saw his wife and how beautiful she was, so he lied to them and almost got everyone in trouble! In fact, the

faith that he had when God told him he would be the father of many descendants was a faith in the midst of fear, not over fear.

Abraham had been in the land God told him to go to for ten years, and no heir had been born to him. He was getting old! He was afraid that it would never happen for him and that his family inheritance would go to someone who was not his blood relative.

God came to Abraham (his name was Abram at the time of this conversation) in Genesis 15:1 and declared: ***"Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."*** Had Abraham had faith over fear, the conversation would have stopped there. However, he was still afraid that he would not receive this blessing. In the following verses, he laments to God that he does not have an heir and that a member of his household should be. He was afraid that the blessing would not be complete. Then, God took him outside and told him to look at the stars and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars.

In the middle of his fear, God met him. He had faith in what God said, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

There will be so many times in life when you will be afraid. I know that is true in my life. God has promised to never leave you, nor forsake you. You are not alone. In those moments, you are called to have faith in the One who holds you. Yes, you are to do this in the midst of fear. This is not always easy, but God is always greater.

DEVOTION 4

KING GEORGE AND THE DUCKY

JEANNIE YATES

When my firstborn, Kylie, was a little girl, VeggieTales were all the rage. It was hard not to love these videos of Bible stories that had come to life with animated vegetables. My husband, Josh, and I even dressed up as Larry the Cucumber and Bob the Tomato for a costume party one year. I will let you guess who went as whom! One of our favorites was the story of *"King George and the Ducky,"* which was a very loose depiction of the account of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). Of course, instead of Uriah, it was Junior Asparagus, and instead of Bathsheba, it was a rubber ducky. To fully appreciate this cinematic masterpiece, I highly recommend you take a moment to watch it.

The writer of Romans mentions King David here in chapter 4, verses 4-8, ***"Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.'"***

I really like how it is worded in the New Living Translation, ***"When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners. David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working for it: 'Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven,***

whose sins are put out of sight. Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of sin.'"

Unfortunately, David's sins and indiscretions were not as innocent as cartoon vegetables and a rubber duck; they involved lust, adultery, lies, and murder. When David was confronted with his sin (2 Samuel 12), he mourned over what he had done, turned back to God, and was granted forgiveness. This passage we just read in Romans quotes a Psalm written by David about his confession and forgiveness. You can find it in Psalm 32:1-2, ***"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."***

In 2 Samuel 12:13, the prophet Nathan tells King David that, ***"The LORD also has put away your sin."*** What a beautiful picture of God's forgiveness! He did not have to work for that forgiveness; it was given. His debt of wrongdoing was ***"covered."*** Later in the book of Romans we read, ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"*** (Romans 6:23). In Ephesians, the Apostle Paul reminds the church, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast"*** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Have you ever desired a do-over? A clean slate? A chance to set things right? You can have that; your sins can be forgiven. It is not because of your work but by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. ***"Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight."*** Thanks be to our God!

DEVOTION 5

WHERE RIGHTEOUSNESS COMES FROM

PASTOR JUSTIN DEAN

I often wonder what it would be like to be the first person to ever do something. I am thinking of things like the first to ever climb a tall mountain, dive to extreme depths, ride in a car, or fly in a plane. There is something extremely special about being the first to ever experience a certain thing and be a pioneer in something that no one else has had the chance to do.

If you could go back in time and be the first person to discover a certain thing, what would you want to discover and why?

Abraham is revered as one of the pioneers and forerunners of our faith. He was one of the first that God called to obedience, and through Abraham, God created His people, the nation of Israel. What earned Abraham this privilege? Did Abraham offer some wonderful sacrifice that showed God that he really meant business? Or was it just luck, and Abraham just won the spiritual lottery?

Take a look at Romans 4:9-12, ***"Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised."***

Circumcision was a sign that God gave His people. If you were a male, that was part of the nation of Israel, then you would be circumcised as a sign that you followed the God of the Bible. Abraham was the first person that the command of circumcision was given to, and he obeyed the command that he was given.

How difficult do you think it was for Abraham to be a forerunner of the faith? What do you think made it that way?

It could be easy to misunderstand what saved Abraham and believe that the act of circumcision or his works earned him favor with God. Paul, here in Romans, wants to clear up that misunderstanding. Abraham was not saved by his actions, nor was he saved by circumcision. Abraham was saved by his faith in God. Circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign that he was made righteous before God, not that the action made him righteous.

For us as believers today, this passage is a strong reminder of where our salvation comes from. It does not come from works or the external changes we make as we follow God. Our salvation, righteousness, and eternal security come from faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We cannot get wrapped up in defining ourselves as believer by anything other than the faith that we have in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Spend some time and pray. Thank God that, like Abraham, you did not have to earn righteousness through your works because we would have failed. Instead, we are given that righteousness through your faith.

DEVOTION 6

FATHER ABRAHAM

DEBBIE GABBARA

Like so many have, a friend of mine struggled to accept the simplicity of salvation: “Believe and you will be saved.” She spent years trying to understand what she needed to do or become to feel she was acceptable to God. Ten years went by before she was able to see that God loved even her so much that He sent His Son to die to pay her debt of sin, and nothing she did or did not do could change the love God had for her. After ten long years, she realized that she was a broken sinner who just had to put her faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. She heard the Good News of the Gospel, she believed in her heart, and the Lord counted her faith as righteousness.

Before we ever knew Him, God loved us. Before we ever looked for Him, God pursued us. Psalm 139:14-16 reminds us that God has always known us and loved us. He has always had good plans for us.

In Romans chapter 4, Paul reminds us of the covenant that God made with Abraham, an outward sign of being set apart for God. However, this covenant was not made until after Abraham had put his faith in God. God saw Abraham’s faith. God spoke to Abraham; he heard and believed. Genesis 15:6 records, ***“And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”***

Romans 4:9-12 says, ***“Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that***

he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised."

Abraham believed God. Abraham did not have to do anything, God did everything. He would send the Messiah, Jesus, to die on the cross to pay the price for our sins. We are counted righteous by God because of our faith and not any ritual.

Philippians 3:9 (NLT) adds, ***"And become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith."***

A song from my childhood came to mind as I read these Scriptures: *Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had Father Abraham. I am one of them, and so are you, so let's just praise the Lord.*

We can sing praises to the Lord for His love for us. For just like Abraham, we are found righteous in our faith.

Lesson 7

Romans 4:13-25

RULES AND REGULATIONS

Pastor Keaton Washburn

1. What is your favorite board game? What makes it your favorite?

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I am naturally a rule follower. For as long as I can remember, I have always felt a strong need to follow the provided rules. Whether it is a game, guidelines at a scenic park, or the directions of my boss, I have a hard time breaking clearly given rules. When it comes to games, if the rules are not clear, I get flustered. People who bend the rules and find loopholes drive me crazy.

2. Are you more of a rule-follower or a rule-breaker? Why?

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3. Share a time you had an encounter with someone who felt differently about the rules than you did.

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In Romans 4:13-25, Paul continues his example of Abraham, which he began at the beginning of chapter 4, by showing once again a proper understanding of the Law. This is a lesson that may be difficult to follow if you do not have your Bible open in front of you. If you need to download a Bible app or go and grab your Bible, please do so!

Romans 4:13-15 says, ***"For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression."***

Paul is giving a hypothetical example of an incorrect understanding of the Old Testament Law to draw out what a correct understanding looks like. In saying, ***"For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the [Abraham's] heirs, faith is null and the promise is void,"*** it is clear that the Law has its limits. Verse 15 shows the point of the Law, to bring ***"wrath."*** Following the Law cannot save, but the Law does show the need for each person to be saved. Mike Winger put it well in saying, "Rules expose me as a rule-breaker." Whether you think of the Ten Commandments when you think of the Law or one of the many Old Testament laws to the Israelites, without the Law, one cannot see their need for Jesus.

4. What rules do you struggle to follow? Do those rules have merit?

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Romans 4:16-17 says, ***"That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring - not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham."*** God's promises to Abraham (that He would give him a son and that the nations would be blessed through him (to name a few) did not depend on Abraham's perfect obedience to God to keep them. Rather, God made those promises based on His own faithfulness instead of Abraham's. Abraham did not have to walk around fearing that God's promises to him would be voided if he sinned because it depended on faith. Faith guaranteed this to Abraham and his heirs (Christians). In Christ, everyone who has confessed their sin and believed in Jesus' perfect life, death, and resurrection has become heirs of Abraham. As the kids' song goes, "Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had Father Abraham, I am one of them, and so are you."

5. Have you made this declaration of Christ as your Lord? If so, when? If not, what is holding you back?

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There is a dangerous belief called replacement theology, which says that the church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people. While you and I (I am assuming you are a Gentile) are not Israelites and direct descendants of Abraham, Romans chapter 11 shows that the Church has been grafted in as God's chosen people (See Romans 11:11-24 for further study).

A very dangerous, common belief is the one that says, "I have done more good than bad in my life so I know I am going to Heaven." The person who believes their salvation depends on their good works is trapped. They never know if they have done enough good work; they are always striving to do another good thing "just to be safe." Instead, those who have trusted Jesus for salvation can hold to His amazing words in John 10:27-30, ***"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."***

6. How do you try and measure up? Why is it tempting to think that our good works can outweigh our bad works?

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7. Why is this promise of Jesus in John chapter 10 so beautiful? How does it change or affirm your view of salvation?

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Read Romans 4:17 again. ***"As it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations' - in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."***

Think for a moment about the words we just read. God is the One who ***"gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist."*** Who else can do that? No one except God! Time and time again, He has shown Himself faithful, yet we are often quick to believe the lies of the evil one and doubt God's power and presence.

Read Romans 4:18-25 and continue to see Abraham shown as an example of faith.

Abraham believed the Lord. His faith was in the Lord and the commitment that the Lord had made to him. Because of this, God counted it as righteousness. Three times in the New Testament the writers recount this truth of Abraham's faith being counted as righteousness before the Lord (Romans 4:3: Galatians 3:6: James 2:23).

8. How were people saved before the life, death, and resurrection of Christ?

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Romans 4:20-25, speaking of Abraham, tells us, ***"No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew***

strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was 'counted to him as righteousness.' But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

9. What similarities are there between Old Testament believers and Christians today? How is each saved?

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As we look back at the Messiah (Christ) today, Old Testament believers looked ahead to the coming of the Messiah. As they had to believe that the Lord would be faithful to His promises, today, we need to believe in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9).

Faith may seem like a small deal, but faith in who Jesus is and what He has accomplished on our behalf sets Christians apart from the world. You may feel like your faith is small, but Jesus said in Matthew 18:3-4, ***"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*** Soon after that, we read Matthew 19:14, ***"Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."*** Children do not have all the answers, but they have great belief.

10. What lessons can be learned by adults about a child's faith?

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Harrison and Hagner, in their commentary on Romans, share an important note that we will conclude with, “To believe in a Christ who died for our sins is only half the gospel. The resurrection cannot be omitted - observe how Paul includes both aspects in Romans 6:3–4 when showing how the work of Christ provides the foundation for Christian living. For Paul, the death and resurrection of Christ belong together, and the former without the latter would be of little significance. Therefore, he rarely thinks of the one without the other.”

NOTES

DEVOTION 1

TRUST YOUR STUFF

STEPHEN BILLINGS

Growing up, I loved to play baseball. I spent many evenings on the baseball field practicing and playing games. With all the time I spent on the field over the years, I made many friends playing on various baseball teams. One phrase that both coaches and friends would say to me, especially while pitching in various baseball games, is "Trust your stuff." Now, if you never watched or played baseball, you might ask yourself, "What in the world does that mean?" To give a quick explanation, "Trust your stuff," as a pitcher, means to believe that your pitches are good enough to challenge the opposing batter. Those who told me this saying were encouraging me to simply throw my pitches to the best of my ability and not worry about what would happen next. As a pitcher, I had a choice each time that I pitched. Would I follow the advice of my coaches, who trusted me, or would I let my nerves get the best of me?

Over the years, each time I followed and trusted this advice, my pitching would go so much better than when I would not. In each game I pitched, I had a choice to trust my ability to get batters on the other team to strike out.

My experience in baseball reminds me of Romans 4:13 (NLT), which shares, ***"Clearly, God's promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants was based not on his obedience to God's law, but on a right relationship with God that comes by faith."***

Abraham was given both commands and a covenant by God throughout the book of Genesis. God commands Abraham to leave his homeland and to go where God leads him to go (Genesis 12). Later on in Genesis 17:4, Abraham is promised that he and his

family would be ***"the father of a multitude of nations"*** (Genesis 17:4 NLT). Abraham obeyed God's commands in faith when they were given, but it was not just his obedience that made Abraham justified, but when he responded in faith. Because Abraham trusted God, he was justified.

As a baseball pitcher, I was encouraged to trust in my own ability to throw different pitches. Many times in life, we get similar advice to trust in our own abilities. However, we cannot trust in our own abilities only or point to the times when we have been obedient out of a sense of duty to be made righteous. No matter what, we have all fallen short of God's glorious standard. We have to place our trust in Jesus and believe by faith that Jesus died on the cross and rose again three days later. Through this, He made the way for us to go to Heaven. Abraham was justified by his faith; we, too, can be justified through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection.

DEVOTION 2

TWENTY CHILDREN

ALYSSA FAIRSE

"No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised." Romans 4:20-21

For the last nine years of my husband's, Brandon, and my marriage, the Lord has told us "No" to having children. Having a big family is something that I have desired since I was a child. Starting at the age of 15, I would often tell my friends and family, "When I get married, I want 20 children." I meant that wholeheartedly. Going into marriage, Brandon and I had an agreement to wait a year before starting a family. Secretly, in the back of my mind, I hoped that with every passing month, I would be pregnant. Once that year was up, we agreed to start our family, but the Lord was clear that He had other plans. It is nine years later, and we still do not have any children.

I often think of the story of Isaac and Rebekah. Rebekah was barren for 20 years, and I am sure for those 20 years that she experienced the same emotions, frustrations, and disbelief that I have through this process. However, through this time, we are told that she remained faithful to the Lord. She honored her husband, took care of her household, had hospitality for those who needed it, and ultimately obeyed God through every passing moment of desperation of wanting a family of her own. Through her faithfulness, Rebekah illustrated what righteousness for our King is really supposed to look like.

Today, I encourage you to take the example of Rebekah. Obey, praise, and glorify the Lord through tough times. In the end, God promises Rebekah that she will have children, and God follows

through on that promise by giving her Jacob and Esau. I am not sure if Brandon and I will ever have children, that is not a promise God has given us. I am hopeful though, and I rest in the promises that God has given us, and I encourage you to as well.

- He promises us new life. - 2 Corinthians 5:17
- He promises us comfort. - 2 Corinthians 1:3-4
- He promises that He is with us. - Isaiah 41:10
- He promises us freedom from sin. - Galatians 5:1
- He promises us salvation. - Romans 10:9-10

DEVOTION 3

PENALTY ON THE PLAY

MELVIN FRICK

"For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression." Romans 4:13-15

I was recently watching a football game where Brandon Aubrey of the Dallas Cowboys had an incredible opportunity to tie Justin Tucker's NFL record for the longest field goal at 66 yards during a game against the Cleveland Browns. Head coach Mike McCarthy gave Aubrey the green light, and the kicker nailed the football straight through the uprights. However, the celebration was short-lived. The Cowboys were penalized for a delay of game because the snap came a second too late, nullifying the impressive kick.

In many ways, this scenario reminds me of what Paul is conveying in this passage of Scripture. He explains that if our righteousness was based on perfect adherence to the Law (like following the exact timing of a football play), then none of us could ever attain it. Just like Aubrey's perfect kick did not count due to one misstep, even our best efforts to pursue God fall short when we rely solely on the Law and our obedience to it.

However, the Law, however, points to our desperate need for righteousness. It enhances our sense of transgression and failure and, as the text suggests, our conviction of being under God's wrath. Yet, the Scripture is clear: we will never be declared righteous by God through keeping the Law, but only by His grace and our faith in His Son. This is why Paul reminded us, ***"For the promise to***

Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith."

Similarly, our salvation and our right standing with God (righteousness) are not dependent on getting everything perfectly right; it is by placing our faith in the One who already did everything perfectly right. Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law that we could not keep. Just as Aubrey's kick was disqualified despite his best effort, so will the Law bring condemnation for every missed mark. However, faith in Christ brings hope, even when we fall short. Be encouraged today that our Father knows how and where we have all messed up but that He still made a way for us to obtain righteousness. It is by placing our faith in the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, we read, ***"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."***

DEVOTION 4

DO YOU SUFFER FROM GNMHS?

DAVID HUDGENS

I have a problem. For many years now, I have lived with a condition that causes great trouble for myself and others. However, my illness went undiagnosed and untreated for a very long time. To make matters worse, I was unaware of the effect it was having on my life. You see, I suffer from chronic God-Needs-My-Help-Syndrome (GNMHS). Allow me to explain. GNMHS is a spiritual condition that affects an individual's beliefs and behaviors, inducing ill-fated attempts to accomplish the exclusive will and plans of the Sovereign Ruler of the universe solely through personal efforts and energies.

Now, you might have guessed that GNMHS is not an actual medical condition. Nevertheless, if I were a betting man, I might wager that its description feels uncomfortably real.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul examines the tension that each of us lives in regarding God's completed work of salvation and our human relationship to it. As I reflect on my experience with GNMHS, I am reminded of Paul's words in Romans 4:16-25. In this passage, Paul emphasizes that the promise of God to Abraham was not based on the Mosaic Law or on one's ability to uphold it; rather, it depends solely on faith.

When we look at the account of Abraham, we see a man who, despite his flaws and shortcomings, chose to trust in God's promises. According to Romans 4:20-21, ***"No unbelief made him [Abraham] waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."*** Abraham's belief serves as an example to us that faith is not about what we can achieve through

our own actions; rather, it is about surrendering to the truth of who God is and what He can accomplish.

Do you struggle with GNMHS? If so, please understand that the consequences of "helping God" can be profoundly devastating. If you choose to operate under the belief that you must help God fulfill His will and plans, you may experience the following: fear, anxiety, anger, general uneasiness, and even resentment. These symptoms stem from a fundamental misunderstanding of your role in God's redemptive plan. You may sometimes feel compelled to be the architect of your spiritual life when, in fact, you are invited to be a recipient of grace.

So, how can one recover from GNMHS? First, you must acknowledge your need for God's grace and recognize that none of us are called to labor under the burden of self-accomplishment. Instead, allow yourself to experience the fullness of God's grace. As you trust in Him, you will become a vessel of God's love and grace to others, set free to live in the light of His promise rather than the shadow of your own struggle. Today, seek the Lord with me and embrace the freedom that comes from believing in the One who is faithful.

DEVOTION 5

A BUG'S LIFE

KATRINA YOUNG

My youngest son was, and still is, intrigued by the things that most people overlook. I am always amazed at the things that grab his attention. One afternoon, when he was a toddler, I watched him playing on the rug. Wondering what he was doing, I looked closer and found a tiny, tiny, tiny black bug crawling on the edge of the rug. He watched the bug for the longest time, and I watched him watch the bug. He would put the bug on his finger, then watch it go on the carpet again. Then he would watch it crawl around on his finger and back to the carpet, over and over again. All of a sudden, he squished the bug with his finger! I was mortified for the moment and was not sure what his reaction would be. He looked at his finger, confused, then brought it to me very confidently and said, "Fix it." At that moment, I realized I was looking at childlike faith. Children instinctively trust their parents to meet their every need, but bringing a bug back to life is not something I am equipped to do.

Adult-like faith is a bit different. We tend to look at the possibilities of failure instead of the perfect God. Our eyes are often fixed on the impossible and not the One who gives us hope. Romans 4:18 (NIV) says, ***"Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed."*** Paul continues in the next verse, ***"He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead."*** When we talk about examples of faith in the Bible, Abraham stands out. Can you imagine being promised that you would be the father of all nations, with nothing physically to support the promise but your faith? Can you imagine hearing from God (the One whom you put your faith in), directing you to take your son up the mountain, build an altar, and sacrifice him? I can honestly say that everything in my flesh would be rebuking the thought and denying that what I heard was from God. Yet, Abraham did not waiver.

The only way for sinners (like you and me) to be righteous before God is through faith in Christ Jesus. When we believe the Word of God, which tells us that Christ fulfilled all righteousness for us and then was sacrificed for us to make full atonement for all our sins, God credits it to us for righteousness. We can go directly to God with all of our brokenness and confidently ask Him, "Fix it." We can approach Him with childlike faith because He is continually working in us. Hebrews 12:2 (MEV) reminds us, ***"Look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."*** That is our encouragement to keep seeking Him. God is not finished with us yet!

DEVOTION 6
DAILY FAITH

KARSEN THEEDE

Google defines faith as “complete trust or confidence in someone or something.” Every day, we see this definition in action. We have faith that our alarm clocks will go off at the correct time. We have faith that our cars will start. We have faith in the roads we drive on. I could keep going on and on about all the things we put our faith in. As Christians, we have someone much more important in which we put our faith: God. So, what does it look like when we truly put our faith in God?

Romans 4:19-21 says, ***“He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”***

Romans chapter 4 focuses on one part of the story of a man named Abraham. Abraham and his wife Sarah had not had any children, but they desperately wanted one. God came to Abraham and made a promise that Sarah would bear a son, and through this son, a great nation would come. There was one problem, though. Abraham and Sarah were old and well past the age of having kids. This caused them to doubt God and what He had promised to them. Even through that doubt, Abraham had faith in God and what He had promised. Romans 4:18 says, ***“In hope he believed against hope.”*** Just as God promised, Abraham and Sarah were blessed with a son who they named Isaac, even though they were about 100 and 90 years old. Isaac became the beginning of a great nation.

I do not believe that any of us will be having kids at those ages, so what does the story of Abraham and Sarah mean for us today? Well, just like Abraham and Sarah, we will face impossible situations, ones where we do not understand God's plan and where it seems like there is no hope. However, just like Abraham, we are called to have faith in God. Abraham's faith was ***"counted to him as righteousness."*** As Romans 4:22 states, His faith justified him before God, and the same will happen to us. We must have full faith in God that He has, can, and will keep His promises, and because of that full faith in Him, we are saved.

Lesson 9

Romans 5:1-11

THE BLESSINGS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Pastor Patrick Bicknell

One of the blessings of being a Youth Pastor is being able to see the Lord working in the life of a middle school or high school students. Sometimes, that work happens instantly; they hear the Gospel, repent of their sin, and follow the Lord. Sometimes, it takes years for them to truly understand their need for a Savior, and it requires many meetings and answering some really difficult and important questions. I remember a few years ago at camp, there was a student who had been coming to camp and youth group with us for a while. During that week of camp, I had the privilege of answering some of his hard questions. I got to see the Lord slowly soften his heart to the Gospel. Toward the end of the week, he saw his need for a Savior, and surrendered his life to the Lord. What I will not forget is what he asked me after I was able to lead him to salvation, "What now?"

This is the question Paul is tackling as he begins chapter 5. Through the first four chapters of this incredible book, Paul has laid out one of the, if not the best, cases for why justification with the Lord is only through faith. He details how fallen we are and how we are unable to save ourselves through our own works. The only way we can have any hope is through the Good News of Jesus Christ. He is now about to begin a great section of this book discussing the blessings or benefits that come to us through this justification.

1. What are some blessings that you can think of that we receive through the work of Christ?

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As we continue our study through the books of Romans, we read in Romans 5:1, ***"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*** I think it is important to notice one word in verse 1. He writes that we have peace ***"with"*** God, not the peace of God. This is the first blessing we see as a result of our justification.

2. What is the difference between peace *with* God and peace *of* God?

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3. How does understanding we have peace with God affect our relationship with God? Do you struggle with knowing you have peace with God?

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I think this first blessing is so important for us and is a reason why Paul puts it first. Oftentimes, and I am sure I am not alone in this, I can feel that I do not deserve God's love because of the sins I have committed. However, Paul reminds us that this blessing is ***"through our Lord Jesus Christ"*** and not through ourselves.

Continuing on to the next verse, we read in Romans 5:2, ***"Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God."*** The second blessing we see is that we now have a standing in grace. This means God's unmerited favor towards us is now ours, and it is not just a one-time thing. It is a truth that is ours continually; we do not need to worry about it being taken away because it is perfected in Christ. Not only does it begin our walk with the Lord, but it is what sustains us. That is why Paul continues writing in Romans 5:3-5, ***"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 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."***

4. What is the connection between verse 2 and what Paul speaks of in verses 3-5?

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5. How does our continual standing in grace impact how we react to suffering?

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6. What are some practical ways we can draw on the grace of God through the various trials and sufferings we go through?

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I heard a Pastor say, "Everything we go through is an opportunity to conform us more to the image of Christ." I believe that this is what this passage is speaking about. Paul goes straight into suffering because he knows that it is a guarantee that we will go through suffering. In 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul says, ***"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."*** John 15:20 adds, ***"Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."*** What will get us through the suffering of our lives is knowing that we have peace with God and that His grace is continually there to help us through our suffering.

Romans 5:8-10 adds, ***"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son,***

much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." The last blessing we see here is that we are saved from the wrath of God.

7. How do you feel when you read that we are ***"saved by him from the wrath of God"***? Does this contradict the idea that God is all-loving if He has wrath?

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8. What truth about your relationship with God do you see when you read, ***"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"***?

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These are some great blessings. We have gone from having peace with God, to having a continual standing in grace, to being saved from the wrath of God. What a blessing it is to have such a great and glorious Savior who died for us even when we were rebelling against Him and who offered that gift to us freely.

9. What are some practical ways to apply these blessings to your everyday walk with Christ?

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10. Which of these blessings do you struggle to believe that you have truly received? How can you combat that disbelief?

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NOTES

DEVOTION 1

PEACE WITH GOD

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

Saint Augustine said, “The purpose of all wars, is peace.” I find this quote to be very thought-provoking. We normally view war as always being evil. However, realizing the war, knowing the enemy, and going on the attack can lead to peace. This is especially true spiritually.

Peace with God

Romans 5:1 says, ***“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** Up to this point in Romans, we have been reminded that we are all sinners. That actually means that since birth, we are at war with God. Hopefully, our sin has brought so much turmoil and emptiness that we see our need for a Savior. God wants to use the war within to bring peace. Through Jesus Christ, we can have ***“peace with God.”***

Peace of God

Once we are at ***“peace with God,”*** we are open to the ***“peace of God.”*** Philippians 4:6-7 says, ***“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** Even though we are saved, we can and will still have struggles. Those challenges can be a gift from God in reminding us to daily rely on God in ***“prayer.”*** It can also help us focus on contentment by being thankful. Please realize and expect a ***“peace of God”*** that does not necessarily make sense. It clearly ***“surpasses all understanding.”***

Peace from God

Finally, there is also peace that comes from God. The phrase ***"peace from God"*** is found twelve times in Scripture (1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3). It is even in Romans. Romans 1:7 says, ***"To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*** A beautiful prayer for family and friends to pray they see God involved in their lives and experience the peace that comes from Him.

I disagree with Ralph Waldo Emerson, who said, "Nobody can bring you peace but yourself." We cannot find peace in and of ourselves. True peace can only come by and from God. If you are in a war right now, look up to the One who brings the victory.

DEVOTION 2

PRAISE HIM IN THE HALLWAY

JASMYN BICKNELL

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 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 5:1-5

The Lord really knows what we need to hear at the perfect time! This passage is so perfect for me to hear right now, ***"Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace."*** We receive grace from God and forgiveness of all sins because of the faith we have in Him. No matter the circumstance, we find comfort in the knowledge that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, has given us His abundant grace. We all make poor decisions daily, whether we mean to or not, it is our nature. We may look back and say, "I should have handled that differently," and seek forgiveness from the person we have wronged, but it is not always guaranteed that they will be gracious and quick to forgive. However, the Lord has promised His grace for all believers, and we should take comfort in that.

That sounds great, and it stops there, right? Wrong. The next part of these verses is the hard part, ***"We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance."*** How am I supposed to rejoice in the sufferings? How do I find joy and thankfulness when I have just lost a loved one or doors keep getting repeatedly slammed in my face? I like to say, "Praise Him in the hallway." It is

a phrase I have to remind myself of daily. It is far from easy, and I struggle with it often, but I know that, ultimately, the Lord has a plan. I need to give up the control that I think I have over my life to let God take the reins. The more you rely on Him through the trials you face, the stronger your relationship with Him becomes, which leads me to my last point.

The last two verses are my favorite, **"*And endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 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.*"** If you claim to be a Christian, your behavior (which ultimately means your character or the way people perceive you) will show whether or not you truly follow God. The more Christ-like you become, the deeper your relationship with God will be. He has given us our individual characteristics and gifts; now, we need to learn how to use them for His good.

If you are waiting to hear "yes" from Him, or if you have already heard the "no," remember to praise Him in the hallway until He opens the door you are supposed to enter.

DEVOTION 3
HOPE IN SUFFERING

PASTOR MITHCELL HOLMES

One of my favorite pastimes growing up was losing hours in the pages of the comic *"Calvin and Hobbes."* If you know anything of the comic, you will remember that Calvin was constantly at odds with his father because he would often ask Calvin to do things that were slightly inconvenient in the name of saving money or teaching his son a lesson. Calvin's father would always remind Calvin in these encounters that these types of things "build character." In one of my favorite strips in the comic, Calvin looks to Hobbes and says, "You ever notice how building character is just a codeword for being miserable?" As hilarious as it is to view the world through the lens of a child who thinks that shoveling the driveway or keeping the thermostat at 68 degrees in the winter is the pinnacle of misery, we can often look at situations in our lives very similarly.

As Christians, we are told to expect there will be difficulties and tribulations. Yet, when God brings trials and struggles to help grow us and mold us, we can feel the urge to complain. Many Christians would say they desire to better represent Christ, and yet when the difficulties come, that will test us and allow learning opportunities, we can focus only on the negatives of the situation. Our passage for today addresses this exact struggle. Romans 5:3-4 says, ***"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope."*** Paul is challenging us to reframe our understanding of suffering. Being part of the Lord's flock comes with many blessings, but here we see that one of these blessings is hope in the face of disaster.

If you are the Lord's, difficulties will arise. However, we cannot allow ourselves to be lost in those troubling times. Instead, we must

challenge ourselves to learn how to best grow and draw near to the Lord during those times. The Bible makes it clear that for those who belong to God, He is working out all things for good (Romans 8:28). That means that we can rest in the understanding that God is using our hardship for His good. There is an immense hope and peace that comes with resting in the Lord when it feels like the situation is hopeless.

Additionally, to be a Christian is to recognize that our time here on Earth is but a blink in eternity. Regardless of how horrible our circumstance, or how helpless we feel, we can have hope for the future because a time is coming in which we will spend eternity in the presence of our Creator. The challenge I leave you with, is to go to God when life gets you down and spend time with the One who gives you rest.

DEVOTION 4

SAVED FROM THE WRATH OF GOD

NATHAN ELLIOTT

My wife and I often joke that she had no idea that I was interested in her when we first met. I was very interested in pursuing her and meanwhile she did not have the slightest clue that I was even in the room! Thankfully, when I asked her out, she said yes. There is a parallel to that story and the relationship that Christ has with you. Jesus loved you and had affection for you before you ever pursued a relationship with Him.

In Romans 5:7-8, Paul says, ***"For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** As humans, we can understand sacrificing ourselves for a righteous cause or person, but sacrificing for something unrighteous does not make sense. These verses should be precious to us as Christians, that Jesus was willing to die for us while we were still sinners. Many of us, as Christians, can remember our lives before we were born again through the Spirit. Hopefully, we can look back at that time and appreciate how much we have changed through the work of the Holy Spirit. However, this text reminds us to look back to the times when we were walking in darkness, that even then, Christ had set His affection on us. Even though we hated God and loved our sins, He was still willing to go to the cross on our behalf.

Not only did Jesus die for us, but He also saved us from the wrath of God. ***"Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God"*** (Romans 5:9). When Jesus went to the cross, the real horror was not the crucifixion (although that was a horrible death); the real

punishment was being forsaken by God. Matthew 27:46 says, ***"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"*** Jesus was forsaken by God for a time so that those who confess Him as Lord do not have to be. Jesus did not come to save us from ourselves or the devil; He came to save us from the wrath of God. There is no greater hope than Jesus.

DEVOTION 5

YOUR DEBT HAS BEEN PAID

KATIE PETTIBONE

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." Romans 5:6-11

Imagine you are shopping for a car at a car dealership. You have that specific car picked out in your brain. You have imagined the color, make, and number of doors it has. You arrive at your appointment to meet with the agent who is there to help you and your car dreams. The agent tells you they have your car. In fact, they have two of the cars you want. The first option is in mint condition. It has a shine to it that perfectly enhances the color. It has the amount of doors you wanted, plus an extra cup holder on the inside of each door. It is brand new, has no miles, and is a good price; it is great! The second option, however, is used. It is high on miles, and the color is a little faded. It has a scuff on the side, and one of the headlights does not work. It is a fixer-upper and still costs a fortune! Obviously, it is not the best option of the two.

I am just going to say that for most of us, we would easily have paid the wage for the first car, no doubt about it. Not even a second thought would have crossed our minds. It is the one that is upright

and has less damage. The first option is good compared to the second which is bad. The second one has too much history on it, looks banged up, and costs way too much.

Now, let us change this scenario and make the cars people. Instead of you paying the wage for the car, it is Jesus paying the debt of your sin. No matter how morally upright you are, how good you look, or how much you have sinned, Jesus paid the debt for all. There is no matter of comparison in this situation either because Jesus bought the debt for all. We have a God who loves us so much that even though we have sinned and turned away from Him, He still made a way for us to spend eternity with Him through His son, Christ Jesus.

Romans 5:7-8 says, ***"For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** The Apostle Paul, the author of Romans, reminds us that people have uncommonly sacrificed themselves for other people who seemed righteous (righteous, meaning someone who is morally upright). Paul also says that people have sacrificed themselves for someone who is a good person. However, the truth is that Jesus is the one true, righteous, and good person. For Him to sacrifice Himself for us is a huge blessing. We are so damaged, our debt is death. We are broken and cannot fix ourselves. However, the Lord who is righteous sees us, loves us, and paid that very debt for us. How amazing is that? God loves us so much that He sent His only Son to pay a price that was not even His to pay. John 3:16-17 says, ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."***

Everyone has been offered the free gift of salvation. There is not a sin that can override Jesus' sacrifice or forgiveness. We all have been

made clean through His sacrifice and blood. I want to encourage those reading this today that the Lord did not come to condemn you for your sin but to save you. If you have been struggling with a sin, bring it to the Lord today. Spend time in prayer with your Savior who loves you and has paid your debt for you.

DEVOTION 6

FROM UNGODLY TO RIGHTEOUS

CAMERON ALDRICH

The world we live in today is something else. Have you ever watched the news and a story has made you drop your jaw in disbelief or disgust? Considering how much negativity is found in our world today, I am sure most of us have heard stories we cannot believe actually happened. It can be from across the world or even right in our own city.

I feel like there are two types of people today: people who watch the news on a daily basis, and those who stray from watching the news to avoid all the negativity and evil that is highlighted every day. Who can blame the latter? It can be depressing and upsetting to constantly hear of people acting in hatred and committing crimes or acts of violence.

However, what is even harder to grasp is the fact that these people, who are so engulfed in sinful mindsets and lifestyles, are also offered the possibility of becoming saved and redeemed through Jesus, just as we are.

Does that make all humans equal in the eyes of God, whether they are living righteously or not? What makes us different from those who are still living in sin, unwilling to change their ways? Here is the short answer: our belief in Jesus' death and resurrection and in His sovereignty as our Lord.

In Romans chapter 5, the Apostle Paul shares that Christ died for the ungodly, and he goes on to share that someone would rarely dare to die for a righteous or good person. Yet, in verse 8, Paul reminds us that ***"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."***

Christ surely did die a gruesome death on the cross for all sinners and ungodly people, and then He rose from the grave three days later, conquering sin and death once and for all. However, that does not mean that everyone on the planet automatically receives salvation and reconciliation through Jesus. We have to believe in who He is and what He did and accept Him as our Savior.

Our part in faith cannot stop there either. We are also called to live righteously for God, and the blessings we receive when we do this outweigh anything else this world can possibly offer to us.

In the proceeding verses of Romans chapter 5, Paul goes on to talk about the reconciliation we receive through Jesus, and uses the word ***"more"*** numerous times. He expresses the difference between the blessings God granted to us while we were still His enemies as compared to the blessings we are able receive from Him after being reconciled.

In verse 10, he shares, ***"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."*** The ***"life"*** that Paul refers to at the end of this verse is the ultimate blessing, which is everlasting life in unity and glory with the Father in Heaven, lasting for all of eternity. This blessing is only attainable once we are redeemed and restored, being viewed as righteous in the eyes of God.

It is painful to see all the hatred and sin within our world, and to be reminded of it over and over again. However, we have a hope in Jesus, the One who will cleanse the world of all sin and unrighteousness with His second coming. Until that happens, we know there is still time for the ungodly to find Jesus, to turn from their wicked ways, and to be restored and redeemed through His saving power and salvation.

Our task is to remain righteous and fully grounded in Christ despite what we see happening around us in the world today. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul shares, ***"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*** As we are now reconciled and righteous by Jesus our Savior, the light of Christ is able to shine through us and reach those who are not. There is still time for the unsaved to become saved. So, let Jesus shine.

Lesson 10

Romans 5:12-21

FROM MESS TO MESSAGE

Pastor Ryan Story

Have you ever walked by a huge mess and thought, “I am glad that was not me?” I have, and I have been the guy who made the mess. In my early twenties, I worked at Kroger in the Dairy Department. Part of my job was to unload trucks full of milk, yogurt, eggs, and anything else you might find in the refrigerated section of your local grocery store. One day, our dairy delivery came in with pallets of milk, and it was my job to use the power jack to get it into our cooler. Now, a pallet consisted of 54 crates (nine stacks of six) with four gallons of milk in each crate. I know there are 216 gallons of milk on a full pallet of milk. The reason I am obsessed with that 216 number is that I ended up clipping the wall at full speed with the pallet jack while turning into the dairy cooler, and I had an entire pallet of 216 gallons of milk come crashing to the ground. If there had been some honey, the back room of the Kroger in Milford would have been that of the Promised Land because milk was flowing everywhere. While I sat there cleaning up that tidal wave of lactose, a buddy of mine walked by, smiled, and said, “I am glad that was not me!” He walked by me, and while I was plotting all the words I would use to tell him off when I was done with the problem currently soaking my feet, he came back with a squeegee and a mop to help. We laughed, and he said, “You owe me lunch.”

1. What has been the biggest mess you have ever created?

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The second section of Romans chapter 5:12-21 is a comparison between two men. One of the men (Adam) made the biggest mess that has ever happened to humanity. The other is the One who came to clean it up, Jesus.

Romans 5:12-13 says, ***“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned - for sin indeed was in the***

world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law."

2. How did sin come into the world, and what were the results?

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Oftentimes, I have discussed humanity's need for a Savior with unbelievers, and there is a common response I have heard from them, "God is not fair for punishing all of humanity for the fault of one man." Because of the one man (Adam), ***"death spread to all men."*** This truth is not about being fair; it is about fact. The severity of man sinning against the holy, just, loving, and powerful God is on a scale that, because of the actions of one man, the results ***"spread to all."*** All have sinned because we all come from Adam. To refute this, refutes the Bible, God's authority, and God's grace.

Romans 5:14 says, ***"Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come."***

Adam is spoken of as a ***"type."*** A type in the Bible is a copy, pattern, or similarity. For Adam, he is a ***"type"*** for all mankind. Because Adam was the first man, he is the head of the human race and every person ***"who was to come."*** We have to understand the truth that our sin "is not about resemblance, it is about identity" (W.G.T Shedd). Because Adam is the ***"type"*** for all of humanity that has not confessed Jesus as Lord, sin is rooted in our identity.

3. Why do we have to understand the depth of sin?

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4. How is it so easy to overlook the ramifications of sin?

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Romans 5:15-16 adds, ***"But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification."***

5. How is Jesus' work a ***"free gift"***?

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6. What did Christ do for sinners?

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Romans 5:17-18 continues, ***"For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men."***

7. What is the only way for us to receive ***"the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness"***?

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8. How has the abundance of grace cleaned up the biggest mess of your life?

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Romans 5:19-21 says, ***"For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."***

I try not to preach when I type a lesson. However, the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be missed in this study. God's Word just explained the depth and ramifications of the sin of Adam. Because of his sin, all of humanity is now impacted by the ramifications of separation from their Creator. It is a toxic heart and death (spiritual and physical). Morris wrote, "The reign of death is a part of humanity's story, but it is not the whole story." There is life because of the free gift, justification that comes to those who call on the name of Jesus and are saved, and the faith of those who believe in ***"that one man Jesus Christ."*** Death does not have the final say. Life in Him is the final say in a man's life.

9. Do you know Jesus as Lord?

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Adam made a mess, and that is putting it so very lightly. The cost of Adam's mess, and ours, was only cleaned up by the death of Jesus on the cross. We should never make light of our depravity, and we should never make light of the abundant grace we have in Jesus.

One of the many things that dropping 216 gallons of milk taught me was that even in the worst messes that I can create, it means so much when there is someone there who is willing to help clean it. For us who believe that Jesus paid the price for our messes, I hope that there is an indescribable gratitude that fuels your worship for Him. Furthermore, Jesus commands His Church to be His hands and feet. Jesus tells us that we will bear witness to Him. Jesus tells His church to love, pray for, and encourage others. While my buddy helping me clean up milk was a memorable thing, those who have helped me grow in my walk with Jesus hold a different place in my heart.

10. How can you help someone who made or is making a mess in their life?

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As a Growth Community, as a location, and as a people who have been called out of death and into life in Jesus, let us be people who step into people's lives, even if they are a mess, and point them to the place where even mess-makers can find life.

NOTES

DEVOTION 1

HIS TYPE

CHRIS MONTVILLE

"Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come." Romans 5:14

Tim Mackie, with *"The Bible Project,"* likes to say, "The Bible is one unified story that leads to Jesus." The entire Old Testament points to Jesus, and the entire New Testament is directly about Jesus and His people. As I was reading verse 14 in Romans 5, the word ***"type"*** really stuck out to me. Throughout the Old Testament, we have so many people who ultimately point to Christ. These are called "types" of Christ. It is part of what makes the Bible so special and unified. Christ came to fulfill what all these people throughout history could not do: redeem and free their people, forever.

Here are a few quick examples of people in the Old Testament that point to Jesus' ultimate fulfillment of their mission:

- Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt into freedom toward the Promised Land, pointing to Jesus' ultimate delivery of His people from the slavery of sin and death.

- Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the fish before being spat out onto dry land alive, pointing to Jesus' resurrection after three days.

- David was a king that sought the Lord and desired to honor Him, just as Jesus is a King that seeks to glorify His Father.

This passage tells us that even Adam is a ***"type"*** of Christ. How? Just as one man brought sin into the world, one man will bring

righteousness to all people. Romans 5:18 explains, ***"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men."***

The problem with all of the "types" of Christ throughout the Old Testament is that they all fall short. Every single one falls short.

- Moses sins in his anger and loses the ability to enter the Promised Land.

- Jonah is bitter and angry that God allowed repentance to his enemies (not to mention his attempt to run away from God's call in the first place!).

- David commits adultery and then murders his mistress' husband.

Every type of Christ is an example for us to look at Jesus and acknowledge just how good our Savior really is. Their stories are there to remind us of Him, and for us to see God's true ability to fully redeem. The first man that is ever created, points directly to Jesus. He ***"was a type of the one who was to come."*** Adam falls short of God's righteous standard right away, and we are made aware that we are in need of a Savior.

As you read through the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, take note when you run across something that points us to Jesus, just as Adam does. The examples are all over Scripture, and it is mind-blowing.

DEVOTION 2
DESPERATE

CATHY STORY

Following his writing about how we have been saved by grace through faith, Paul jumps into discussing another important topic. In Romans 5:12, Paul gives an important reminder regarding the origins of sin.

Understanding how we have been reconciled and saved through Jesus Christ is a key part of faith, but it is also crucial to understand the sin that we have been saved from. Paul writes regarding the importance of understanding that point in Romans 5:12, ***"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."*** From that moment of eating the fruit in the garden, sin has been in the world. Paul makes it clear that sin did not just enter the world when the Law was given many years later, but at that moment, we read about it in Genesis chapter 3.

Paul also makes a second clarification in verse 14, ***"Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam."*** This means that even if a sin was not the exact same as Adam's sin, it was still sin.

When we take the time to recognize the true depth (if we can even get to that understanding) of our sin, we begin to realize just how desperately we were and are in need of a Savior. In what may feel quick to us to read, these verses help illuminate the realities of what we have been saved from.

Paul emphasizes that this sin entered the world through one man. Now, this fact in and of itself may not seem important, but in God's bigger plans, what may seem at the moment like something trivial

or unimportant can prove to not be the case at all. As we continue reading through Romans, we will see just how God knew exactly how the saving from our sins would be done. Even though sin entered the world through this one man, the story did not end there!

DEVOTION 3

ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL

GRANT GRIMES

"But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ."
Romans 5:15–17

In Romans 5:15–17, Paul presents a powerful contrast between Adam and Jesus. He begins by stating, ***"The free gift is not like the trespass."*** This distinction is crucial; Paul is differentiating the impact of Adam's sin from the grace offered through Christ. While Adam's transgression led to sin and death for all humanity, Jesus brings the gift of grace and eternal life.

As I meditate on this passage, I see how profoundly Paul wants us to understand that our struggles, rooted in Adam's sin, are not the end of the story. The pain and trials we experience in this world are a result of that original sin, but through Christ, we find hope and redemption. Paul emphasizes that Jesus is fundamentally different. Where Adam's actions brought condemnation, Christ's sacrifice offers justification and reconciliation.

This contrast reveals just how significant Jesus' work on the cross is compared to the burden of sin that Adam created. Paul reiterates

that while Adam's sin led to death, Christ's grace abounds, offering life to all who receive it.

The biggest point that Paul makes in this passage is that all have sinned because of one man's fall, yet we also are saved through one man. What seemed to be a system of loss and failure is redeemed through Jesus Christ. A story that begins with a great fall and seems to be hopeless is perfected and finished through the second Adam. There is nothing and no one that can offer us grace and righteousness besides this one man, Jesus Christ. Jesus cements this in John 14:6 when He declares that He is ***"the way, and the truth, and the life."*** There is no way to salvation or reunion with the Father besides this one man who is both fully God and fully human. If you are new to Christ or a familiar face, this is a truth we have to know. Jesus is the only way, and it is only through Him that we can have hope and security in the Gospel: His death, burial, and resurrection.

DEVOTION 4

THE POWER OF THE ONE

ZACH HONNEN

"But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ."
Romans 5:15–17

Sometimes, things just come down to life and death. Ever since the fall of Adam in Genesis chapter 3, life and death have been our reality. In the beginning, God gave us life and not just life, but we were given His very breath. We were made in His very image. However, through Adam, this life was corrupted, and the sin of man was passed down to all humanity. This stain of sin was now on the eternal souls of all humanity. So, we see through one man that we all have been affected.

I am sure no matter who you are, where you live, or what you believe, you understand that our actions rarely only affect our lives. Almost always without fail, our actions and choices have an impact on the lives of those around us, especially our family, children, and grandchildren. We have an impact, and we see the effects of those before us on our lives. Think of the best men and women in history, and even think of the worst; both have a great impact on the lives of future generations.

However, there was one man who had an impact not just on those who came after Him but also on those who came before His birth. Jesus came. He lived, was tempted, yet was without sin, and died on the cross for the sins of the world. His death was not for one man or woman or for all who came after Him, but it was for all humanity across all time. His death affected all who would believe across all human history and gave an opportunity for salvation to all men and women. With this truth, we see that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus were much more powerful than Adam's trespass.

Because of this, we have been given a gift of grace, righteousness, and life. Our sins are forgiven, and we are given what we do not deserve because of what Christ did. We receive His righteousness as a gift so that we can become holy as He is holy. We, as Christians, are no longer slaves to death and sin, but we are free to have life, eternally, with Christ. In addition, we have an opportunity to make an impact in our lives. In conclusion, consider these questions:

1. Do I live as a child of God or as a son of Adam?

The point is, do you live as though you have grace, or do you live as someone who is graceless? Do you live in the reality of what Christ has done, or are you still living in slavery to sin?

2. Knowing that you have received this gift and that you are a child of God, are you motivated to share the Gospel with others?

3. What are some practical ways that you can share this wonderful truth with people in your life?

DEVOTION 5
THROUGH ONE MAN

RICH SAWICKI

Through one man, sin entered, and through one man, sin was defeated. Romans 5:19 (NIV) says, ***"For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."***

Imagine someone knocking over the first domino in a long line. That one little nudge causes all the other dominoes to fall, one after another. That is kind of what happened when Adam disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. His one choice to go against God's command did not just affect him; it affected everyone. Through that one man, sin entered the world, and ever since then, humanity has been living with the consequences. Sin became a part of our lives, and with sin came things like guilt, shame, and separation from God.

However, here is the amazing part: God did not leave us in that fallen state. Just like sin entered the world through one man, God planned to defeat sin through one man. He is Jesus. Where Adam brought disobedience, Jesus brought perfect obedience. Where Adam's sin led to death, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross brought life. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus broke the power of sin and made a way for us to be reconciled with God. Sin was defeated once and for all through the obedience of Jesus!

Think about that for a moment: Adam's one act of disobedience caused a ripple effect of sin for all humanity. Jesus' one act of obedience caused an even greater ripple effect of grace, forgiveness, and life. Because of Jesus, we do not have to live under the weight of sin anymore. The power that sin once had over us was destroyed when Jesus died on the cross and rose again. That is an incredible victory!

It is easy to feel like sin is too big to overcome or that our mistakes have too much of a hold on us. However, the truth is Jesus has already won the battle. Sin was defeated the moment He gave His life for us. All we have to do is trust in that victory and accept the grace that Jesus freely offers by believing He is God.

So, today, remember that while sin came into the world through Adam, it was defeated through Jesus. His obedience, sacrifice, and love for us have made a way to save us from our sins. We do not have to live in guilt or shame anymore; Jesus has already set us free. All we have to do is put our faith in Him.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for sending Jesus to defeat sin and set me free. I am so grateful that I no longer have to live under the weight of my mistakes. Help me to walk in the freedom and victory that You have already won for me in Jesus' name, Amen.

DEVOTION 6
ONE VERSUS ONE

MARK PITTENGER

Anyone who knows anything about sports knows that a game could be lost in the blink of an eye by the actions of a single person. We have seen many times, in football or basketball, where a turnover costs that team the game. In basketball, it could come down to the final shot in the final seconds!

If you grew up in the 90's you undoubtedly know who Michael Jordan is. The early 2000s, fans had Kobe Bryant, and more recently, Lebron James. If you happen to not know who they are, these guys played professional basketball. They all had this special thing about them that when the game was on the line, they could flip a switch and single-handedly take over the game, often carrying the team to victory!

Romans 5:18-19 tells of a similar instance in history, but this holds a far more important outcome than that of a game. Paul writes, ***"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."*** Here, Paul shows us a direct correlation between Adam and Jesus. He is saying that we are condemned through the sin committed by Adam when he ate the forbidden fruit. It was only one sin that lost the game of life for everyone! All throughout the Old Testament, we see God giving people the opportunity to turn from sin, but they do not. There are numerous accounts of people losing the game of life due to sin. It is all because of one sin, by one person. It is game over! Or so it looked, but then came Jesus.

Jesus entered into the game! He played a perfect game. Because He played a perfect game, He is the only One who could fulfill the penalty placed on us by God. God's Word tells us, ***"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"*** (Romans 6:23). Due to the sin of Adam, we lost the game, but Jesus! He flipped the switch and took over the game in a way that only He could. Jesus won the game for us. Without Jesus, our game is over.

When Jordan, Kobe, or Lebron took over a game and won it, their whole team benefited from the victory. So I ask, are you on team Jesus? He has won the game! As Christians, we are called to follow Him (1 John 2:6). While we cannot play the perfect game, we can put our trust and give our lives to the only One who did play the perfect game.

Lesson 11

Romans 6:1-11

WHAT WE ALL NEED TO KNOW

Pastor Ryan Story

Every now and again, a familiar scene happens inside the confines of my house, and an argument begins. Now, one of the more recent arguments that broke out was between my wife and me. This was not a disagreement or anything tense. There was an argument about where something was. I needed a cookie cutter that we often use to make our family favorite “Sunshine Breakfast” (basically egg in a hole, but my kids like to give things “better” names). After about five good minutes of looking, I called out to my wife, stating I could not find what I was looking for. I was rather vocal about not being able to find said cookie cutter. Finally, my wife walked over to me, moved one thing, and low and behold, out of nowhere, the cookie cutter appeared.

While I cannot prove this biblically, I believe wives have a super spiritual ability to be able to just know where something is. I asked her, “How did you know that was there and why did you not just tell me?” Her response was, “I just knew where it was and I knew you would not ask for help.” Seems to be a universal truth that wives just know where stuff is better than their husbands.

1. Have you ever known where something was, what someone would say, or the answer before the person asked?

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Similar to this situation, God inspired Paul to write and know the truth to every common argument that would arise against Paul’s writing in the book of Romans.

Romans 6:1-2 says, ***“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”***

2. What do you think the common argument was that Paul was contending with based on Romans 6:1-2?

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3. Does the fact that God is so full of grace give us permission to test that grace?

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God knew that people would argue this point and make excuses for the next 2000 years. Just because God is gracious, that does not give us a license to live in sin. While we all will sin, and God's love is so vast, deep, and incomprehensible, using God's grace to merit a sinful, disobedient life shows a complete disregard for the sacrifice of Jesus.

4. What should our response be to the grace that God has shown us?

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One of the things I wish my wife could have taught me that morning was how she can remember so much. She knows all the important dates, the idiosyncrasies about our house, and manages to memorize all the preferences of our four kids. I asked her, "Can you teach me to remember like that?"

The thing I love about the book Romans is that God uses a logical progression. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to call out the abuse of grace but then prompted Paul to write the solution to the problem.

Romans 6:3-4 adds, ***"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."***

5. What must we be taught in order to not take advantage of Christ's grace?

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There is a keyword we have to spot when reading the above verse, and that is ***"into."*** The text says we have been ***"baptized into Christ,"*** and ***"baptized into His death."***

6. Why does Paul use baptism as an example to refute living in sin?

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God's Word is pointing out that while we are all dead in our sins, the work of Christ alone is grounds for our justification to any who put their faith in Jesus. We are united with Christ when we are saved. We are ***"into"*** Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

7. Why should one who confesses Jesus as Lord and is justified by the work of Christ desire to be baptized?

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Romans 6:5-7 continues, ***"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. For one who has died has been set free from sin."

8. What does dying to your old self and being raised into a new life in Christ allow you to be?

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The argument that most people will make is that living in sinful manner is "freeing." Sadly, sin does not free, it only imprisons. Freedom from the tyranny of self-love, self-worship, self-sufficiency, and self-satisfaction is only found when we confess our sins and call out for forgiveness to the One who can truly forgive us, Jesus.

9. How has the lie of "freedom" hindered your walk with Jesus?

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Romans 6:8-11 says, ***"Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."***

10. How effective was Jesus' sacrifice on the cross? Why do we struggle to remember that at times when we are drifting in our faith?

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One aspect I love about my wife is that she knows what I am looking for before I ask and before I admit to my struggle. While I sit here typing, as blessed as I am to have her as a wife, I am much more blessed to know that God knows what I am looking for before I ask and knows the answers to my struggles and questions. The Holy Spirit knows what the hearts of men need to hear, 2000 years ago and now. The truth is that all mankind needs Jesus to rescue us, which is truer than a husband who does not know where something is.

NOTES

DEVOTION 1

DEAD IN SIN

PASTOR CALEB COMBS

I remember standing in amazement on the edge of a 45-foot cliff on the island of Kauai, overlooking Shipwreck Beach. A few friends and I were planning to jump off the cliff into the ocean below. Just minutes before, I had assured my wife that everything would be fine, confident I would be okay. I am a decent swimmer and generally enjoy a bit of risk. However, my wife had pointed out the large red flag on the beach - a clear warning that the water was too dangerous that day.

In my stubbornness, I ignored the flag and found myself at the edge, preparing to leap into the raging ocean, where waves were surging close to ten feet high. I actually have a video of the jump, in case anyone wants to see it. I remember the exhilarating drop, feeling how quickly 45 feet passed, and then hitting the water hard. That is when the real struggle began. Swimming back to the shore, where my wife was waiting, was a different story. There were moments during that swim when I honestly thought I might not make it. As I reached the point where the waves were breaking, they tossed me around like a rag doll, and swallowing mouthfuls of salt water heightened my desperation to reach the shore. Finally, I made it back, collapsing on the sand, breathless and reflecting that, as thrilling as it was, I probably should have heeded that red flag.

I often lack fear in situations like this, or maybe I am just good at ignoring it, thinking, “God will protect me.” In retrospect, that is a foolish mindset. God has given me the ability to recognize when something is not wise, and ignoring that warning was, in a way, abusing His protection.

Romans chapter 6 speaks to this concept of abusing God’s grace. Here, Paul raises a flag - not against a dangerous ocean but against

a dangerous mindset: living however we want and just relying on grace to save us. Romans 6:1-2 says, ***"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!"*** Paul was addressing believers who were treating grace as a "get out of jail free" card, disregarding the life Jesus has called us to live. He reminds us that our lives should reflect the freedom found in Christ's work on the cross.

The grace of God is incredible. It is His unearned favor, God doing for us what we could never do ourselves. However, as His followers, we can abuse that favor. God's desire is that we seek to honor Him, embrace that favor, and live to glorify Him. Paul describes himself as a slave or servant of God, indebted to this grace. What I love about how Paul describes this is not that he earned his way to grace but that it was given to him out of God's love. As Romans 5:8 states, ***"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** This act of love places us in His debt and calls us to live in a manner worthy of the Gospel - as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

My prayer for you as you read this is that you recognize the depth of your sin but also realize the depth of His grace. May that realization guide how you live. Let this reflection serve as a red flag, encouraging you not to abuse grace but to live as a resurrected, renewed child of God.

DEVOTION 2
INWARD TRANSFORMATION

JILL OSMON

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Romans 6:1-4

Every time I read these verses in Romans 6, I am reminded of the words we use when we baptize someone, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, buried in the likeness of His death, raised in the newness of light." Baptism is an outward sign of an inward transformation, a representation of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

When we are baptized, our immersion in the water represents our death to our old self. Our death to sin and self involves an intentional surrender of our sinful nature, allowing Christ's death to free us from the power of sin. This death, a death to our flesh, selfish desires, and pride, should be replaced by a life devoted to pursuing holiness.

Being dead in sin also means that we are subject to the ***"prince of the power of the air"*** (Ephesians 2:2), a reference to Satan's influence over those who are spiritually lost. Satan is seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8), and if we are not vigilant, we will continue to go back to our sin over and over again, giving into our flesh.

Dying to Christ is not a one-time event but an ongoing process of sanctification. It requires daily surrender and obedience, choosing to

live by the Spirit rather than by the flesh (Galatians 5:16). Ultimately, through the process of dying to self, we find a more abundant life in Christ, where we experience the transformative power of God's grace.

DEVOTION 3
OUT WITH THE OLD

CAMERON ALDRICH

Have you ever seen a horse and buggy slowly moving alongside the road as you were driving? If so, I can assume you cruised right past them in your vehicle. I can also assume that at some point after noticing it, you thought, "I cannot imagine living and especially traveling like that." How could that not come to mind when we consider all the technological advancements, such as cars, that we utilize in our society today? It just makes so much more sense to utilize all of these advancements, which are immense blessings to us in so many ways. Yet, we can often take them for granted until we see something that reminds us of how life used to be without them.

There is no denying why we in today's world would choose a car over a horse and buggy in any given situation. Cars can move faster, which means less travel time. Cars have temperature controls and are enclosed forms of shelter, meaning that we can find comfort while traveling no matter what season and weather conditions we face (at least, outside of extreme cases). Some newer cars today also have advanced technology built within them, such as a Bluetooth system that can connect to our phones to enable us to make phone calls, listen to media, and use our map apps to help us navigate. All of this enables us to enjoy traveling, and because we are provided with so much ease and comfort with our vehicles today, why would we ever consider using the older method of transportation that provides nothing close to that experience? It would not make sense.

To travel today, we choose to use cars without even thinking about the options that existed beforehand. This is actually a great way to consider how we should view our lives when we have been made new in Christ.

In the first verse of Romans chapter 6, Paul asks us a very important question: ***"Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?"*** He is essentially asking that even while God's saving grace surrounds us and is made available to us daily, should we still choose to live in sin? In verses two and three, he answers commandingly, ***"By no means!"*** He then poses another great question: ***"How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"***

When I consider our methods of transportation, I think about Paul's answer. In today's society, we have advancements that enable us as humans to not be forced to the restrictions and bounds that nature brings as we travel. Back before all the automobile advancements we have today, weather and temperature would have played a major part in deciding when and to where you would travel. In a blizzard, would we dare to travel many miles one way for work or to get food or supplies? Of course not. With today's vehicles, that is no longer an issue. We are able to easily and comfortably travel to where we would like, despite the distance and conditions that are at hand.

Paul continues his explanation in verse four as he states, ***"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."***

If we find ourselves given the opportunity to walk in a new way of life every day that far surpasses the old life that we put to death through Jesus, why would we ever desire to continue living in that old way? So long as we call Him our Savior and believe in what He did, there is no comparison to the blessings, eternal promises, and salvation that come from the new life provided to us through Jesus.

In today's modern world, there is absolutely no reason to consider traveling with a horse and buggy like everyone did ages ago. In the

same way, there is absolutely no reason that we should consider or have a desire to continue to live in the old, sinful lifestyle that we have been blessed to have put to death through Jesus. Without a doubt, our new life in Christ far exceeds that old way of living. Because of Jesus, we can boldly say, “Out with the old, and in with the new.”

DEVOTION 4
BELIEVE AND REPENT

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

"For one who has died has been set free from sin." Romans 6:7

"So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Romans 6:11

My family is what you would call a dog family. Although we do not presently have a dog, we have had several through the years. They become like a family member for us. They are loved and well cared for. Yes, they are even spoiled. When one of our four-legged family members passes away, it is a sad day in our home. They are not easily replaced by just getting another puppy. If you are a dog lover or any other kind of pet lover, you understand.

When our pet passes, everything changes. Although they are missed, we do not put food out for them. We do not schedule any vet or grooming appointments. We do not take them to the dog park. Everything changes. They are not alive anymore.

There is a spiritual lesson here to be embraced. When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, we are ***"set free from sin."*** It no longer owns us. We should not feed our sin nature. We are to consider ourselves ***"dead to sin."*** It involves repentance. We turn from serving ourselves and strive to please the Lord Jesus.

Not only are we ***"dead to sin,"*** but we are to be ***"alive to God."*** Salvation is not about just saying a prayer; it involves our very beings. We are called to believe and repent. Ephesians 2:8-10 says, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in***

Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Although we are saved ***"through faith,"*** it is not based on our ***"works,"*** and it is a ***"gift of God,"*** there is more. We must realize that we are ***"created in Christ Jesus for good works."*** One big difference between my pet analogy and the spiritual application is that we do not need to grieve the passing of the sin that mastered us. God has something better for us.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, we read, ***"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."***

DEVOTION 5
FULL PRICE

KATRINA YOUNG

I am not much of a gardener, but I succumbed to the influence of a friend who inspired me to purchase clearance (end-of-the-season) perennials at 90 percent off. I was assured that if I got them in the ground soon, they would bloom in the Spring. It is October, and I knew the selection would be slim, but I thought I would give it a try. This guy has a beautiful garden, so after talking with him, I was inspired to bring something back to life. So, off to Lowe's I went. Christmas decor was front and center in the garden area, but way in the back, I found the rack of pots with the dried-up plants. The marker stick inserted in the pot is really the only way to identify what they once were. I bought what I could find and planted before the ground froze, and now I wait for Spring.

Throughout Scripture there are many references to seeds. In John 12:24, Jesus said, ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."***

I did some research and found that when a seed is planted, the life breaks free from the seed and sprouts into something new, leaving behind a shell of what once contained it. When we give our life to Christ we die to our sinful nature and become new. We die to ourselves and our old ways so that we can become more like Him.

Romans 6:5-11 says, ***"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. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died***

with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

None of us are worthy of the sacrifice that He made. We are all sinners (dead) without Him. Like the plants on the clearance rack, we are withered and dead, but even though we are not worthy, He paid the full price, not the 90 percent markdown! I look forward to Spring and seeing the new life that comes from what was planted.

DEVOTION 6

WHO DOESN'T LOVE A GOOD STORY?

DAVID HUDGENS

One of my favorite activities at home is watching a good movie. I love making a giant bowl of microwave popcorn, finding a comfy spot on the couch, stretching out, and getting lost in the charm of make-believe. I do not know about you, but when I watch a movie, I am eager to immerse myself in the setting and characters. I actively look for someone to identify with so I can wrestle with the choices they face as if they were my own to make.

I suppose what I enjoy most is simply a really great story. My favorite stories are those that depict transformation - where a person must journey through great struggle to shed their former way of life and become a new version of themselves in order to achieve the impossible feat they so desperately desire. Even now, writing about it, I am excited at the idea of finding another good movie to watch. I wonder what it is about these types of tales that bring me so much delight.

As I think about it, perhaps the reason I enjoy such a classic story arc is due to my own experience of transformation and victory in the grace and mercy of Christ.

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul wrote about a transformation far greater than any fictional story. He said, ***"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"*** (Romans 6:5-6). This is the story of every believer in Christ - a story of real, true transformation!

Just as movie characters must face struggles to change and overcome, so must we. However, in Christ, our transformation is not the result of our own effort or willpower. Rather, it is through the power of God at work in us. As Paul put it, ***"We know that our old self was crucified with him."*** That is the climax of our own stories. It is that moment when we realize our old way of life, ruled by sin and death, has been crucified with Jesus, never to live again.

Paul continues in Romans 6:8-9, ***"Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him."*** Christ's victory over death is our victory! Just as in those heroic tales where the protagonist rises against impossible odds, in Christ, you and I rise from the old life of sin into the new life of Jesus and His righteousness. In Christ, our struggle has already been won on the cross.

That is great news. In Christ, we do not just learn from a character's journey; we get to experience our own personal transformation. We no longer have to live as slaves to sin because we are free to live for God, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Romans 6:11 continues, ***"So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."***

Like a great story with a victorious ending, we are part of an ongoing narrative of redemption. We are being transformed by God's grace, and with every turn of the page, every opening of the next act, we transform even more into the image of Christ.

Lesson 12

Romans 6:12-23

SLAVES TO SIN OR SLAVES TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

Pastor Roy Townsend

Have you ever heard the saying, “Be careful what owns you?” We do not like the idea of being owned by something else. Most of us would believe that we are our own person. Nothing owns us! The question remains: does something own you?

Now, many of you may not relate to this story, but I have friends who own lots of “toys.” These toys can be hobbies, cars, trucks, boats, houses, pools, and hot tubs. However, all of these toys come with a price to purchase, and they come with a price to maintain them. I know of a friend who was trying to get his cabin and property ready for the winter, but he was having trouble starting his boat to get it out of the water before winter came. Many of the troubles surrounding these toys felt like they were crashing in on him. He did not have enough time or knowledge to fix the boat, but if he did not get it out of the water before the freezing weather, it was going to further damage the boat. However, if he spent all his time working on the boat, the property and cabin would not be ready for the winter. He only had so much time until he had to get back to where he lived to take care of his family and job responsibilities. Feeling overwhelmed, the thought came to mind of how much these “toys” owned him. They were distracting him from what he was called to be.

1. Do you ever struggle with “toys” or “things of this world” owning you? Please explain.

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2. Do you embrace the idea that “nothing owns me, I am my own person”? Are you offended by the idea that we allow the things of this world to own us sometimes? Please explain.

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The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 6:12-23, ***"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."*** Paul is challenging us to be careful as to what owns us. We should not let sin rule our bodies or obey its passions. It is almost like Paul is giving the advice to be careful as to what owns you. Will it be the cares, desires, sins, or toys of this world that own us? Or will we present ourselves to God? We are to present ourselves to God because He has brought us from death to life, and it even goes further that we are to allow ourselves to be used for righteousness. The things of God should "own us," not the passions of sin or the things of this world. Further, sin will not have dominion over you because it is by God's grace that you have been saved. You have been freed from the weight of the Law.

3. Do you struggle with the idea that the things of God should "own" us because we, who have put our trust in Christ, have been brought from death to life? Why or why not?

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4. It seems like a choice is being set up for us. When we talk about sin, do you feel like you have a choice, or do you feel like you are helpless in fighting against sin? Please explain.

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I heard a sermon where a pastor was detailing the choices that are before us when it comes to what Paul is describing here. Either we

present ourselves in this body to serve our sinful nature, leading to unrighteousness, or we can present ourselves in this body to serve God, leading to righteousness. Summed up, you serve God or your body. The Law referred to in the passage is that suffering and the consequences of sinful nature help point to God's Law, and grace is the salvation we have through Christ's death on the cross.

5. How did Christ's death fulfill the Law?

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6. Do you see how Christ's death now allows us to be free from being owned by sin, and being free to live for God or being owned by God? Explain this to the group.

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Paul further writes in Romans 6:15-18, ***"What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."*** Here, Paul asks a question, "Are we allowed to sin now because we have God's grace? Can we do what we want since we are trapped in a sinful world?" No, we cannot. If we present ourselves to sin, then we are being owned by sin (Paul uses the term slave). I know this seems very weird to us, and we do not like the term slave in our culture, but we will be obedient to sin leading to death or righteousness leading to life.

7. Is the word slave a stumbling block to you as you read this passage? Are you okay with the freedom that God brings? For Him to bring freedom, then something had to enslave us. Do you agree?

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8. One commentator wrote, “Before you came to faith, you were a perfectly obedient slave to sin; you did everything your master wanted you to do. The problem is, that master was evil, and everything it required was unrighteous.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?

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Lastly, Paul wrote in Romans 6:19-23, ***“I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** We see the Scriptures revealing that presenting our bodies to righteousness will lead to sanctification. This is the process of being more and more Christ-like, and it further describes the fruit that will come from this process. We all know that you cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

9. Which master are you feeding? Are you feeding the master that leads to death or the Master that leads to life?

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10. Do you agree or disagree with the warning, “Be careful what owns you”?

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NOTES

DEVOTION 1

HOW TO TRAIN AN ELEPHANT

PASTOR GARY WRIGHT

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness." Romans 6:12-13

I have read that when elephants are babies, they are taught by a trainer who uses a chain and attaches one end around the elephant's foot while the other end is attached to a stake in the ground. The baby elephant will pull and tug and try to get free, but when it realizes it is not strong enough to pull the stake out of the ground, it will simply give up. When the elephant gets bigger, it still believes it is enslaved, even though it could easily pull the stake out of the ground and be free.

In our passage, Paul is teaching the same sort of thing to believers. He had previously shared that as believers in Christ, we are no longer enslaved to sin. Romans 6:6 says, ***"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."*** When we put our faith in Jesus, we have the ability to say no to sin because we are no longer enslaved to it. Even though we have been set free from sin, we still struggle with it, and we are still tempted to sin. In Romans 6:12, Paul is encouraging believers to ***"let not sin reign in your mortal body."*** It is funny to me that Paul uses the word ***"mortal body"*** because the mortal body is dying and decaying. Why would we continue to give in to something that

is dying? When we let sin rule our lives, we are giving into our sinful desires. We are free but acting like we are still enslaved.

Paul goes on to say that instead of giving into the desires of sin, we should live like people who have been brought from death to life so that God can use us for His purpose and His glory.

Before we put our faith in Jesus, we are like the baby elephant, and no matter how hard we try to get free, we are enslaved to the chain and stake of sin. When we put our faith in Jesus, He removes the stake and chain. We are free from sin! We have the ability to say no to sin. This does not mean we will not be tempted. So, how do believers overcome temptation?

1. We overcome by studying and knowing God's Word. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert, the first thing He did was quote Scripture (Luke 4:1-12).

2. We overcome by praying. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told Peter to pray so that he would not fall into temptation (Mark 14:38).

3. We overcome by having another believer that we trust to come alongside us and encourage us when we are being tempted (Galatians 6:2).

In 1 Corinthians 10:13, we read, ***"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."***

DEVOTION 2
CHOOSE YOUR MASTER

DEBBIE GABBARA

A slave: a person entirely under the domination of some influence or person. It is inconceivable to think of ourselves as slaves. However, if we have not accepted Christ Jesus as our Savior, that is exactly what we are: slaves to whatever we choose to serve.

Romans 6:12-14 (NLT) says, ***"Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace."***

We all struggle with sin. I am sure my sin probably looks different than your sin, and odds are, your sin looks different than Paul's sin. Yes, the Apostle Paul struggled with sin, too. He tells us that in Romans chapter 7. God used Paul to write thirteen (fourteen if he wrote Hebrews) books of the New Testament. Yet, in Romans 7:15-17, it says that Paul did not understand himself. Though he wanted to do right, he ended up doing the very thing he hated because he was giving into his fleshly desires. Do you just hate it when that happens in your own life? Unfortunately, submitting to our flesh is a part of our human curse.

When sin is our master, we are unable to control it. Nonetheless, sin is inevitable; it is in our nature; but as believers, we do not have to let sin run or ruin our lives. As we read in Romans 6:12-14, we were once controlled by our sin, but we can choose to do what is right for the glory of God. Author Randy Alcorn said, "Sin doesn't make life interesting, it makes life empty."

God commands us not to obey our lusts or let sin rule in our bodies. As believers, we are no longer slaves to our sin. However, if we are not diligent in denying our flesh, we end up volunteering our souls to the enemy and his destructive desires for us. As previously mentioned by Paul, Scripture tells us exactly what to do: Give ourselves completely to God and use our bodies as an instrument that allows us to live in the freedom of God's grace.

Do not let your sin tell you what to do. Our flesh makes a poor master! Instead, live in the freeing truth that because of Christ's sacrifice, you are free indeed.

Galatians 5:1 adds, ***"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."***

DEVOTION 3
WILLING SLAVES

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."
Romans 6:15-18 (NKJV)

I joyfully, happily, and thankfully declare that I am a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ! How about you?

For most people, the word ***"slaves"*** evokes negative, even upsetting emotions. When we hear the word, we process it through the horrors of human trafficking, the fight of the civil rights movement, or the ancient enslavement of the Hebrew people in Egypt. We rightfully recoil at the idea of the oppression of others by wicked people. While we (and God) condemn human slavery and its horrors in nearly every category, there is one form of it that is right and good, even beautiful. The Greek word "doulos," used throughout the New Testament to describe Christians, refers to an unforced, voluntary, and joyful giving of ourselves to another. This kind of "slave" is commonly called a "bond slave."

The concept of a bond slave comes from the Old Testament books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy 15:12-17, we read that in the land of Israel, if a Hebrew man or woman became a slave (often to pay off debt), they could only remain a slave for six years. In the seventh year, they and their debts were to be released,

and they were to be allowed to go free. This was God's Law and a way of protecting people from becoming oppressed. However, in verses 16-17 of that passage, we read about something that could occur. Verses 16-17 says, ***"And if it happens that he says to you, 'I will not go away from you,' because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you, then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever."*** The description here is simply this: if a slave, upon release, says, "No, I want to stay with you as your servant," he can do so because it is voluntary. He has the ability to leave, but love keeps him there. The person that does this is called a bondservant or a bond slave.

Paul writes in Romans 6:16, ***"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey."*** He continues in verse 18 with the words, ***"And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."*** He is referring to the process of a bond slave giving himself to the one who is setting him free. Here, he reminds us that it was the Lord Jesus who released us from the bondage of our sins and the death we deserved. He forgave our debts and set us free. As His people, we do not just take our freedom and go! His love for us causes a loving response in us. As He says, "You are free," we look to Him and say, "I am Yours. You have loved me. I love You. I want to remain with You forever. I am Your servant and a willing slave of my King." As we do this, we become that bond slave, a willing "doulos" to our God.

What a joy to say that I am His slave. For in saying it, I am declaring that I am His forever! I am happy to shout it.

How about you? Can you say it? "Lord, I am Your slave forever."

DEVOTION 4

THE CHOICE

LORENA NORRIS

In Romans 6:15-16, Paul explains two ways to live: in the bondage of sin or the freedom found in obedience to God. He writes, ***"What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?"***

As believers, our past, present, and future sins are covered by the blood of Jesus. This does not mean we should exploit His gift of grace as an excuse to continue to sin. Instead, we must remember that our sin binds us like a cruel master, dragging us back into despair and separation from God.

Apart from God, we are bound by rules we could never fulfill perfectly. When we choose to sin, we submit ourselves to the very thing that enslaves us. Sin promises false freedom and only tightens its grip on us. However, when we are saved under His grace, the Holy Spirit guides us, giving us the strength to live according to God's will.

The beauty of grace is that it can empower us to choose. Paul later discusses this internal struggle in Romans chapter 7, where he describes the fight against our flesh. We often find ourselves doing the very things we do not want to do. This is our human vulnerability and the ongoing conflict between our desires for righteousness and the pull of sin.

This grace does not allow or condone sin but empowers us to resist it. We have the power to overcome our sins, not on our own, but because Jesus overcame the sins of the entire world. Grace is an

invitation to put our faith into action and embody the same love and righteousness of Christ. Living out that truth means our actions showcase the love and truth of Christ. Embracing God's grace means acknowledging our struggle but returning to the cross and remembering that we are no longer slaves.

Reflect and ask yourself if your actions show that you are a slave to your sin or a willing servant to the King of kings. Engage in this fight with hope. Choose wisely. The path of obedience leads to life, and only by hiding our lives in Christ, we can triumph over the desires that seek to keep us in chains.

DEVOTION 5
AN UNEXPECTED CHANGE

PASTOR JUSTIN DEAN

I love to watch movies. One of my greatest and worst qualities is that I am exceptionally good at guessing the ending to movies. Greatest because, if I am honest, I am not a big fan of surprises, and worst because my wife usually ends up irritated at me for spoiling the movie. A movie can really gain my respect if they can pull of a major twist and surprise me in the process. Some of my favorite movies do this quite well.

One of my favorite twists of all time is found in Scripture. It has to do with the eternal destination of our souls. Paul lays out this twist in Romans 6:20-23, ***"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

Humanity has only earned itself one thing: death. The minimum payment for our actions, disobedience, and sin is eternal separation from God in Hell. This is the expectation because it is what we earned, the foreshadowed end of humanity's movie. The twist comes when God frees us from that sin. He paid the price through the work of Jesus Christ so that we could have freedom. Even though we have earned death, He gives us the free gift of life. Through confession that Jesus Christ is Lord and belief that He has risen from the dead, we receive the free gift of eternal life (Romans 10:9-10). It is a life following Christ now and forever in Heaven with God.

One of the things that Paul emphasizes here in this passage is what this gift for us means now. It can be easy to think of our salvation only coming into play after we die, almost like spiritual life insurance. Paul says it is much more than that. In fact, he emphasizes that you should see fruit or things that your newfound salvation produces in your life. He uses the word ***"sanctification"*** in verse 22. That word describes the process of becoming purified, holy, and set apart, living for God's purpose in our lives every day. In essence, it refers to our growth process.

God does not save us only to leave us to our own devices. He does not throw us a life preserver and leave us in the midst of the ocean. He saves us and then helps us learn how to live moral and righteous lives for Him. This is the process of following Jesus Christ. God cares for us immensely and desires what is best for us, which is living the way He designed us to. So, this week, remain encouraged as you follow God. He saved you, and He is leading you to grow more and more in His ways.

DEVOTION 6
CREATED TO SERVE HIM

CHRIS FREZZA

"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:20-23

We are all a slave to something. Though we are not now, we were born to be a slave to God and to please Him with our lives. Adam, in the garden of Eden, before being led astray by the temptation of sin, was given a task by God: to tend the garden and to have dominion over creation. In a perfect creation, he was born a slave to God, not in a derogatory sense, but in the sense that his life was created to glorify his Creator. Being a slave in this context is not what we typically think of when we hear the word slave in our culture today. The Word of God teaches us in Genesis chapter 1 that man was given dominion, or responsibility, in the first days. Genesis 1:28 says, ***"And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"***

Genesis 2:15 adds, ***"The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it."*** We were made to serve the Lord in our responsibilities and work. The work we were created for, as described in Genesis, was righteous because everything God created was good.

Romans 6:20-23 teaches that though we inherited Adam's purpose for good work, we also inherited Adam's sin. In our sin, and apart from Christ, our desires are only sinful all the time. When Adam sinned, the human race became slaves to sin because our desire was no longer for the righteous work God created us for. Nothing we could do produced good fruit. That is what Paul is referring to when he rhetorically asks in verse 21, ***"But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?"***

When we surrender our lives to Christ and give Him His rightful place in our hearts as our Lord and our King, we return to our originally designed state of being a slave to righteousness. Where before we only had the ability to displease God, we now possess the ability to live for Him and please Him through the Holy Spirit, bearing the fruit of righteousness. We have been set free and have become slaves to God.

It is incredible to notice in verse 23 that the wages of our sin (our thoughts and actions apart from Christ) is death, but eternal life comes from Christ Jesus, not our behavior or merit. Thanks be to God for taking imperfect and sinful people who could not produce good fruit and fashioning us into instruments of righteousness in Him. We have been set free for good works, which lead to sanctification, perfecting us in the righteousness of God! I encourage you to take a moment to pray a prayer of thankfulness and reflect on what God has done in your life. Praise God for returning you to your original state and freeing you from being a slave to sin and instead making you a slave for Him!

Lesson 13

Romans 7:1-12

INCAPABLE IN RELATION TO THE LAW OF GOD

Pastor Patrick Bicknell

One of the greatest things I have learned since becoming a follower of Christ is what a yoke is. If you are not a farmer, let me explain to you what that is. It is a wooden cross piece that is fastened over the necks of two animals and attached to the plow or cart that they are to pull. I know this from my many years of working on a farm and dealing with cattle almost every day of my life. Now, if you know me, you know that is the furthest thing from the truth and are probably laughing out loud at the thought of me being a farmer. I am the furthest thing from a farmer. However, this idea of a yoke and understanding this illustration can be very impactful for our walks with the Lord and as we continue to study through Romans.

Jesus uses this illustration in Matthew 11:28-30, where He says, ***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."***

1. What do you think Jesus means when He says, ***"My yoke is easy and my burden is light"***?

_____
_____
_____

2. Can you think of some things that you have been "yoked" to?

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I believe Jesus is telling us that the requirements to have a right standing with God and the way we are to follow Jesus is not meant to be hard. His grace towards us is completely unmerited, and the way God views us does not depend on all the things we can do, but rather, it is based on the finished work of Jesus. That is the truth we have seen through Romans up to this point. Our justification is dependent not on the work we can do, but rather, it is completely

through what Jesus did for us on the cross. We no longer need to be yoked to a burden of religious works. That burden is lifted because Jesus completed the work.

This is the idea that Paul is going to lay out in Romans 7:1-3, ***"Or do you not know, brothers - for I am speaking to those who know the law - that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress."***

3. What is the message that Paul is trying to convey with this illustration?

_____
_____
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4. How does this illustration apply to our lives?

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_____

Essentially, what Paul is trying to do here is to give an illustration of the truth He is about to reveal in the next section. He goes on to say in verses 4-6, ***"Likewise, my brothers, you have also died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code."***

5. What is ***"the law"*** that Paul was referring to in this passage? How did we once ***"belong"*** to the Law?

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6. What does it mean to know that you are released from the requirements of the Law?

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7. Have you ever, or had someone else, put a burden on you to fulfill some requirements so that God would love you?

_____
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All of us were in this place that Paul talks about in verses 4-6. God is perfect, His Law is perfect, and He demands absolute perfection from us through His Law. It is not enough to keep every Law and only break a few. As James 2:10 says, ***"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it."*** However, praise God, we have been released from that requirement through the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus! We belong to a better covenant, one that actually gives us the power to serve Him in a way that is pleasing.

I am sure some of you are thinking, "So, the Law must be bad or sinful, right?" Paul anticipated that question from his readers as well. Romans 7:7-12 continues, ***"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin***

lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."

8. If the Law is not sinful, then what is its purpose?

_____
_____
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9. Are we the ones who fail the Law, or did the Law fail us?

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_____
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Paul makes sure to clarify at the end of this section that it is not the Law that is sinful; we are the sinful ones. The Law was always meant to be a mirror for us. It shows us how sinful we are and how holy God is. That was meant to lead us closer to God, knowing that He is our only way to salvation. Yet, the point of this passage of Scripture is to remind us that we are no longer burdened by the Law. We are no longer yoked to the Law. We have a new yoke; we are attached to Christ and His unmerited, never-ending grace that changes our lives and empowers us to follow Him every day.

10. What are some false burdens or requirements to earn God's love that you need to let go of?

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NOTES

DEVOTION 1
CONTEXT

PASTOR JOHN CARTER

Context is everything! It is one of the fundamental aspects of studying Scripture. Without proper context, we can take a verse or a passage of verses to say whatever we want. It can cause the Word of God to appear to say very damaging ideas and things that were never intended to be affiliated with the Word of God. The misuse of context can be construed by others as the truth of God's Word, though it is a lie.

This is why careful scriptural study must be a part of the believer's life. It is not just a pastoral responsibility; it is the responsibility of every follower of Jesus. As we navigate Paul's outstanding wisdom and understanding of doctrinal issues, please know that context can never, and I mean never, be forgotten or removed from the passages we study. All through Paul's life, as well as long after his life, people have taken his words, twisted them, and manipulated them to say things they were never meant to say.

As we start Romans chapter 7, I hesitate to say Paul is starting a new thought, though it may seem as such because he uses a new analogy. It must be read in context to the previous chapter as well as the entire book as a whole. If you are just picking up our devotion for the first time, this may be a little hard to comprehend without the previous context. Paul uses a universally understood illustration for his analogy: marriage.

Before we dive into the meaning of Paul's marriage analogy, it might be helpful to recap and highlight a few of the main points from Romans chapter 6.

First, what "enslaves" us before we accept Christ? According to Romans 6:6-23, we are enslaved to sin.

Second, what must "die" for us to be set free from the sin that enslaves us? This is answered in multiple places throughout chapter 6, but maybe most directly in 6:6-7, where Paul states that we must die spiritually to sin (just as Christ died physically) to be set free from sin's captivity over us.

With those two points in mind, let us now read Paul's marriage analogy in Romans chapter 7. Romans 7:1–3 says, ***"Or do you not know, brothers - for I am speaking to those who know the law - that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress."***

This analogy perfectly illustrates how our old self, the flesh, was bound to sin. However, that bond was only active as long as our old self remained alive with its fleshly desires. Death had dominion over us (as Paul stated in Romans 6:9,14), but now we have died to that which held us captive (sin). Paul is simply conveying the exact same points he made earlier in chapter 6.

You may be wondering why Paul uses the word ***"law"*** in Romans 7:3 rather than the word ***"sin,"*** as he did previously in chapter 6. Are we free from the Law of God when we accept Christ and die to our old self? Well, it is important to understand that the Law has many purposes, and one of these purposes is to show us our transgression in context to an unregenerate heart (which is why Paul uses the phrase ***"the law of sin and death"*** later in Romans 8:2). At the beginning of chapter seven, Paul shows us through the illustration of the married woman that we have been released from that specific purpose of the Law. We are released from the law of sin (depicted metaphorically as the ***"law of marriage"*** in verse two),

which means that the law no longer produces in us an increase in trespass. Thank God! Now, we can serve Christ, free from the captivity of sin that once enslaved us.

DEVOTION 2

DETENTIONS, SUSPENSIONS, AND EVEN WORSE

ADELINE SANCHEZ

I remember when I was in 7th grade, my class was so poorly behaved that the school had to put really strict rules in place to keep us under control. For example, if we had a substitute teacher and they wrote down one of our names for even the slightest disobedience or mistake, we were automatically issued a one-day suspension. I had to argue my way out of three suspensions that were almost issued to me for the most ridiculous reasons, like being a couple of minutes late to class or quietly talking to a friend after finishing my work (which, by the way, I was told was allowed). Sure, maybe I should not have been late to class, and I could have used my time more productively than talking to friends, but a suspension seemed like an extreme punishment for such small mistakes. The harsh regulations left no room for even minor errors, putting a lot of pressure on a bunch of twelve and thirteen-year-old kids. Fortunately, I switched schools in 8th grade and was relieved of the strict expectations at my previous school.

The idea of being set free from those harsh regulations brings me to the idea of our freedom in Christ. Romans 7:1 says, ***"Or do you not know, brothers - for I am speaking to those who know the law - that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?"*** The Israelites were also bound under a strict Law full of rules, regulations, and sacrifices throughout the Old Testament. The Law was certainly good and had very real and valuable instructions on living a righteous life, but what the Law really did for the Israelites was reveal their desperate need for a Savior, as exemplified by their constant inability to follow that Law.

Jesus' death on the cross is the death that ultimately freed us all from the burden of the Law. Jesus' death did not abolish the Law from existence, it fulfilled it for us so we could be free from the consequences of the Law that we would have otherwise never been able to live up to. We no longer live under the Law; we live under grace and thank the Lord for that!

Where in your life are you still finding yourself feeling trapped by the shame and guilt of your sins? God does not want us to live in shame and regret over our sins; He calls us to find rest in His abundant grace. No matter how hard we try, we could never earn God's favor. His favor is a free gift given to us through Jesus' sacrifice. Take a minute today to thank Him that you are not defined by your unrighteousness, but by His righteousness.

In case you were wondering, no, I never actually landed myself a suspension in school, but I definitely spent my fair share of time in detention (haha)!

Finally, Galatians 5:1 (NIV) says, ***"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."***

DEVOTION 3

MARRIED, BURIED, RAISED, AND REMARRIED

PASTOR JOSH COMBS

"Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead." Romans 7:4

The Good News of Jesus starts at a funeral – yours and mine. That is kind of dark and morbid, but it is true. Paul's startling words, ***"My brothers, you also have died"*** seem weird. Our death was not physical, as we would most often describe death. It was spiritual. The Apostle is writing to those who are now both physically and spiritually alive, but who were at one time deceased spiritually.

The Holy Law of God has sentenced each of us to death. We could not, as we have seen over and over again in Romans, live to the holy standard of the Law. All our excuses and deflections were pointless. Even our righteous deeds are filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

How can we then fulfill the righteous requirement of the Law? We cannot.

How, then, can we escape the rightful death sentence of our treason against God? Christ is the only answer.

The imagery of Romans chapter 7 pictures us as married to the Law, ironically, the very declaration and proof of our guilt before the righteous Judge. The Mosaic Law, comprised of over 600+ laws, each points to the sinner's guilt. Like a marriage, we were stuck to the Law "'til death do us part." However, Paul says, we ***"have died to the law through the body of Christ."*** We died to the Law, and in doing so, our "marriage" to the Law ended. However, Christ did not

leave us dead; we have experienced a spiritual resurrection. Now, because our "marriage" to the Law is over, we are free to ***"belong to another"*** (verse 4). We belong to Christ. We have a new marriage to Him who loved us, died for us, and rose again.

While the Law was a constant reminder of our guilt and need for a Savior, Christ's presence and promise to never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5) is a constant reminder of the Good News of how we were rescued and to Who we belong.

DEVOTION 4
AM I BEARING FRUIT?

KATIE PETTIBONE

"Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God." Romans 7:4

In this passage, Paul declares that the Law has no authority over sin and no longer condemns believers. Now, this does not mean that, as believers, we do not have rules to follow because we definitely do. What Paul is trying to convey is that through Christ's sacrifice, we are now able to become holy. However, we are only able to become holy through Christ Jesus. As we read, ***"so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead."***

As followers of Christ, we are told that we must be Christ-like by following Christ's example on the cross, His ministry on earth, and in His relationship with God. We need to be careful with this because if we are believers but do not abide in Him, we will not become holy, and we will not bear the fruit being talked about at the end of the passage when it says, ***"In order that we may bear fruit for God."*** This ultimately means that when we are serving for the Lord, we will bear fruit. Something good will grow from the work that is being put into it.

It is much like growing a plant. When tending to a plant, you have to get the correct soil; you also have to make sure you water it just enough and put it in the sunlight at a certain time of day. When all that work and attentativeness is put into growing the plant, in the end, there will be a beautiful blooming organism. Much like when we abide in Christ, our relationship with Him will be fruitful, and we will start to become more like Him. We will be living out the Fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-24 records, ***"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."***

However, when Paul mentions, ***"in order that we may bear fruit for God,"*** He is talking about more than just abiding in Christ, but abiding in Christ to accomplish good works. The Bible mentions the phrases like bearing fruit or being fruitful a lot of times and in many different ways. However, I personally think that Colossians 1:10 does a great job of defining what it means to spiritually bear fruit, ***"So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."***

The rest of the passage in Colossians identifies this statement in Romans very well if you would like to dive into it. Because we are now made holy in Christ and He has paid our wages of death, we are to walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord, especially in what we do for Him.

Our works for Him are found in the way we serve Him. For some it is serving at church on a Sunday morning either on stage, guest services, or in children's ministry - it all matters. Others find it by serving in nonprofit organizations, or simply doing small things for the Lord and others in your daily life. It could be cooking a meal for someone or donating clothes.

In all these ways, when we serve the Lord we want it to be in a manner that will bear fruit. How is that done? It is through doing it in a manner worthy of Him. How do we do that? We need to check ourselves continually making sure the work that we are putting in comes from a place of love. We need to make sure that our walk is in line with Christ and not of the world.

As a Children's Director, I always tell my volunteers to be careful of "pouring from an empty cup." We cannot pour from an empty cup, because the cup is dry and therefore without nourishment. When the cup is without nourishment, the one we are feeding it to will not be nourished. So, when we are not in line with Christ, our works will be without fruit.

Is there something in your life that is hindering you from bearing fruit? If so, are you walking in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord? Jesus made a way for us to be able to come to the Father whenever we need to. I encourage you to be in prayer and evaluate yourself today.

DEVOTION 5

NOT KNOWING WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

PASTOR JOSH YATES

"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead." Romans 7:7-8

We all have things we need to work on, right? We need to eat better, we need to spend less time on our phones, we need to be more present in our lives, we need to make more time for what is important, and we need to do so much more.

So, what is the answer to all that "we need to-ing"? It is like a New Year's resolution! Maybe it is just a resolution in general. We make decisions all of the time to "do better" or "be better" in a specific area. We are so very sincere in our desire, right?

However, something happens to those decisions. They get harder to do! It is like as soon as we make a decision or a resolution, the decision to do it makes it even harder to accomplish. You are around more candy than you have been in months, your favorite sports team is vying for a championship and you have to know the score on your phone, your schedule is getting busier so you see less of your family, and on and on it goes.

Paul talks about something like this in our passage for today. Before the Law was given by God, people did not know that sin was, well, sinful. People would go around and do whatever they wanted and think all was well. Once God gave the Law in the Old Testament, sin was given a definition by the only One that can give that definition.

We didn't know what we didn't know.

This is the same Paul that has been talking about the glorious salvation of Jesus in his letter to the Romans. He has spoken about how sin's power had been broken by Jesus at the cross and that the free gift of God was eternal life through Jesus alone (Romans 6:23).

We did not know that what we were doing was sinful until God told us. Once the Law was given, every single one of us was presented with a choice: follow God or follow what we wanted. The reality of the situation is that apart from Jesus, our nature is perpetually given over to disobedience and living for self. We would always choose sin.

Where do you find yourself today? Where do you find it hard to overcome sin in your life? You must know that you cannot overcome on your own. You need a Savior. Knowing that what you are doing is wrong does not change you. It may bring guilt and shame, and you may feel bad, but it will not help you overcome.

Jesus overcame. Jesus overcomes. Ask Him for strength. Lay down your sin before Him. Ask Him for forgiveness today. He will lead you to overcome.

DEVOTION 6

TO OUR CORE

SIERRA COMBS

Have you ever read the Ten Commandments and felt a strange mix of awe and dread? I remember the first time I really pondered them. As a kid, they seemed like a pretty straightforward list of do's and don'ts, things that "good people" follow. As a teen (who was very much a rule follower), they were a list of things that I was doing great at and most other people were doing terrible at (or so I thought at the time). However, as I grew up and took my distorted and prideful eyes off of myself, I came to realize that God's Law is not just a checklist for behavior. It is a mirror that reflects the depths of my heart in ways I might not always want to see.

Paul speaks to the purpose of the Law in Romans 7:7-12. ***"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."*** Here, we are reminded that God's Law is not flawed; it is perfect, holy, righteous, and good. The Law reflects and reveals God's nature in the same way, showing His holiness, righteousness, love of justice, and desire for purity. The Law is the standard, and God, in His perfection, sets and meets that standard by every account. We, on the other hand, do not. Not only do we not meet the standard, we miss the mark by miles! God's Law exposes the

problems within us, brings our brokenness to light, and points out the fact that we are, actually, wretched sinners. The Law shines a light so brightly on our own lives that it does not just expose the external, visible sins but goes deep down to our core, revealing thoughts and attitudes that we may not even recognize as sins until they are pointed out. It goes to the very heart of the matter.

In this passage, Paul explains that before he truly understood God's commandments, he did not see his sinful nature clearly. He uses the example of coveting, saying that at one time, he thought of coveting as just a harmless, passing thought - no big deal. However, once he understood what coveting really meant, that it is a desire for something that is not rightly his and that it springs from discontent and envy, he could no longer ignore God's command, ***"You shall not covet."*** The Law opened his eyes and revealed that sin was alive within him in ways he was not even aware of. This resonates with me deeply as I think back to the way I used to view God's commandments. They are not just a list of rules that "good people" follow, and they certainly are not a list of rules I am fantastically accomplishing. When looked at with the correct lens, the purpose of God's Law is not to show me how good I am. Instead, it reveals what a failure I am. I can never measure up to God's perfect standard, no matter how hard I try. Yet, the Law is not the enemy; sin is. Ironically, this weighty and burden-filled place is the best place we can find ourselves because it is here where we are forced to acknowledge our deep need and utter dependence on God. Left to myself, I am prone to anger, pride, envy, and more, but when I come under the weight of God's Law, I see the true purpose behind it - to point me to Jesus. The Law drives me to the foot of the cross, where forgiveness, freedom, and transformation are found. The burden has been lifted! Through Christ, I no longer approach God's Law with selfish pride, dread, or condemnation. Instead, I see it as God's goodness, grace, and the greatest gift I could ever receive. While the Law may reveal my sin, it also points me to the only One who can save me from it - Jesus Christ.

Lesson 14

Romans 7:13-25

THE PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION

Pastor Noble Baird

"Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." Romans 7:13-25

Paul used the word ***"good."*** It is often an overused, basic, underwhelming, easy, and circumventing word. On a daily basis, it can be used at three different times of the day: good morning, good afternoon, and good night. Whenever you find yourself having to make small talk, and you do not want to go deep or be fully honest about what is happening in your life, the easiest response for how you are doing is, "I am good." Ironically, this word also has the power through sarcasm to be encouraging or demeaning: good job.

1. In what ways do you find yourself using the word ***"good"***?

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2. Have you found yourself using this word as an easy escape or a way to cover up true feelings?

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In Romans 7:13-25, Paul continues his letter, and he begins in verse 13 by posing a rhetorical question. He writes, ***"Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?"*** The answer to this question is, of course, no, or as Paul declares, ***"By no means!"*** However, to fully understand what will unfold in the verses to follow, we must first understand the ***"good"*** that Paul is speaking of. In simple terms, this ***"good"*** is the Law of Moses, which all the Jewish people lived under and held to.

Paul is continuing this discourse, helping us understand the reality and weight of sin. If we remember Romans 3:23, Paul declares the truth that we are all sinners and totally depraved. Again, simply put, there is nothing redeeming within us as sinners, nothing that can save us from our sin. Paul continued in Romans 6:23 to share the hard reality that because of our sin and depravity, our penalty is death. It is this equation of sin + righteous punishment = death and eternal separation from God. Paul continues this theme in Romans chapter 7. He talks of walking out the need for the true good and how sanctification unfolds in our lives as followers of Christ, but we must begin with the brokenness and separation of sin.

3. What comes to mind when you hear the word ***"sin"***?

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4. What does it mean when Paul writes that, ***"the wages of sin is death"***?

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Paul continues on in this passage with verses 14-17, ***"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me."*** Paul's honesty, in the reality of the struggle with our broken human nature, is comforting. This passage is comforting; first, as humans, we will never be able to escape the brokenness of our flesh. Paul declares that no matter how hard we try, how many good things we do or say, at the end of the day, we are of the flesh and sold under sin. Secondly, this can be a reminder of our reaction to those in this world who do not know the Lord. As followers of Christ, Paul is teaching us here how we will always be broken and susceptible to sin; it is an unfortunate foundational truth to the brokenness of humanity. Therefore, we must remember that as we have interactions with the world, those who do not know Jesus, we cannot expect anything else from them. Until they come to a relationship with Jesus, we cannot expect them to do anything except be chained and under the oppression of sin in all they do.

5. Have you ever had a situation or experience with someone who did not know the Lord, and you reacted poorly to how they acted toward you?

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6. How do we keep a mindset of grace and love toward a broken world whose foundation for all they do is sin and brokenness?

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Paul gives an understanding that the Law is the standard for what is good; it is what one ought to strive for. However, the Law by itself is not what saves us as followers of Christ; it is our faith in Jesus and His glorious resurrection by which we are saved. Paul writes in verses 21-25, ***"So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."*** When we talk about sanctification, the process of becoming more like Jesus, this passage is such a clear image of the reality of this process. Sanctification is not something that is achieved, perfected, or completed. On the contrary, it is the daily process of being obedient to the Lord. It is the daily process of being mindful that we are battling our fleshly desires versus serving and following the Lord instead. Sin will always be in this world. It will never be completely eradicated until Jesus returns. So, as followers of Christ, we must be on guard. We must not ignore the reality that as we press forward in our walks with Christ, sin and evil lie close at hand. As we strive to obey the Law of God, we will face temptation. Yet, as Paul exclaims in verse 25, ***"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*** Thank God for Jesus that we can break the chains of sin and run from the desires of our flesh through Jesus!

7. How do you run from sin?

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8. What are some of the most difficult obstacles in your life that you have had to put safeguards against in order to serve the Law of God, not the law of sin?

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A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, the great philosopher Yoda once said, “Do or do not; there is no try.” I love this statement because, as followers of Christ, it is truly that black and white. We either choose to serve, obey, and follow Jesus Christ, or we choose to serve sin and give way to the desires of our flesh. As Luke was about to make the greatest shot ever, placing two proton torpedoes into the reactor core of the Death Star, he heard the voice of Obi-Wan guiding him to his goal. In the same way, we, as followers of Christ, are never alone, and we have something far greater than Hollywood sci-fi; we have the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of the living God resides in each and every one of us who call upon the name of Jesus. It is His Spirit that leads and guides us in this sanctification process. Meanwhile, we battle the desires of the flesh, the law of sin. However, we can be confident not in ourselves but in Jesus. Confident that we can overcome our flesh, we can overcome sin, and we can stand firm on the Law of God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

NOTES

DEVOTION 1

FALL FORWARD

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

"For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." Romans 7:15

Romans 7:15 can be encouraging. This might fall in the category that misery loves company. It surprises many of us that Paul had the same struggles we have. Our intentions are pure, but the outcome is often a mess.

Romans 7:15 can also be discouraging. We may feel defeated before we start. I have heard many quit before they even tried because they were sure they were doomed. We are all aware that the common New Year's resolutions of losing weight, exercising more, saving money, getting organized, reading more, spending time with family, and quitting a harmful habit seldom last longer than a few weeks. Many ask, "Why try?"

This can also happen with spiritual disciplines. I have encouraged men to pray out loud with their wives. It only needs to take 30 seconds. All too often, they will not even start to do it because they do not want to fail, knowing it will not last.

How about you? Is there something you know you should do and even want to do, but fear of failure has stopped you from trying? It may be attending, hosting, or leading a Growth Community. It might be setting the goal of reading through part or all of the Bible in a year. Possibly, it is committing to regularly volunteer at church by serving in the nursery, the tech booth, or in the lobby. Take the next step.

In counseling, I have often told people to fall forward or fail often. This may sound like horrible advice, but I think it is better to fall or

fail and rise again than to fail by not trying. Sometimes, it is better to compare ourselves to what we were a week, month, or year ago than the perfection we feel we should strive for.

It may seem overly basic, but you will not hit a homer if you do not swing the bat. Most of us are not talking homers; we just want to make contact, and a single would be worth celebrating. Take a swing. Fail often. Fall forward.

Wayne Gretzky is a Hall of Fame player generally recognized as the greatest hockey player ever to play the game. (I think Gordie Howe might even agree.) Gretzky once said, “You miss 100% of the shots you never take.” (I realize Michael Scott used the quote, too.) By being paralyzed by fear of failure, we fail. We lose.

Everyone who has ever set goals, has fallen short. However, winners get back up, step in to the batter’s box, and take another swing. Paul is a hero of the faith. Yet, he too, had to battle forward. Begin your next journey with the first step.

DEVOTION 2

THE TEMPTATION OF THE TRASH

JEANNIE YATES

We consider ourselves to be dog people. We have a sweet, 9-year-old rescue dog named Ruby. Ruby is a border collie/boxer mix (or so we were told), and she definitely has characteristics from both of those breeds. She is a smart dog and knows what she is supposed to do (and not do) in the house. Because of that, she usually has free reign of the main living space when we are gone during the day. Ruby is a loved, well-fed dog, and she responds easily to positive praise and treats. However, she is also a stubborn dog who often obeys her instincts and desires despite her owner's instructions. This smart dog learned how to open and get into the trash can in the kitchen, which gave her access to all sorts of "yummy" scraps and fun things to tear open. She knows she is not supposed to get into the trash. She even hangs her head in doggy shame when we return home to find a big mess. It is obvious that she does not want to disappoint or disobey us, but she continues to give in to the temptation of the trash.

Just like Ruby, we often let the voice of our flesh become louder than what we know is right and good. Earlier in Romans chapter 3, we were reminded that we do not have any righteousness on our own; ***"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one"*** (Romans 3:10-12).

The good news is that we were given a free gift that is available to us only because of the sacrifice of Jesus' death and resurrection. We can have ***"the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe"*** (Romans 3:22). I wish that meant

that there was now an "easy button" that erases all desire and temptation, but we read from Paul that this struggle continues even in the hearts of the Christ-follower. Romans 7:13-20 (NLT) says, ***"It [sin] uses God's good commands for its own evil purposes. So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it."***

Paul says that not only is he a sinner like the rest of us, but he is in a constant struggle because of that indwelling sin (the flesh, the old nature). We want to do what is right and please our Father in Heaven, but how often do we exchange the reward of obedience for the momentary, cheap thrill of digging in the trash? Despite knowing the truth, we follow our fleshy desires. Warren Wiersbe wrote, "The inward man may delight in the law of God (Psalm 119:35), but the old nature delights in breaking the law of God. No wonder the believer under law becomes tired and discouraged and eventually gives up! He is a captive, and his condition is wretched."

Maybe as you read this, you can identify with Paul. You feel the desires of your flesh weighing you down, and you are constantly battling against what you know to be right and what you feel your desires to be. Maybe you even feel held captive, and the struggle becomes greater when you hear our world say, "Do what feels good to you." Let me encourage you to take that burden to Jesus; lay it at His feet. Ask for His strength to choose the truth. He invites you to come. He invites you to rest in Him. Matthew 11:28-30 states,

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

DEVOTION 3
CHOOSE YOUR LAW

CHRIS MONTVILLE

Throughout Romans chapter 7, Paul talks about this relationship between the Law of the Old Testament and sin. Starting in verse 7, he dives deep into how our sin nature works in that relationship. There are so many verses in this chapter that I am sure you will find relatable and convicting, as well as helpful in understanding our natural thought processes and how they can be deceiving. However, something that this chapter also points out is an idea that pushes against our current culture: the idea that without God or religion, we are "free."

Romans 7:22-23 says, ***"For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members."*** In these two verses, we see Paul say that he delights in ***"the law of God,"*** which means he delights in God's Word, as we all should as Christians. However, he contrasts it with our sin nature, calling it several things: ***"another law," "the law of my mind,"*** and ***"the law of sin that dwells in my members."***

In Western culture, religion is often related to this idea of putting on shackles or binding yourself to certain "rules." If someone outside of the church were to read that we are under ***"the law of God,"*** they would most likely understand that you are referring to God's commands and that you desire to follow them. However, if you were to then tell them that they are under ***"the law of sin,"*** it is highly likely that they will disagree and push back on that idea. They are not under any law! They are "free!"

When we come to Christ, we see sin as the destructive force that it is, which ultimately leads to death (Romans 6:23). Christians are able to look back on their life and see the destruction that sin has

caused. We can see how our thought process was skewed, and incorrect. We can see how we were under ***"the law of my mind."***

This idea that if you follow Christ, you are under His law, but if you do not conform to any particular religion you are somehow "free" is not accurate, nor biblical. In 2 Corinthians 3:16 we read, ***"But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed."*** John 9:25 adds, ***"One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."***

Our eyes have been opened to see that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Spend some time today reflecting on your past sins. Praise God for loving you despite them, and paying the price to deliver you from them.

"To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." 1 Timothy 1:17

DEVOTION 4

THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG?

NATHAN ELLIOTT

"For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." Romans 7:22-25

What came first, the chicken or the egg? This silly yet thought-provoking question has been a means of debate for a long time. Essentially, both answers are correct in a sense because one cannot exist without the other. There is a somewhat parallel connection between us as Christians and how we view ourselves. The Christian is both spirit and flesh. However, if we were only spirits, we would be in our glorified, heavenly state, but this will not be fulfilled completely until we reach Heaven. If we were only flesh, then we would have no desire for God or personal holiness, yet we do desire those things on Earth. This is the internal conflict that Paul addresses in our text.

Verse 22 says, ***"For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being."*** Paul begins by speaking of his intense passion for the Law of God. At a very young age, he studied the Law and tried to follow it perfectly. In fact, he was so zealous that he dedicated his life to the Law. Verse 23 adds, ***"But I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members."*** Paul contrasts his love and sincerity for the Law of God with his captivity to the law of sin. He is constantly fighting within his own mind as to how to process this battle. He comes to only one conclusion in verse 24,

"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Paul realizes that he is helpless to destroy his fleshly desires on his own!

Paul's mindset is certainly one we ought to be able to relate to. Some days, as we read our Bible and pray, we feel overjoyed and full of love for God and our salvation. On other days, we feel so sinful that we question how a holy God could save our souls from the just wrath we deserve. This is the battle within every Christian who has ever lived. Thankfully, we have the answer on how to win this battle. It is the same answer that Paul had. Verse 25 concludes, ***"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*** If it was not for Jesus, there would be no battle at all. It is through Jesus' work that we can stand before a holy and just God. All praise and honor to Him!

DEVOTION 5
WRETCHED MAN

JASMYN BICKNELL

"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." Romans 7:24-25

Why does Paul call himself a ***"wretched man"***? I know I personally hesitate to admit to a mistake; that is the pride inside of me that I am trying to work on. I am sure many of us can relate to that. Yet, I think the reason Paul becomes vulnerable in this moment is to draw attention to the fact that we need to humble ourselves, repent, and seek forgiveness for our faults. By calling himself a ***"wretched man,"*** he is not claiming to be some perfect Christ-follower; he is being real in the fact that he is far from it. After all, God knows our every thought, desire, and action, so why try to hide it?

Next, he asks, ***"Who will deliver me?"*** He obviously knew he could not bring salvation to himself, he needed the Lord for that. Without Christ, we are nothing. Without Christ, we fall into the ways of the world which lead to an eternal death. We must turn to the only One that can save us. Trying to handle things on your own will only lead you down a path of destruction.

Paul shows this in his next statement, thanking God through Christ, ***"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ."*** Why did he say it like that? It is because when Jesus died on the cross for our sins, He bridged the gap between God and man, so we have the freedom to talk to Him at any moment of any day! We no longer have to go through a priest to talk to God. I love this! It means that any time I am feeling anxious or overwhelmed, I can simply talk to my Heavenly Father wherever I am, and He will bring me rest, comfort, and peace in any situation.

The last part of this verse he encourages us that though our flesh wants to sin and be of the world, we find deliverance through Christ when we fully turn our eyes to Him and we stop trying to handle everything on our own.

Remember that through Him, we have salvation. Do not assume that life will be perfect once we give it all to Him. Our flesh will always tempt us and try to make us sin, but we must strive to seek God with every conscious moment.

DEVOTION 6
WAR WITH THE OLD

ZACH HONNEN

As a young Christian, I remember my walk with the Lord being characterized by many ups and downs. I would share my faith with anyone who would listen, but over time, the spiritual high would fade, and I would find myself struggling with sin all over again. One of those sins was anger. I remember playing one of the final basketball games of my high school career, and the game was not going our way. I began to push, shove, and say some pretty awful things. In the end, the conviction and guilt hit me so hard that I went to the parking lot to cry and repent before God.

I was frustrated that I could not seem to control myself. I felt like such a hypocrite, moving from conviction to despair. That was when God brought this passage to me. It explained exactly how I felt. The passage is Romans 7:21–25, ***"So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."***

Over the course of my life, I have heard many interpretations of this passage. Some argue that it is an excuse to allow sin in our lives. Others claim that once we have Christ as our Savior, we can now be perfect in this life. However, when I look at this text, I believe the answer lies somewhere in the middle. This text does not teach that we can have a free-for-all with sin. Earlier in Romans 6:1-2, Paul points out, ***"Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?***

By no means!" That being said, I also do not believe this text suggests we will be perfect in this life. In 1 John 1:8, we read, ***"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."*** So, what does this text teach? This text teaches us that we have no power to defeat the old man on our own.

Several passages talk about being a changed person once we accept Christ as Savior:

- ***"Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."*** Colossians 3:9-10

- ***"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."*** Romans 6:6

- ***"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."*** 2 Corinthians 5:17

Paul was a man well-acquainted with this concept of the old man and the new man. We are born into sin, and when we come to Christ, we are born again. We become new in Christ, and at that moment, we have a new reality of the old and the new. There is a struggle between wanting to please God and wanting to please our sinful nature. This old man is within us, and we are called to put this man to death each and every day. Luke 9:23 says, ***"And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'"*** There is a problem. We cannot do it on our own.

In Romans 7:24, Paul exclaims, ***"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"*** Paul spent much of

his ministry in prison, and one practice in those prisons was that when a man would die, they would bind the dead man to a living prisoner, strapping them back to back, legs and arms bound. The bacteria from the rotting corpse would eventually infect the living man, leading to his death as well. This is likely the illustration Paul had in mind when he asked, ***"Who will deliver me from this body of death?"***

So, what is the answer? Just as the prisoner could not untie himself, we cannot free ourselves from the old man either. We need someone to act on our behalf.

Romans 7:25 adds, ***"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."***

The answer is Jesus. We must submit ourselves to Him and let the Spirit save us. You and I have no ability, but God does. He is more than able. James 4:8 says, ***"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."*** Victory is found in Christ, as we see demonstrated in Romans chapter 8. For us today, we must make war against our old man, our sin nature, by walking in the Spirit and drawing near to God.

Lesson 15

Romans 8:1-8

FREE TO FOLLOW

Pastor Philip Piasecki

Everyone remembers their first car. Mine was a 1995 army green Jeep Wrangler, two-door, with a soft top. The thing sounded like it was going to explode if you drove it over 65 mph, and I always seemed to manage to take the top off when rain was unknowingly in the forecast. I have always loved to drive, and I could not wait to get my license when I was younger. The freedom that I knew that vehicle would allow me to have motivated me every day as I saved up my money. I counted down the days to my 16th birthday when I would get that car that would give me the freedom I desired. Even though I already knew how to drive, I counted down the days until my birthday when I would finally get my license, which would legally allow me to drive.

1. What was the first car you ever owned? What has been your favorite car you have ever owned?

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Romans 8:1-4 says, ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."***

2. What does Romans 8:1 mean when it says, ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"***? How does this assurance of freedom affect our journey of sanctification?

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Sure, the freedom that our first vehicle afforded us was great, but nothing compares to the life of freedom that we can have through Jesus Christ. This is what Paul starts to explain to us in chapter 8. We have learned all about this Law and how we are unable to fulfill it ourselves. Paul shows us that when we are found in Jesus Christ, we are free from the condemnation of this Law. Knowing that we are free allows us to confidently strive to be more like Christ. One commentary described sin and death as the two "archenemies of humanity," but now we have a new freedom available to us from this Law thanks to the ***"law of the Spirit of life."***

3. How would you describe the ***"law of the Spirit of life"*** (Romans 8:2)? In what ways does the Holy Spirit give us freedom from sin's control?

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This refers to the work of the Holy Spirit, Who brings new life and empowers us to overcome sin. Unlike the Old Testament Law, which could not change our hearts, the Holy Spirit transforms us from within. Through Him, we experience freedom from sin's dominion, enabling us to live in ways that please God. God sent His Son to do what we could not do. Without the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and His resurrection, we were to be condemned by the Law. The Law attempted to justify us, but it failed. Jesus came, and He condemned sin so that we could be found righteous in Christ. We have been made free.

4. In Romans 8:3-4, Paul explains that God sent His Son to fulfill the Law's requirements for us. How does this foundation in Jesus' sacrifice help us rely on the Holy Spirit rather than our own efforts for growth?

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One commentary said, “One must be assured of acceptance with God before one can grow in grace and conformity to Christ.” Only when we understand our assurance in Christ can we fully begin to grow in our relationship with Him and truly be sanctified. So, we have been set free from the Law for what purpose? It is for the purpose of actually following God’s commands through the power of the Holy Spirit. No matter how great of a driver I thought I was before I turned 16, without my official state-issued license, it was impossible for me to drive legally. In the same way, as believers, it was physically impossible for us to submit to God’s Law before we believed in Him and began living by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:5-8 adds, ***“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”***

5. What does it mean to ***“set the mind on the things of the Spirit”*** (Romans 8:5-6), and how does this impact our daily choices and attitudes?

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We say we want to be more like Christ, but what are we setting our minds on daily? When we set our minds on the Spirit, we are intentionally focusing on the things of Christ. This plays out practically in studying our Bible and prayer, but also in every moment, letting the Holy Spirit guide us in our thoughts and actions. Ask Christ to guide you in His Spirit. We want each and every step of our lives to be taken with our mind set on the things of the Spirit.

6. Paul contrasts the mind ***"of the flesh"*** with the mind ***"of the Spirit"*** in Romans 8:5-6. How do we recognize when our thoughts and desires are influenced by the Spirit versus our flesh?

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We must be willing to take stock of our thoughts and actions and see where they lead us in our lives. Scripture is clear that a mind set on the flesh leads to death, and a mind set on the Spirit leads to life and peace. Are your thoughts and desires leading you to life and peace? Do you have godly people in your life who can speak into your actions and be honest if they seem led by the flesh or by the Spirit?

7. How does the Holy Spirit empower us to obey God and grow in holiness, even in areas where we might struggle?

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8. Are there areas of your life that you used to struggle with that have you seen the Holy Spirit transform you in?

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We have been freed from the curse of the Law. Now, through the power of the Spirit being called to keep the Law's commandments, this is now possible by living according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh. I have heard it said, "Divine aid is required to meet the divine requirement." We can have spiritual confidence knowing that the curse of sin is broken in our lives, and through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, we can actually fulfill the Laws of God. Scripture constantly presents us with the life

that it wants us to live, and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross has made it possible for us to fulfill that life in Him.

9. Romans 8:8 says that those who are ***"in the flesh cannot please God."*** What does this reveal about our need for the Holy Spirit's involvement in every aspect of our sanctification?

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Colossians 1:10-11 says, ***"So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy."***

10. Do you believe that God loves you and that you please Him?

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In the flesh, we cannot please God. This may feel like a sobering reminder, but I view this verse as an incredible encouragement. We are no longer in the flesh, but we are filled by the Spirit, and those in the Spirit can please God. We can live a life that glorifies Him. We can lead a life where, through God's power, we kill sin in our lives. We can live a life that is constantly being sanctified to be more like Christ. I love how one commentator put it, "The fulfillment of the law in Christian living does not entail perfectionism. It refers to a basic orientation of one's life and basic patterns of Righteousness." God has given us freedom from sin so that we can live for Him. Every day, we set our minds on the things of the Spirit and try to follow the commands of Christ. Then God looks at us and is pleased because He sees His creation that He loves, perfect through the sacrifice of His son Jesus, striving to be more like Him. We have been made free, and through the Spirit, we can now follow Christ.

NOTES

DEVOTION 1
FREEDOM

GRANT GRIMES

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1

"Oh, freedom!" Aretha Franklin's song *"Think"* echoes in my mind as I read this powerful verse. For those in Christ Jesus, there is true freedom - freedom from condemnation. Many people do not fully grasp the incredible victory this short verse represents for Christians.

Sin has severed our unity with the Father, leaving us condemned in the heavenly court to pay the penalty of death. Yet, this verse proclaims the glorious verdict: for believers, there is no condemnation. Jesus, in His mercy and grace, took upon Himself the punishment we deserved. The debt has been paid in full.

When we reflect on this verse, we should feel overjoyed - motivated to change and to live a life worthy of the Gospel, inspired by the magnitude of what Jesus has done. Sadly, many take this truth for granted, viewing Jesus as a kind of spiritual credit card, swiping away His grace while continuing in the very sin He died to free us from. I challenge us to remember this verse daily. Let us pray for hearts full of gratitude and a commitment to live in a way that honors the freedom we have received.

We must meditate on the significance of Jesus' sacrifice, refusing to let sin cling to us with shame and regret. Instead, let us hold on to the hope this verse provides. Jesus has paid it all, and we owe everything to Him.

DEVOTION 2

THE SPIRIT SETS US FREE

RICH SAWICKI

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1

Have you ever had a moment when you felt like you had messed up so badly there was no going back? Maybe you told a lie you regretted, or you did something you knew was not right, and you felt that guilt just sitting on your shoulders. It is like carrying around a heavy backpack filled with rocks that gets heavier with every mistake.

Well, here is some amazing news: Jesus has taken that backpack off of you and He put it on his back! He has taken away the guilt, the shame, and the "I messed up again" feeling. Romans 8:1 tells us that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That means God is not pointing a finger at us saying, "Look at what you did!" Instead, He opens His arms wide and says, "You are free!"

How can we be free? It is through the Holy Spirit. When we accept Jesus into our lives, God's Spirit moves in. He is there to help us, guide us, and remind us that we are no longer stuck under the weight of our mistakes. The Spirit tells us, "You are free. You are forgiven. You are loved."

Imagine a courtroom. You are standing before a judge, and the list of everything you have ever done wrong is there on the table. It is a long list, and it is embarrassing. However, before anything can happen, Jesus walks in, takes that list, and says, "I have taken care of this." Then He looks at you and says, "You are free to go." That is

what the Spirit does for us every day! He reminds us that Jesus has paid the price, and we are not guilty anymore.

Here is the best part: living free does not mean we just go out and do whatever we want. The Spirit gives us the strength to make choices that honor God, to love others, and to live a life that reflects Jesus. It is not about perfection; it is about freedom to grow and live without fear of messing up. The Spirit sets us free from fear, shame, and condemnation.

So, next time you feel weighed down by guilt or worry, remember that the Spirit is whispering, “You are free.” Let go of that heavy backpack. Jesus has taken care of it. You are forgiven, loved, and ready to live in the freedom He has given you.

DEVOTION 3

RULE MAKER AND BREAKER

STEPHEN BILLINGS

"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Romans 8:2-4

Have you ever found yourself in a position where you have had to create a rule for yourself or others to follow? As a father of two toddler boys, I find myself having to create new rules all the time to keep my two boys safe. To be honest, I do not enjoy creating rules. The reason for this is that every time I create a rule for my boys, I then have to remember the rule, hold my boys accountable to that rule, and try to follow it myself. Every time I create a rule, I find myself questioning if I really need to create it because I know the headache that may come with that rule in the future. If you cannot tell already, I am not a huge "rules" person.

However, in the Old Testament, God has given the Old Testament Law. This Law is made up of the Ten Commandments and many laws that were written specifically for God's chosen people, the Israelites. In Romans 8:2, the Old Testament Law is called the ***"law of sin and death."*** The reason for this is that we are imperfect people who are not able to perfectly follow each of the many rules given in the Old Testament Law. Since we and the Israelites are not able to perfectly follow the Old Testament Law, there is a punishment for our sins. That is eternal death.

In the face of our sin, Romans 8:3 shares how God saved us from the punishment of our sin. Romans 8:3 says, ***"For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh."*** God sent His one and only Son, Jesus, to die for the sins of the world. Jesus did not stay dead, though; He rose again and, on the third day, made a way for us to go to Heaven. If we declare Jesus to be the Lord of our lives and confess our sins to Him, He is faithful to forgive us.

Even though I do not like rules, I am thankful for them. Rules like the ones found in the Old Testament Law expose my need for a Savior. They show me that I need help because I am a broken person.

Today, take a moment to reflect upon a time when you broke a rule. Walk through that situation. What happened? Why did you break the rules? Then meditate and remember that despite our failure, Jesus loves us so much that He died and rose again just for us.

DEVOTION 4
TRUE FREEDOM

JOANNA MONTGOMERY

Freedom is a bird soaring in the sky, a person found innocent leaving a courtroom, or a child running without restraint. Is this true freedom, though? Sometimes, things are not what they appear to be. A soaring bird may be frantically looking for a meal for starving chicks in the nest. A person leaving a courtroom may be innocent of a crime, but life is forever changed, and they are financially broke from paying legal fees. A child may be running free, but watching from a window is a parent who will dash out if the child strays too far. So, while these look like freedom, they are not true freedom.

The Bible speaks of true freedom. It speaks of a freedom we can only understand if we experience salvation through Christ Jesus. If we are followers of Jesus Christ, Romans 8:2-4 tells us the Spirit sets us free: ***"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."***

Without Christ, we are condemned and sin-filled. John 3:18 states, ***"Whoever believes in Him [Jesus] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."*** The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). That is a heavy burden to carry, yet many people carry that weight daily, not even aware of its weight.

In Christ, we no longer carry that weight. According to Romans 8:2, the law of the Spirit of life has set us free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Freedom in Christ is knowing condemnation is gone. Sin is gone, and our wages are no longer death. We have eternal life because our sin debt was paid in full by Jesus. We are free to live confidently and do the will of God. We do not bear the weight of the fear of eternity. We do not bear the weight of the wrath of God. We do not bear the weight of trying to please God. We are truly free. We are free to walk as the Spirit leads us. Eternity is secure and does not depend on our performance at all.

That is an amazing freedom. Imagine if you were found guilty of a crime you had committed, but because you chose life in Christ as payment for that crime, the judge says, “You are guilty, but you do not have to go to jail, you do not have to pay any fines, you do not have any probation, and you do not have to live in fear of the law tracking you down. Just go into the world, and do not be the criminal you once were.” That is complete freedom. The Spirit’s freedom is not because of anything we do but what Christ did. That is walking according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. Our flesh wants us to accomplish something to deserve or earn salvation, but nothing we do, no matter how wonderful, is good enough to purchase salvation.

We have complete freedom. It is freedom to live for Christ without the burden of guilt, without sadness for sins past, present, or future, and with freedom from self-pity and frustration. As a child of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. We are free to speak God’s truth and to love others so they find forgiveness and freedom, too. So, serve Jesus with your whole heart and enjoy true freedom.

DEVOTION 5

THE SPIRIT SETS US FREE

ELIJAH EDWARDS

When I was a kid, I, like many other kids, hated eating my vegetables and wanted to eat nothing but sweets and desserts. It is a cliché narrative but it is a truth that holds true today with almost every kid and I am almost positive that the same holds true with you. Yet, if I ate only sweets and lived my life according to what I wanted, then what would happen? It would result in stomach aches, unhealthy eating, loss of energy, and possibly worse.

The reason I bring this up is because we as people are inclined to want to do what we want to do. Our childhood rebellious nature holds true today with our relationship with God. We do not want to do what God commands; we want to live our life as we see fit. The problem is that the path leads only to death.

Romans 8:5-8 says, ***"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."***

In this chapter of the book of Romans, Paul focuses on how those of us in Christ have ***"no condemnation,"*** meaning that we are free from death in our sins. Paul is telling us in these verses that if we continue to live our lives according to our wants and desires rather than what God wants for us, then we are marching towards death. It is death in our sin, but those in Jesus need to set their minds and live their lives according to the Spirit that leads to life and freedom in Christ Jesus.

Just as children need to eat their vegetables for their physical health, we need to live according to God's will to be spiritually healthy. The false sweetness of the flesh (our own desires) leads only to death, while the true nutrition of the Spirit leads to life and freedom.

DEVOTION 6
WHO IS YOUR CHOICE?

MARK PITTENGER

Have you ever faced unrealistic expectations? Maybe it was in your job or some other aspect of life in which you were given expectations that you did not see as achievable. However, maybe with the proper knowledge and training, it could be very doable! Maybe it is obtainable with just a choice that you had to make!

In Romans 8:5-8, Paul says, ***"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."*** In the previous verses, Paul talks about how the Law was given by God to us as guidelines for how to live a righteous life. However, the Law actually highlighted our sinful nature and the fact that we will never live up to the standard of God, but Jesus stepped in!

Romans 8:2 tells us that through the ***"Spirit of life"*** in Christ, we are set free! Jesus came and lived the perfect life that lined up with God's Law. So, we are now faced with a decision. We can choose to live according to the flesh, following our sinful nature, which only leads to death, both physically and spiritually. Or, we can choose to live according to the Spirit. He is the very same Spirit that brought David victory over Goliath! He is the very same Spirit that brought Jesus out of the tomb! He is the very Spirit that Jesus promises we will receive when we confess Him as our Lord and Savior! Yet, it is a choice that we have to make.

Paul addressed the church of Galatia with the same teachings (Galatians 5:16-18), showing us that we cannot fulfill the requirements of the Law. However, Jesus did! This is why, just a few chapters later, God's Word tells us that we should be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Romans 12:2).

Finally, Jesus tells us in Luke 9:23, ***"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*** Jesus says we need to choose to live according to the Spirit daily. Every day, when you wake up, you have a choice to make. Will it be living according to the fleshly desires of our sinful nature that only lead us to death, or living according to the righteousness given only by the Holy Spirit in Jesus? Choose the Spirit. Choose life. Choose Jesus.

Lesson 16

Romans 8:9-11

THE PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION

Pastor Keaton Washburn

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

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Paul, the author of Romans, after showing the limits of the Law and the benefits of the Spirit of God, gets very pointed with his intended audience here. 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,…"***

Romans 8:9-11 says, ***"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."***

2. Track 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?

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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?

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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?

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As we talk about 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?

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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.

Connected to Christ

There is a phrase the I grew up hearing that I believe 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 "ask Jesus into my heart."

Ephesians 3:17 says, ***"So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith - that you, being rooted and grounded in love..."***

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?

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There is a theological term 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 can 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, the Christian's salvation is secure because we are connected to Him!

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

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If Christ has been resurrected (which has been proven over and over!), verse 11 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 the here and now?

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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." What 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

DEVOTION 1

THE TEST

PASTOR JAYSON COMBS

"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." Romans 8:9-11

When was the last time you took a test? When I think of a test, I think of grabbing my #2 pencil, being handed that green ink Scantron, and trying to fill in the right bubble, knowing that I only crammed last night at the last second. My wife, on the other hand, approached her test much differently. She would be prepared. It would not have been a last-second study, but a planned-out week to make sure she would pass the test. I will let you figure out which one of us was the valedictorian and who finished in the middle of their class.

In Romans 8:9-11, we are given a test. The question is, "Are you a true believer?" Maybe you have asked the question, "How do I know if I am really saved?" This passage gives great clarity to those questions. First, verse 9 says, ***"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."***

Here we have this wonderful truth. If we are saved, we have the Holy Spirit of God living in us. If you hear someone say that you need to do something extra to receive the Spirit of God, you can rest on the clear teaching here that once we are saved, we receive the Holy Spirit. Roman 8:16 says, ***"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."***

The verse goes on to shed light on what it practically looks like for someone to have the Holy Spirit. Verses 9-10 record, ***"Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness."***

Having the Holy Spirit in us looks like Christ. Kent Hughes says it this way, "It gives us a new sense of life. Through the Spirit we experience something of Jesus' disposition - his kindness, his gentle care, his love in our lives." What a difference the Holy Spirit makes in our lives! Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:6, ***"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."***

Paul gives this very same truth in 2 Corinthians 13:5. He says, ***"Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you fail to meet the test!"***

The test is whether or not we know Christ as our Savior. The answer is if we have the Holy Spirit. How do I know I have the Holy Spirit? Do we live a life through the Spirit that looks, acts, and loves like Jesus? The Holy Spirit is what gives us the strength to live a life that obeys Him and follows His example. Let us walk in the Spirit of Christ today. (For further reading on how to follow Jesus' example, I would suggest Colossians chapter 3.)

DEVOTION 2
FIXER-UPPER

KARSEN THEEDE

Growing up in my household, if we were watching TV as a family, nine times out of ten, my parents would have some type of home improvement show playing. HGTV or the DIY channel were a common occurrence. My parents loved watching shows where professionals would come into houses that were falling apart and looked horrible. They would demo or remodel them into gorgeous works of art. As a kid, I hated these shows and would have much rather been watching one of my shows, but as I have gotten older, I have also come to love those shows. I love watching the craftsmanship and all of the problem-solving that goes into these homes, but most importantly, I love watching the care the professionals put into the houses. I know not everyone shares the love for this kind of entertainment, but what if I told you that every single one of us has been at the center of one of these fixer-upper stories, whether we realize it or not?

Romans 8:9-11 states, ***"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."***

The fixer-upper story that I spoke of earlier comes straight out of Romans chapter 8, and we are like the house that needs to be remodeled. Romans says that our bodies are dead; why is that? It is because of our sin. Our sin causes us to be broken and falling apart, but luckily, we do not have to stay that way. As Romans chapter 8 says, if Jesus dwells in us, we are given life through Him. Jesus is

the “professional” who comes into our broken down “house” and cares for it and heals it. We must accept Christ to have Him dwell in us, and for those of us who have already accepted Christ, we must celebrate the fact that He gives life to our broken, dead bodies.

However, as with anything else, you must take care of and maintain the work that has been done. As Christians who have accepted Christ, we must further our relationship with Christ. Seek Him out, read Scripture, and talk to Him because without maintenance, our “houses” will become broken and appear dead once again.

DEVOTION 3
LIFE AND DEATH

MARC DELCAMP

Life and death are two things that every person is guaranteed to face. No matter our race, socioeconomic background, beliefs, or education, whether it be today, tomorrow, or 50 years in the future, one thing is certain: we all live and we all die.

As we continue our sermon series through the book of Romans, we come to Romans 8:9, which says, ***"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you."*** Here, we see two things: the Spirit and the flesh. One gives life and the other leads to death.

When the Bible refers to ***"the flesh,"*** it is referring to our human nature, which is inherently broken and cursed with a sinful nature. This means our default setting is to do wrong. Psalm 51:5 (NIV) says, ***"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."***

When the Bible refers to ***"the Spirit,"*** it is referring to the Holy Spirit, which is part of the Holy Trinity. He is the part of the Trinity that dwells in us after we accept Christ as our Savior.

Now that we have a basic understanding of what the Spirit and the flesh are, we can grasp what this passage is telling us. Verse 9 tells us that if the Spirit of God dwells in us, then we are not in the flesh. This means that when we allow the Spirit into our lives, we are freed from the absolute power and penalty of sin, which is separation from God. However, we still live in fleshly bodies, and sin still has power over our physical bodies, which is why physical death is not removed from the believer.

Romans 8:9 ends with, ***"Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."*** So, the question is, how do we obtain the Spirit? The answer is found in Romans 10:9: ***"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*** When we follow Romans 10:9, we invite the Spirit into our hearts, allowing us to be in a relationship with God, pulling us away from the flesh that leads to eternal death and moving us to the Spirit, which brings eternal life.

DEVOTION 4
HE OVERCOMES THE WORLD

CATHY STORY

Have you ever found yourself caught feeling saddened or afraid of the direction the world is going? We can hardly turn on the news or simply scroll through our social media feeds without being reminded of some aspect of just how fallen our world is. At times it may even feel difficult to figure out how we should best navigate the brokenness around us.

As with anything negative or positive we may face, we can and should turn to God's Word for hope and truth. Romans 8:9-11 provides a powerful encouragement for us as believers: ***"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."***

We are reminded that when we have truly accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior, the Spirit of God (Holy Spirit) lives inside of us! The hope that we have in Jesus cannot be taken away by the brokenness and fallen state of the world. These few verses remind us that if Christ is in us, meaning if we have genuinely accepted Him into our hearts and lives, then the Spirit of God dwells within us as well.

Therefore, when the brokenness of this world wants to try and steal our hope, when we are in Christ, we can rest in His peace. We can rest knowing His Spirit continues to live in us, leading, guiding, and directing us. We are able to have hope that the things of this world

are temporary, and that a day is coming when we will be able to be with God Himself!

DEVOTION 5

THE SPIRIT GIVES US LIFE

MICHAEL FOX

As we journey through the book of Romans, we come to Romans 8:9-11. Throughout Romans, Paul emphasizes living by the Spirit rather than by the flesh, and this theme is strongly echoed here in Romans 8:9-11: ***"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."***

When I think about ***"life,"*** my first thoughts often go to life here on Earth with its struggles, trials, and pain. I am especially drawn to the powerful words in verse 11, ***"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."*** Every day, we are confronted with reminders of the sin and brokenness around us. As Paul says in Romans 3:23, ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** I often wonder, as I raise three children in this world, how they will navigate a world that seems to grow more chaotic by the day.

Amid all this worry and anxiety, I sometimes overlook a simple yet profound truth. I am grateful that God continually brings me back to the essence of the Gospel: that we are only here temporarily, and our real home is eternity with God. Verse 9 powerfully reminds us that if the ***"Spirit of God [Christ]"*** dwells in us, He will give us life. By accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we receive not just

earthly life but eternal life. It is one free from pain and suffering. This is the life we are all searching for; we just need to lift our eyes from the flesh and turn them to Him.

Have you accepted Jesus as the Lord of your life? If not, consider reading these verses in Romans: 6:23; 5:8; 10:9; 10:13; 5:1; and 8:1. We can be confident of our eternal life simply by recognizing our need for a Savior, believing that Jesus died for our sins and rose again, and calling on His name.

DEVOTION 6

THE SPIRIT GIVES LIFE

JOSH THAYER

Today, we are looking at a powerful truth from Romans 8:9-11 about the Holy Spirit and how He gives us life. Paul says: ***"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."***

Paul is making something clear here: when we belong to Christ, we are not ***"in the flesh."*** We are in the Spirit. That is a huge shift. Living in the flesh means living by our own power, stuck in cycles of sin and struggle. However, when the Holy Spirit lives in us, something amazing happens. The Spirit does not just influence us; He transforms us from the inside out.

In verse 10, Paul says, ***"But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness."*** We are all affected by sin; it is the human condition. Our bodies break down, we deal with temptation, and ultimately, there is a physical death that awaits us all. However, the Spirit of God, Who lives in us, brings a whole new kind of life. This is not just physical life, but it is a spiritual life that is deeply connected to God. Through the Spirit, we are made righteous, no longer separated from God by our sin.

In verse 11, Paul brings it home: ***"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."*** This is amazing! The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now lives in us. Think about the power in that statement. That is not a small, quiet power. That is resurrection power. The Spirit gives us life, filling us with hope, joy, and strength for every day, but He also promises us a future resurrection.

So, what does this mean for us today? It means we do not have to live as if we are defeated. When we face trials, challenges, or even our own weaknesses, we can remember that the Spirit within us is stronger than anything we will face. The Spirit gives us life that overcomes death, hope that outweighs despair, and power that surpasses our human limitations.

Today, let us lean into the life that the Spirit brings. Invite Him into your struggles, decisions, and worries. Know that because He lives in you, you are never without hope, strength, or life.

Lesson 17

Romans 8:12-17

THE SPIRIT MAKES US TRUE SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Pastor Mitchell Holmes

As we progress through life, inevitably, we will all go through transitional phases. These are time periods in our lives where a major change happens which shifts how we view the world and how people view us. Sometimes, these transitions are weird and difficult for us to grasp at first. The transition that was most like this for me was my transition into police work earlier in my life. Going from a civilian to a police officer was very jarring and weird for me. My first time in a police car, I remember thinking to myself that everyone was driving so slowly, which confused me until I realized that I was affecting everyone around me. Every driver saw me coming, immediately took a glance at their speedometer, and drove more carefully. It was hard to walk into a restaurant for lunch and immediately feel the environment change. It took time for me to not feel weird about this transitional time of my life.

1. What was a transitional phase of your life that took some getting accustomed to? How long did it take for this change to not feel weird?

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As we have been studying the process of sanctification, and more specifically, what the Holy Spirit does for us in that process, we come to a passage of Scripture where Paul tells us that there will be a transition, and this transition will change the way we interact with the world as our identities change.

Romans 8:12-17 says, ***"So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit***

himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Paul recognizes that though the Holy Spirit has begun the sanctification process in us, we will not automatically live the way that we should. It is a transition, and it is weird for us to comprehend. Where previously our nature was fleshly, violent, and sinful, now Paul is pushing us to live righteously and ***"by the Spirit"*** kill the areas of our lives that were sinful captivity for us. It is a challenge to crucify our flesh, as Galatians 5:24 speaks of when it says, ***"And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."***

2. How do you trust the Holy Spirit to help you avoid sin? When considering specific times that the Holy Spirit has guided you away from sinful behavior, how do those moments impact your faith?

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3. Verse 13 tells us that if we live according to the flesh, we will die, but if we put to death the deeds of the body, we will live. What does this look like in our lives? What does it mean to die versus live in this context?

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Paul continues in verse 14 by telling us that if we live a life that is humble enough to be led by the Spirit, we are sons of God. We are adopted into the family of God. We are given a new identity. Not only is God Lord and Master, and not only is He the sovereign

omnipotent Creator of the universe, but He is our Father. He makes us His sons and daughters. He looks at us as His little children. We do not follow God out of fear of His might, for the Holy Spirit places in our hearts the cry of ***"Abba! Father!"*** He is our dear father.

4. How does the relationship of a father and son differ and impact your life when compared to a relationship of master and servant?

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5. How does being a child of God impact your life and daily decisions? How does the idea of adoption affect your view of God's love and grace?

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As adopted members of God's family, we must recognize that our all-powerful Creator is a relational being who sincerely desires that we draw near to Him. When pondering how our Father in Heaven is in control of all things and cares for us as a father caring for His child, it should bring us a sense of calm. Regardless of how heavy the weight of the world gets, we can run into the open arms of our Father, who loves us. We can rest in the knowledge that no matter how terrible things might seem, our eternity is in His hands, and He has us. That sense of security brings such a feeling of freedom. That is what Paul means in verse 15 when he says, ***"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"*** We are free from the slavery of fear. We are free from the shackles of the cares for this world. We do not have to be afraid of the worst possible outcome, or even death, because we know that we are in the hands of our Father, who will never leave us or forsake us.

6. What are some areas of your life where you might feel enslaved? How can the Spirit help you overcome these?

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7. When looking at verse 16, what areas of your life have you felt the reassurance of the Spirit?

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As we come to our final verse, Paul writes, ***"And if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."*** He tells us that to live according to the Spirit is to follow Jesus. Following Jesus means wonderful things, but it also means that our lives will have turmoil and persecution. Jesus told His disciples that the world would hate them because the world hated Him. The same is true for us; if we exemplify Jesus in our lives, there will be difficulties. Paul wrote that we will ***"suffer with him."*** However, in so doing, we demonstrate the light and hope of Jesus to a dark and hopeless world. Our suffering and persecution are not without cause because we glorify God when we act this way. Paul tells us that we will be ***"glorified with him."***

8. How do you reconcile the idea of suffering with your understanding of being a child of God and an heir of His promises? How does this influence your perspective on current trials and challenges in your life?

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9. How can you push yourself to attain a greater sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life? What practical steps can you take to align your will with His will?

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10. How does the recognition that we are children of God change how you view the community of the church?

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NOTES

DEVOTION 1

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

JASMYN BICKNELL

"For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Romans 8:13

Often in Scripture, we are called to live by the Spirit, not by the flesh or of the world. In 1 John 2:15, we read that if we love the world, the Father's love is not in us. Paul tells us to walk by the Spirit in order to not follow the flesh's desire because the Spirit's desire goes against the flesh's desire (Galatians 5:16-17). These are just a couple of examples, including Romans, that give us reasons for walking in the Spirit, not the flesh.

I believe the importance of repeating this idea in Scripture is to show that the Bible does not contradict itself. It backs itself. Also, it is reiterated because the temptations of the world are strong. We are easily influenced by the media, peers, work environment, and close circle of friends. There are so many factors that come into play when it comes to what drives our decisions. If we are only surrounding ourselves with people who take part in fleshly desires and things that go against God's Word, we are more likely to give into those things as well. However, if we have a strong foundation of friends and family who are in the Word daily, lifting each other up in prayer and encouragement, and confidants that will help guide us toward Christ, we are equipping ourselves to fight against the temptations of sin. Our strength is found in Christ; nothing can take that from us.

The more time we spend with God, the stronger that relationship becomes. You will notice yourself becoming more thankful, loving,

gracious, and joyful. Others will start to notice as well and wonder where it is coming from. That opens the door for you to share that your joy comes from the Lord!

DEVOTION 2
DESIRED OBLIGATION

JEANNIE YATES

Have you ever found yourself in the gift-giving obligation trap - someone buys you a birthday gift, and then you feel "obligated" to buy them one, too? Most of the time, that feeling or sense of obligation is a response to something we have been given. When you borrow money, you have a legal obligation to repay the loan you were given. If you have received the privilege of a driver's license, you have an obligation to obey traffic rules and regulations. If you are blessed to be a citizen of the USA, you have an obligation to pay taxes to the government. The Oxford Dictionary defines an obligation as "an act or course of action to which a person is morally or legally bound; a debt of gratitude for a service or favor."

In Romans chapter 8, we have been reading some important truths about what it means to live according to the Spirit. Those who are in Christ no longer stand condemned; the Spirit sets us free and dwells in us! In fact, verse 11 says, ***"The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you."***

Romans 8:11-14 (NIV) says, ***"He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation - but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God."***

As followers of Jesus, we have been given the Spirit of God, Who ***"dwells in"*** us! So, because of that fact, we have an obligation. We have a "debt of gratitude" to live by the Spirit, not living to serve my flesh, my "self." Pay close attention to verse 14, ***"For those***

who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God." We ought to respond to the truth that the Spirit lives in us with a sense of obligation to walk in the Spirit because of Christ's sacrifice at the cross. When we allow our lives to be ***"led by the Spirit,"*** we are called God's children. John 1:12 says it this way, ***"To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."***

So, then, what does it look like to be led by the Spirit? Take a look at 1 John 3:9-10, ***"No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."*** Are you keeping a practice (habit) of sinning? Are you choosing to disregard God's righteousness? Or are you seeking to allow the Holy Spirit to develop these things in you, ***"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"*** (Galatians 5:22-23).

When we call on the name of Jesus and truly surrender to Him, our heart's desire to follow Him will not be simply an obligation; we will want to be led by Him. The more we allow these truths to sink in that we have been saved from eternal death and that Jesus alone gives everlasting life, the more we will desire to surrender our will to be led by His Spirit because we are His children.

DEVOTION 3
A CHILD OF GOD

ELIJAH EDWARDS

Until I was graduating high school, I did not realize how blessed I was to have two incredibly loving parents. Being called their son was something that I did not appreciate like I should have until adulthood. I know many people who struggled with their parents or have lost their parents. One of those people is my wife, Madison. When she was in high school, her mom sadly passed away suddenly and without warning. She lost an identity that day of being her mother's daughter. Yet, the strongest thing I have seen in her is her reliance on her identity as a daughter of God.

Romans 8:12-14 says, ***"So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."***

Let us look at verses 12 and 13 first. Living ***"according to the flesh,"*** meaning choosing our sinful nature over a life honoring the Lord, is something that Paul warns us about because if we choose our flesh, we are choosing a path that leads to death and only death. Yet, the Good News is that when we live ***"by the Spirit,"*** we live, and we are children of God, as it says in verse 14.

1. After reading these verses, how does this change the way you view sin in your life?

Regardless of our individual upbringing and relationship with our parents, knowing that we, as believers in Christ Jesus, are called children of God puts things into perspective. We know that the Lord will never forsake us, never leave us, and is always there. When

reading commentaries on this passage, I read one that said that we have a “holy obligation” to live by the Spirit and not by our flesh. Being a child of God should draw us closer to God and make us want to obey Him because of all He has done for us.

2. What are some things you know you need to move away from concerning your sinful flesh?

3. Do you know that you are a child of God, created by Him and loved unconditionally by Him?

Take a moment to reflect on this and go to God in prayer. Thank Him for sending His Spirit so that we may always be pointed back to Him and have the blessing of obeying Him as our Heavenly Father.

DEVOTION 4

ADOPTED

ADELINE SANCHEZ

I remember, as a kid, I loved the movie *"Annie."* If you somehow have never heard of this classic film, it is a musical about a little girl who lives in an orphanage for girls, all of whom dream of being adopted by a loving family. They have no one to love them, not even their orphanage mother, Miss Hannigan. She is a mean lady who treats the orphans as her maids and servants. Annie (one of the orphan girls) is one day swept up by a very rich man who takes her into his home temporarily to give her a week of freedom from her orphanage. In that week, the rich man and his whole mansion of people fall in love with Annie and ultimately decide to permanently adopt her into their family. Annie's dream of being someone's daughter finally comes true (and now she is super rich, which is a perk).

The theme of the movie, of course, is orphan to daughter, but it is also mixed with the theme of rags to riches. I like to think our lives as Christians follow these same themes. Romans 8:15-17 says, ***"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."*** Before we accept Christ, we are slaves to our own sin and ultimately doomed to death. When we devote our hearts and our lives to Christ, we are given a new identity as His children and, therefore, also receive an inheritance from Him, which is life. This is what Christians mean when we call each other our brother or sister in Christ. It is not just a friendly greeting; it is a witness to all of our adoptions in Christ that we have received. The term ***"Abba! Father!"*** is a term of intimacy

and trust that the Spirit enables us to call Him once we are adopted into His family.

Being a child of God means we are also co-heirs with God, and we can share in the blessings of God's Kingdom. Of course, Paul explains here that since we share this inheritance, we must also share in Christ's suffering. We will absolutely face challenges and trials in our life and in our walk with God, but take heart and know that our future is secure in Christ and we belong to Him. There is truly nothing more comforting than being in the safe and perfect hands of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Take some time today to pray, reflect, and fully embrace your identity as a child of God. Think about what it means to call God your true Father. You are no longer a slave to fear; you are a child of God!

DEVOTION 5
GOOD, GOOD, FATHER

LORENA NORRIS

In Romans 8:15-17, we are invited into a new life free from fear, guilt, and the pressure to perform. Through the Gospel and the Holy Spirit, God has made us His children, offering us a future far beyond our understanding.

Paul writes, ***"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."***

The family unit is a central metaphor in the Bible, helping believers understand their relationship with God and each other. For those with positive father figures, this passage brings comfort, echoing the love and security of a father. However, for those who have suffered from neglect or abuse, the idea of ***"father"*** may stir painful emotions, making it difficult to fully embrace God's love. Yet, Paul is not asking us to compare God to earthly fathers. He emphasizes that God is the perfect Father. He is unchanging, always present, and always good.

Through the Holy Spirit, we are assured that we are children of God. It is not because of anything we have done but because of His love and grace. Regardless of our earthly father experiences, we can rest in the truth that God's love for us is unwavering and perfect. As His children, we are free from fear, rejection, and performance-based approval. We are no longer slaves to guilt, shame, or religious expectations.

This freedom is not just about being loved; it is also about receiving an inheritance. We are co-heirs with Christ, sharing fully in the blessings of God's Kingdom. We are not second-class citizens but heirs. However, there is a cost to this inheritance: it is shared with Christ, meaning we also share in His sufferings. Just as Christ endured hardship, we, too, will face trials. However, Paul reminds us that suffering is not without purpose. As we share in Christ's sufferings, we will also share in His glory.

Our trials are not meaningless; they are part of God's process to shape us more like Christ and bring us into the fullness of His victory. Though suffering is temporary, the glory that awaits us is eternal. As co-heirs with Christ, we look forward to a future where every tear is wiped away, every pain is healed, and every injustice is made right.

This is the promise we have as children of God: freedom, forgiveness, and an eternal future with Christ. We are no longer slaves to fear, guilt, or sin. We are sons and daughters of a perfect Father, sharing in the glorious inheritance of Christ.

DEVOTION 6
FAMILY GATHERING

KATRINA YOUNG

Family gatherings have a special place in my heart. I love getting together, whether it is for a holiday, a celebration of a birthday, or just time spent over dinner. Purposing time to spend together brings a closeness and bond that is shared with family. Whenever we approach the holidays, I notice an abundance of people expressing, "I hope you get to spend time with family, enjoy your loved ones this season, and take some time to spend with those that you love." What is heartbreaking is the assumption that everyone has the same family dynamic. Whether it is through loss, separation, or distance in miles, for some, simply getting together is not an option. As human beings, we all have an emptiness that can only be filled by our Father.

The Good News is that we have a God who has prepared a place for us in His family. Ephesians 1:5 says, ***"He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will."*** When we accept Christ as our Savior, we are then heirs, adopted by our Heavenly Father. Romans 8:16-17 says, ***"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."*** How amazing is it that God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus, His Son? Not only are we part of His Family, but we have all the benefits that go along with it. We have a Father who is there to protect, provide, and care for us that loves us unconditionally. Also, through Christ, we have the assurance of eternal life.

Sunday mornings are a time of gathering together to worship and glorify God. It is a time for families to attend church together but also

a time for the saints (His children) to come together. Sometimes, I stand in awe as I look across the auditorium and know that I am fellow heirs with those in attendance who have come to know Christ as their Savior. I am thankful for the time that we, as His children, can gather as a family, spending time worshiping and praising our Father.

Lesson 18

Romans 8:18-27

HELP IN OUR WEAKNESSES AND SUFFERINGS

Pastor Roy Townsend

Growing up, we listened to and sang a lot of music. My family especially loved old country and western music, but there was a song that I loved titled *"Help,"* which was performed by The Beatles. Some of the lyrics are as follows: "I need somebody (Help) not just anybody (Help) you know I need someone (Help)." It is really comforting to me that God speaks to this in Scripture. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:18-22, ***"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."***

1. Why does God allow suffering for His children?

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2. Do you think it is strange that God's children are treated the same as the rest of the world?

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Paul is conveying, and even speaking convincingly, that our sufferings now will have no comparison to the glory that is coming. There is glory that we will be experiencing. This is a different perspective than we are familiar with in our culture. We are very much a "right now" culture. We are not interested in delaying what we want, even if it might be better to delay. This attitude can give us many pitfalls.

3. Does the comparison of the eternal perspective to the present sufferings that Paul writes of resonate with you? Why or why not?

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4. Do you believe that some of our spiritual growth can depend on suffering? Do you believe there is a better way than suffering? Was there a better way for Christ to give us eternal life than through His suffering?

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It may be interesting to you that the entire creation is in the same situation. Creation itself is suffering and waiting to be set free from the bondage of corruption. You could say that creation needs help!

5. So, if something bad is happening in your life, does it mean that God has stopped caring about you as His child? Why or why not?

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6. Do you find it interesting that Scripture uses an analogy of childbirth? Childbirth pain usually leads to what?

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Further, we read in Romans 8:23-25, ***"And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the***

redemption of our bodies. 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." This is very interesting. Scripture goes on to tell us that not only does creation need help, but we need help, too. Sin entered the world, and God pronounced a curse as a consequence of man's choice of sin. From that sin, it requires suffering or the curse for both creation and mankind. I guess you could say, "We need someone." However, one day, we will see the redemption of our bodies. Scripture says this is a hope in the things we have not seen yet. It continues to confront us with the eternal perspective. Then there will be glory and redeemed bodies, but for now, we wait to see the eternal perspective on this suffering.

7. How good are you at waiting and hoping for these things that we cannot currently see? Explain.

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8. We are so confronted with the things of this world that we can see. Do you struggle with placing your hope in the things of this world? How?

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God knows that we need help in this world. He knows that we do not need just anyone. God sent the Holy Spirit to be our help and comfort. In John 16:7-11, Christ reveals, ***"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because***

I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." Lastly, Romans 8:26-27 reads, ***"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."***

9. Who does this Scripture say will help us in our time of weakness? How does He do this?

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10. Even when circumstances of suffering are too overwhelming for us to pray, it revealed that the Spirit Himself will pray on our behalf. Have you ever thought about how God gave us the Spirit to help us? Do you know of other ways in which the Spirit helps us?

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NOTES

DEVOTION 1
A NEW WORLD

CHRIS FREZZA

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."
Romans 8:18-21

Our natural world today is full of both beauty and corruption. Even creation itself displays characteristics of the sin that entered humanity through Adam. While I tend to be fascinated by natural disasters and their power, the destruction they leave behind is most assuredly an effect of sin in our world today.

Think for a moment about what it must have been like to walk in the Garden of Eden like Adam and Eve. Everything was created by the Word of God in perfection. At the end of each day of creation, as described in Genesis chapter 1, we read, ***"God saw that it was good."*** Just as Adam and Eve were created perfectly and without blemish, so was creation. The majesty of that garden must have been incredible to experience. It really did reflect the glory of its Creator.

Even so, today, many marvelous examples of God's creation exist. My wife, Jess, and I took a trip to Arizona earlier this year. The sheer magnitude of the canyons there is a sight to behold. The red dust of the desert in Sedona brings an otherworldly sense of awe to a place that is easy to forget is still on Earth. Going to and seeing a

place like this drew our attention to how intricately creative yet vastly powerful our God is. His glory is on full display in His creation.

Paul, in Romans 8:18-21, tells us that creation is waiting with ***"longing for the revealing of the sons of God."*** It is the day when Christ will return in all His glory and put an end to sin and death once and for all. The corruption in creation, just like the corruption in humanity, will not last forever.

Christ will return, and when He does, He will return creation to its intended state of perfection in a new Heaven and new Earth. He has a plan to make us new and bring us into His new world. It will be one without blemish from sin. Jesus Himself says in Revelation 21:5, ***"Behold, I am making all things new."***

What an amazing promise this is. Everything is being made new in Him. In a spotless, new creation, we will forever magnify the name of Christ, who saved us from sin and its effects, which ultimately result in death (Romans 6:23).

If creation is marvelous now (and it is), imagine what it will be when everything will again be perfect without the stain of sin. No corruption or suffering we bear now is worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us. That is what we have to look forward to as believers in the body of Christ. This future we look forward to is also the only destination where anyone, or anything, will be at peace with God. Take a moment to thank God for His creation and His promise to make all things new in you. Thank Him that He is still saving people to join us with Him one day in His made-new, perfect creation forever.

DEVOTION 2

SUFFERING AND PURPOSE

JILL OSMON

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."
Romans 8:18-21

Suffering is inevitable in life. I think we would all love for that not to be true, but the Bible is very clear that it is when and not if we experience suffering. Often, we can feel like our suffering will not end or has no purpose. If we believe that, if we allow that to guide our life through our suffering, it will seem hopeless. However, our seasons of suffering do have a purpose. It is to sanctify us and to bring God glory.

What is sanctification? John MacArthur defines it, "True sanctification, according to Scripture, is the process of God's transforming work in your life. In the moment of your salvation, you are declared justified by the Lord through the sacrifice of His Son and freed from the guilt of sin. From there, sanctification frees you from the pollution of sin, helping you destroy sinful patterns and relinquish your former wickedness."

The study I am doing with my Growth Community is on Ephesians, and they said this about sanctification, "The Holy Spirit lives inside of us presently, continually at work to make us holy. Present grace frees us from sin's power - we are no longer enslaved to sin. However, we will struggle with sin and live in a world broken by sin."

As I understand sanctification more and more, the one question that I ask, the one question I believe we, as believers, ask repeatedly is, "Why does God choose to use trials or suffering to sanctify me?"

We live in a world broken by sin, and our sanctification is designed to bring us closer to God and away from that sin. Look at James 1:2-4, ***"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."***

In 1 Peter 4:12-13, we read, ***"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."***

We see both in James and 1 Peter that suffering is not strange in that we share this experience with Christ. In His suffering on the cross, He understands our suffering. He endured it as well.

Matthew chapter 26 is where we see Jesus going to the garden before His death, beseeching his Father in verse 39, ***"And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.'"***

How many of us have seen the storm coming or been in the middle of the trial and begged God to let it pass over us? If that has made you feel weak, angry, or forgotten, remember Jesus, God's Son, asked for the same thing. He knew He was about to go into a season of suffering. He knew it would be painful, He would be betrayed, and He did not want it, and yet his response was, ***"Not as I will, but as you will."*** He knew His suffering had a purpose.

I read somewhere that “God is so much more committed to my sanctification than He is my comfort. And so that being the case, then He is good to me because He is showing me him (God) in these difficulties.”

Jesus died to Himself and endured the suffering for His Father’s glory. So, take heart: Jesus has gone before us and endured so much more. Our suffering, while it pales in comparison to Jesus’ suffering, brings our Father glory. That is what Paul is talking about in verse 18, ***“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”***

Endure your suffering for God’s glory just as Jesus did.

DEVOTION 3

WEAKNESS FOR STRENGTH

DEBBIE GABBARA

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." Romans 8:26

Recently, I saw a poster that said, "Give Him your weakness, and He will give you His strength."

Romans 8:26 tells us that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. I have been living in this verse for the last few weeks. Sometimes, our outside is going through the day-to-day of life, and we can appear that everything is just fine. However, on the inside, the weakness and groaning of circumstances beyond our control are looming as we await unknown answers or results.

The Greek word for ***"helps"*** in this verse means to assist or support. When we cry out, the Holy Spirit is right there to help us and guide us. He shares our burdens and weaknesses and gives us strength. God's promises never fail. He is waiting for us to bring our struggles to Him so He can take the burden and give us guidance as we seek Him.

The Apostle Paul goes on to explain God's future glory in the verses here in Romans chapter 8. One day, the world will be back to the way God created it with no more suffering and groaning. For now, He is always there to help us through our trials. One day, the suffering will be over, and believers will live a perfect life with God. It will be a life that He has always planned for us.

My current trial is not over, but I am so thankful to serve a great God who assists and supports me when I am weak. In 1 Peter 4:7, we are reminded that we can cast all our cares on the Lord because He cares for us. Jeremiah chapter 32 tells us that nothing is too hard for our God.

Will you take a minute to pray and thank the Lord for always being there for us:

Thank you, Father, for caring about all the trials that we go through. Thank you for giving us the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us when we are struggling. Thank you, Jesus, for going to the cross to pay the debt for our sins. We give you praise, honor, and glory and look forward to the day when we will spend eternity with You in that perfect place where we will groan and struggle no more. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Romans 15:13 adds, ***"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."***

DEVOTION 4

ALREADY, BUT NOT YET

ZACH HONNEN

"For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 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 8:22–25

Have you ever waited for something so long that it felt like your whole body ached? Was it as if you were going to die inside if you had to wait any longer? When I think of this, I picture the wife of a soldier at war, aching and waiting for the day her husband comes back on leave. Or, I think of the excitement of a new mother or father waiting for their child to be born.

All of creation has been waiting for the redemption that comes through Jesus. Our passage says ***"the whole creation"*** has been groaning, but then it pivots, emphasizing that it is not just creation. It is also those of us ***"who have the firstfruits of the Spirit"*** who are eagerly waiting for our ***"adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."***

Within this passage, I believe we see two key themes: the future reality that is guaranteed, and the waiting period.

The reality is this: you and I are guaranteed adoption as children of God because of what Jesus did on the cross. We are already children of God. We are also guaranteed to have the redemption

of our bodies when Jesus returns. This is the beautiful picture of "already, but not yet." We live in the assurance of these promises, even as we wait eagerly and hope for them to become fully realized.

When a mother is pregnant with a child, she already has a child. The child exists complete with feet, fingers, and eyes, but the mother cannot yet see her child. She is already a mother, but she is not yet physically holding her child.

In the same way, we are already children of God. We have already borne the fruit of the Spirit, and we will have redeemed bodies. However, we do not yet have these things in our hands.

Let us take some time to reflect and challenge ourselves today:

1. How do we cultivate patience while waiting for God's promises?

2. Patience is not passive; it is an active trust in God's timing. Consider this: are you leaning into prayer, Scripture, and community as you wait? Are you allowing God to use the waiting period to shape your character? Challenge yourself to embrace waiting as a season of growth rather than frustration.

3. How does the assurance of our adoption and redemption shape how we live today?

4. Knowing we are already children of God should give us confidence that transforms our actions. Does this truth change the way you face struggles, treat others, or prioritize your time? Challenge yourself to live each day with the assurance that your identity and future are secure in Christ.

5. Are there areas where we struggle to see God's goodness, and how can we renew our hope?

6. Life can blur our vision of God's goodness, especially in seasons of pain or uncertainty. Are you taking time to reflect on God's past faithfulness? Challenge yourself to find specific promises in Scripture and pray them back to God. Write down moments when you have experienced His goodness as reminders of hope when doubt creeps in.

DEVOTION 5

THE SPIRIT HELPS US IN OUR WEAKNESSES

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Romans 8:26-27 (NKJV)

Sometimes, I have no idea what to pray for! Should we put the kids in this school or that one? Should we sell the house now or later? Should I accept this job offer or turn it down? When should we go to this doctor or that one? On and on it goes, there is decision after decision in life. I pray, asking for His direction because I do not know what is best.

My confusion in prayer does not end with decisions. I often do not even know how to pray for the way I am feeling or thinking. "Lord, forgive me. And them! And make them call me and apologize! Also, help me not to hate them. And, make them miserable!" Oh, do not look at me that way! I know you pray like that, too! Lol.

As verse 26 says, I often ***"do not know what [I] should pray for."*** Many times, my prayer begins one way or another, but by the time I am done praying, it has become something else entirely. This is because of the work of the Holy Spirit of God. He is God. As such, He knows exactly what is best. Paul's words here tell us that not only does God have a will, but He loves us and wants to bring about His will in our lives. That is a comforting thought. God loves me and will override my stupidity to bring about His perfect will in my life. He is amazing!

The way He does this is by God the Holy Spirit "translating" my prayers. That is what Paul says here in Romans 8:26-27. The Holy Spirit of God begins to pray for me according to the will of God for my life. It goes something like this. I might go to the Lord and pray, "Lord, please give me that promotion. It will mean more money. It will take the pressure off. And maybe, I can get that new car. Amen!" God the Holy Spirit, because I am His child, quickly interrupts that prayer and "interprets" it for me: "He means, Lord, make him content and thankful for all that you have given him. Make him more and more focused on the Kingdom of Heaven and the lost around him, and less and less focused on material things. Amen!"

As a dad, I understand this process. My children have often asked me for things that are not the best for them. "Dad, can we just have ice cream for dinner?" Now, I do not just give in to those things (at least I try not to, but ice cream?). I do what they did not ask for, and I try to do what is best for them. "First, dinner, then maybe ice cream."

As our Father, He knows what is best and will only ever do what is best for us! The assurance here is that He knows. He sees. He overrules. He loves us and is good to us. So pray and be sure that He will interrupt and interpret each prayer. We may end up with dinner instead of ice cream, but we can be sure that He will always do what is best for us.

DEVOTION 6
WE NEED HELP

PASTOR GARY WRIGHT

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." Romans 8:26-27

When I was in High School, my girlfriend, Kim, and I were on a double date with some friends of ours (Kim is now my wife). We went to see a movie. The theater was about 30 miles from where I lived. After the movie, I realized that I did not have enough gas in my car to get home. Actually, it was empty. We went to a gas station, but between the four of us, all we could scrounge up was about two dollars. We needed help.

As believers in a broken world, we face many difficult circumstances and hardships. We do not always know how to pray in these situations. Sometimes, these situations are so difficult that it is hard to even come up with words to pray. We need help.

In John chapter 14, Jesus promised to ask the Father to send His disciples a helper. That Helper is the Holy Spirit.

In our passage from Romans chapter 8, we see that ***"the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."*** The Holy Spirit does more than groan. He jumps in and helps us in our weakness by interceding for believers when they do not know how to pray. We do not always know how to pray because we do not always understand God's purpose and will, especially in difficult circumstances. However, the Holy Spirit knows God's

will, and He prays according to that purpose and will for us. The Father knew we would need help, and out of His love for us, He gave believers a Helper.

We all need help sometimes. When I was out of gas 30 miles from home, help came in the form of someone overhearing our conversation in the gas station parking lot and interceded. That person went into the gas station and paid $20 worth of gas for us because they knew we needed help.

The Holy Spirit knows we need help as well. He intercedes for us when we do not know how to pray. That does not mean we should not pray. Prayer is an essential part of a believer's life.

In this broken world, there will be hardships and difficulties. If we have put our faith in Jesus and made Him the Lord of our life, we can trust that when we do not know how to pray, we have a Helper who intercedes for us, the Holy Spirit.

We only receive the Holy Spirit and His help when we have put our faith in Jesus and make Him the Lord of our lives. Have you done this? If you have not and have questions about what that looks like, I recommend talking to your Location Pastor.

John 14:16 states, ***"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever."***

Lesson 19

Romans 8:28-39

SLOWING DOWN

Pastor Ryan Story

There are several times in my life when I go too fast for my own good. I speed through conversations leaving people feeling confused or not heard. I speed through moments with my family and realize days after how truly impactful they were and wish I would have made that moment more memorable. There are times I speed through when I read the Bible and fall victim to believing that because I understood something with my mind, that I knew it in my heart.

1. Do you struggle with living life with too much urgency?

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Chapter eight of the book of Romans might be a great example of something that was written, and if we speed through reading, we can totally miss the amazingness of God's Word. This Growth Community lesson is meant to be taken slowly to fully allow our hearts to be transformed by what we know about God. Purposely, there is less depth than I normally would write in hopes that as a Growth Community, we are able to slow our minds down to seek Jesus and understand His works more fully.

Romans 8:28 says, ***"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."***

2. What does this verse mean to you?

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There are times in life when we are speeding through life, going from appointment to appointment, kid's sports game to next agenda items, and we overlook God's purpose and what He is working out around us.

3. Why can a lifestyle full of rushing dull our ability to recognize God's workings?

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Romans 8:29-30 continues, ***"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."***

4. Who initiates the whole process of our salvation?

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The conversation about the foreknowledge of God and the exacts of the predestination of the elect is a lengthy one. My hope is that we take more from the simple truth that God predestined, He called, He justified, and God glorifies. With each of these amazing biblical truths, there can be one truth that we, as followers of Christ, miss. Instead of arguing deep theological concepts, a follower of Christ ought to look more at how their confession of Jesus as Lord is transforming them.

5. What does it look like to be conformed to the image of His Son? How can we be conformed?

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Roman 8:31 adds, ***"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"***

Reading the Bible and not stopping at each verse number is one way to see God's truth in such an amazing way. Because God foreknew, because God predestined, because we are conformed to image of Jesus, because we have been justified by the work of Jesus, and because we will be glorified because we put our faith in Christ, God's Word says one truth that we cannot distort, but must hold on to, that God is for us.

6. How can this truth be strengthened in our hearts when we slow down?

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Romans 8:32 states, ***"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"***

7. What was God's supreme act of love? When was the last time you took the time to realize that God sent His Son to seek you who were lost?

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Romans 8:33-34 continues, ***"Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died - more than that, who was raised - who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."***

8. What does it mean to ***"bring any charge"***? Why can nothing or anyone make a charge against God's elect?

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Taking a moment to slow down brings us to a place to rest in God's supreme work. Oftentimes, I catch myself going through life condemned by my mistakes, misses, blunders, and failures. While I may have others who know the weight of this prison, I have had to learn that I have to slow down to remember that those charges are not from God. Living a life in haste seldom brings peace to those who confess Jesus as Lord. Taking time to slow down and realize that any charge against you has been paid for on the cross is where the rest can be found.

Romans 8:35-39 concludes, ***"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

9. Is there anything you can do to make God love you more? Is there anything you can do to make God love you less?

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10. What is the only way to be separated from God?

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When we rush through life, we get more focused on the trials, persecutions, difficulties, and let-downs. Slowing down, reading His Word, reflecting, and realizing His love, grace, and power are

real. Knowing Jesus is King and Lord of this world brings us to a place where we understand that nothing in this life can stop God from loving us. It is easy for our brains to say, “Yes, I know that.” The sweet spot is when our hearts can slow ourselves down long enough to realize that we can rest in His love.

NOTES

DEVOTION 1
ARE YOU VICTORIOUS?

CAMERON ALDRICH

Victory is a word that sits well with most people, especially when they have the opportunity to achieve it. The concept of winning can often be associated with victory. In our culture today, winning can mean being the best at something or being financially set in life with material things.

It can be so easy to assume that others are in a winning state of life with what we see or hear about them. As we drive around, we might pass by absolutely beautiful and enormous houses or see stellar cars that cost a fortune to own. We might see people posting about their family's accomplishments, unbelievable lifestyles, or their amazing vacations to countries we have always longed to visit. Sometimes, seeing and hearing about all these measures and experiences that another person has attained can be frustrating or saddening when we look at our own lives in comparison. That can be especially true when we do not consider ourselves to be in a state of victory, but rather, in a state of immense defeat or loss.

It is easy to get caught up in comparisons and to be envious of others' accomplishments or lifestyles. That type of thinking is just in our human nature. Thinking about this can even be habitual for some of us. No matter what, there will always be someone in the world who has more material things or has experienced more than we have.

Let us be honest, though. Why would we not strive to be as comfortable and happy as possible by focusing on the things we own and the places we go? Why not focus on what we do not have until we finally achieve it? Surely, happiness and victory come from earthly measures and experiences, right? Well, yes, if you are stuck in an earthly state of mind.

Although having and achieving all these things could be considered a winning life in the earthly sense, it is easy to forget that we are winning in life in a different, yet far more important way. It is one that ensures our victory beyond comparison.

In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul refers to the victory we have through Christ. This victory is not achieved from material things or from experiences. In Romans 8:28, he states, ***"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."***

Our God is a provider who never stops working. He loves and has a plan for those that He created. When we love Him and put our faith and hope in Him, He is faithful to provide for His children, and will never forsake or abandon them. However, God does not guarantee a perfect life, and He does not guarantee an easy life. That does not mean He intends to lead us to suffering.

As Paul stated in the verse above, God works for good, and that is according to His will and plan. That will never change so long as our love for and faith in Him does not change.

As believers, we have to trust that, though the path might not always be clear or easy, He is with us every single step of the way. When our God is by our side, fighting alongside us, and leading us, we stand in a place of victory that cannot be destroyed.

Many times, the following verse has served as a great reminder to me of God's hand in my life, no matter the season I have found myself in. James 1:17 states, ***"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."***

He is with us and for us no matter the circumstance, and it is not shameful to need to be reminded of that as we journey throughout life. It is all the same whether we are in the middle of the sea surrounded by a raging storm or standing on top of a mountain.

DEVOTION 2
BEING CONFORMED

PASTOR JOHN CARTER

"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."
Romans 8:29–30

Of all the words in this passage that catch your attention, I would like you to focus directly on one particular word. The word ***"conformed"*** is an interesting word used by Paul. According to the Oxford Dictionary, conform means to "comply with rules, standards, or laws." This is an interesting perspective, considering all the conversations about the different laws Paul talks about in previous passages. The Greek word used according to Strong's Dictionary is defined as "jointly formed; conformed to, fashioned like unto."

Wow! What an amazing passage! Consider what Paul is writing in this passage. The phrase ***"to be conformed to the image of his Son"*** is absolutely incredible for us to wrap our minds and hearts around. In all of the conversations and passages we have read so far in Romans, this single phrase is a pinnacle teaching of Paul. It is saying that we, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will be able to behave, act, speak, think, and talk like the Son. That is to say, we will be conformed. We bear His image; we are changed from an image that is contrary to God to an image that is in complete unity. This conforming makes us all start to look like we come from the same family. It is the family of God, and the pinnacle example of that family is Jesus. Even though we come in different shapes, sizes, and colors, we will be called brothers to Jesus. I love that Paul says there will be ***"many brothers."***

Despite all the different baggage we bring and the different anxieties we carry, the power of the Holy Spirit is to give us victory over the flesh, over the sinful nature, and allow us to be conformed.

Today, take some time to evaluate how much you look like Jesus. Is His character and behavior visible to your family? Is it evident in your workplace? Do your neighbors see the amazing character and love of Jesus in you? This is only possible when you submit to the Holy Spirit's leading, guiding, and conviction in your life. It is, as Paul is showing us, the way to have victory!

DEVOTION 3

THE BEST HELP

PASTOR JUSTIN DEAN

I have always been into playing video games. As a child playing video games, I would frequently come across levels in a game that seemed impossible to beat. After what seemed like hours of attempts, cries of frustration, and, to my embarrassment, tears, I would sulk my way to my father to ask for help. In moments, he would pass the game back to me with the level conquered. Something that seemed impossible to me was taken care of in a matter of minutes by the ultimate gamer. We have a Father who takes care of things far more significant than levels in a video game.

Have you ever been around someone vastly superior to you at a certain skill? Who was it, and what was the skill?

Romans 8:31 says, ***"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"***

Oftentimes, we believe that we are the only ones on our team. We believe the lie that we are the only ones who truly want what is best for ourselves 100% of the time. So, we do things according to our own strengths and our ways. Often, we end up just as frustrated as 10-year-old Justin struggling on a seemingly impossible video game level. Fortunately, we do not have to do things on our own, and we are not the only ones on our team. We have a God who is for us even when it seems that no one else is.

Who are some people who look out for your best interest?

When is a time you tried to do things your own way only for you to regret it in the end?

Paul asks a rhetorical question in Romans 8:31, with the answer being, “No one can stand against us.” Those of us who have received salvation through faith in Jesus Christ cannot be taken from God, hindered, or overtaken by anyone who seeks to stand against us. When we feel discouraged or weak, it is important to remember that our strength does not lie within ourselves but in our God, a God who no one can stand against. Our God is mighty, in control, good, and looks out for our best interests. He is worthy of our trust. In times of worry, fear, and anxiety, we can trust that He will see us through.

Spend some time praying and offer up to God some things that you are feeling fear or worry about. Ask Him to help you and to produce faith in you to rely on Him. Ask Him to give you assurance that with Him on your side, nothing can stand against you.

DEVOTION 4

THE GRACE GIVER

PASTOR JOSH YATES

"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died - more than that, who was raised - who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." Romans 8:32-34

We love stories of heroes. We fawn over them. We clamor for them. We go see them in movies. We love it when good wins over evil. We applaud when there is one that gave their all in order to save the world. Can anyone say Ironman? "Avengers assemble!"

One of my favorite accounts in the Scripture is when Abraham was called to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis chapter 22. God came to Abraham and told him that he must sacrifice Isaac, the son he loved, to Him. This sounds absurd to me, but it is even deeper. God had promised Abraham that he would be a blessing to the world and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. Isaac was the beginning of that promise and was Abraham's child of the promise.

I think about that request from God, and I consider all of the questions and thoughts that would be going through my head: "Are you serious? What are you thinking? I do not think I can do this. I do not want to do this!"

Scripture tells us that Abraham got up early the next morning and set out to worship God on the mountain with Isaac. He did not waste any time. He took all of the supplies for sacrifice to the Lord. At some point on the journey up the mountain, Isaac notices that there is

nothing to sacrifice. He asked his dad about it, and Abraham simply answered, ***"God will provide"*** (Genesis 22:8).

Once at the place of sacrifice, all preparations were made, and when it was time to do what they had come to do, Abraham tied up Isaac and placed him on the altar. Can you picture the scene? Isaac was probably questioning his father. Abraham must have had tear-filled eyes as he raised the knife above his son, ready to obey. At that moment, the Angel of God cried out to Abraham, "STOP!" Abraham's son was spared, though he was ready to obey God no matter what. He trusted God's heart. He knew his God.

We read in Romans that God the Father sent His Son, and His Son was not spared. He gave His life for us. The Father allowed Jesus to be pierced for our transgressions, our offenses before God. He was crushed for our iniquities, our sins. He was whipped and beaten, and He died. Through all of this, we are healed.

Why do we forget that Jesus is our Messiah in tough times? How easy is it to forget that Jesus is our Hero, our Champion? He did not spare His own life. He came to spare your life and to heal you. He no longer condemns you if you know Him as your Savior. He is the Grace-Giver.

Will He not then provide for you?

He does not bring any charges against you anymore. As a son or daughter of God through Jesus, you are in God's grace, and it never ends. He paid for that grace with His life. Once, you only knew God's judgment; now, because of Jesus, all you know is His grace.

Whatever you are going through as you read today, do not forget that God's grace is sufficient for you. It was bought with Jesus' life. He is your Hero, and He will never let you down.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!

DEVOTION 5
INSEPARABLE LOVE
CATHY STORY

You do not have to look too deeply in the Bible to find mention of God's love and care for His people. A quick internet search would tell us that there are hundreds of mentions of the word "love" throughout Scripture. As common as this word is, and as easy as it may be for many to talk about and attempt to explain God's love, the reality is that for many of us, fully embracing and accepting that love can be another story.

We can be able and should be willing to say that we believe God loves us. We can easily see it in John 3:16, ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*** Being able to quote and remind ourselves of these types of truths that God's Word proclaims is incredibly important! However, sometimes, we find getting our hearts to fully accept what our heads know can prove to be difficult.

If you are anything like me, maybe you have found yourself questioning how such a great God could really love someone like you. He does! His Word is filled with promises and statements regarding that love, but due to us being touched by the brokenness of sin on a daily basis, our view and understanding of God's love can become skewed. We may be willing to share and accept that God really does love people, in their mess, brokenness, joy, and in all things, but we may have a harder time taking and genuinely applying that same belief of God's love to ourselves.

Here is where Romans 8:35-39 is such an incredible reminder for us, ***"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written 'For your sake we are being killed all***

the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The next time the lies in your mind want to tell you that you are too messy or too much for God's love, come back to these verses. Know that when the Spirit of God lives in you, nothing is going to separate you from His love! Yes, even you.

DEVOTION 6

STANDING FIRM IN A SHIFTING WORLD

SIERRA COMBS

As much as I have a hard time believing and admitting it, the numbers do not lie. I am middle-aged. The fine lines are creeping in, the grey hairs are poking out, and it just is what it is. Perhaps we all feel this way in regard to our very unique and personal God-given life maps, but I feel like I was born at such an interesting time. I am old enough to remember life before the internet but young enough to adapt to all the new changes the world was bringing. My childhood was idyllic. I would wake up and walk to my neighborhood school where the only safety protocol that I ever had to worry about was earthquake drills and fire safety (seriously though, for as many times as we discussed this in school, not once have I ever had to stop, drop, and roll). I would then go home and call my best friend on my fancy gold rotary dial phone and then bike over to her house to play Mall Madness. The days that we got to go to the computer room in school, which was a small classroom with maybe eight giant box computers, were the greatest days of my life. Fellow Millennials may shed some tears of nostalgia when I remind you of Carmen SanDiego, Math Blaster, Treasure Mountain, KidPix, and, of course, the one where everyone dies of dysentery or drowning - The Oregon Trail. I went to church every Sunday and Wednesday, and everyone else did, too, because that was just what people did. Of course, now, as an adult, I realize that that is not exactly true. Not everyone went to church, but it was at least the normal and expected thing to do. As my years progressed, things started to change. I was a high school freshman when the Columbine tragedy shocked the nation. I was a junior when I watched the planes fly into the Twin Towers. Honestly, society has just seemed to have gone downhill from there. Fast-forwarded to today, life back then is unrecognizable. Whether this is reality or not, I feel like I was born and raised in a Christian society,

which then slowly faded into a post-Christian society, and now is rapidly transforming into an anti-Christian society. If I am being truly honest, I have a really hard time accepting this without fear and anxiety.

Lately, it feels harder and harder to live as a Christian in today's world. Society seems to be drifting further from biblical truth, and standing firm in faith can feel isolating, scary, and sometimes even dangerous. From being misunderstood for your beliefs to being labeled hateful and unloving, we watch laws and cultural norms grow increasingly anti-God, and it is so easy to feel overwhelmed and afraid. These feelings are not new. In Romans 8:35-39, Paul speaks directly to these fears when he writes, ***"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

Paul would have known that his audience, Christians living in Rome, needed some major encouragement. Believers were constantly faced with ridicule, rejection, and even death for their faith. Paul knew this reality well, as he himself endured beatings, imprisonment, and untimely martyrdom for his faith in Christ. Yet, he declared with boldness that none of these hardships could ever sever the bond between Christ and His church, nor could any amount of persecution, cancelation, or trial undo the victory that Christ has secured for us! Paul's confidence was not rooted in favorable circumstances or a safe society but in the unchanging, unbreakable love of God.

As we navigate a society that is increasingly hostile to Christian values, we can take heart in this truth: God's love is greater than anything we will ever face. We do not have to live in fear, whether present or future, because we know that we are eternally secure in Him. No matter what was, what is, or what will come to be, stand firm! We are ***"more than conquerors,"*** which means that not only will we win, but we will win in a landslide. Christ is with us every step of the way, and nothing will ever separate us from His love. That is where true victory lies.

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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