

ROMANS

THE
WHOLE
TRUTH



The Whole Truth

A 31-Day Devotional of Romans

Introduction

Truth is hard to find these days.

Truth cries out for us, trying to get our attention, but the noise of lies is too loud.

From the beginning of time to the 1700s, truth was found in the Bible, in God alone.

Between the 1700s to the 1900s, science “enlightened” people to new ways of answering questions and finding hope.

From the 1900s to now, truth is relative. You define truth according to your need.

If up is down and that works for you...good. If bitter is sweet and that works for you...eat up. If fat is thin...good luck fitting into those skinny jeans. If the earth is flat...then whatever...

However, when truth gets redefined other things happen.

Evil becomes good. Man can become woman. Adults become children. And vice versa.

Without truth, nobody knows where they stand, who's in charge or where to draw the line. Anything goes!

Paul wrote Romans to help this newly founded church in Rome understand the truth of Jesus Christ to bring unity and clarity to a divided congregation. He outlined all the foundational principles necessary to have a truth-full, grounded faith in Jesus.

They needed this then because untruths, lies and misguided alterations were spreading around and corrupting Christianity.

That sounds exactly like now, but it's always been the case when truth is attacked.

I hope this **31-day** devotional can help you become grounded in this truth so you can defend your faith.

Troy Schmidt / Windermere, FL / April 2026

Day 1

Read Romans 1:1-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith. Romans 1:16-17

Paul (Saul) converted to Christianity when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus around AD 33-34. Jesus told him to go to the city and await further instructions. In the meantime, the Lord found Ananias in Damascus and told him in a dream to meet Paul “... *for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.*” (Acts 9:15-16). Paul’s heart was always for the church to reach Gentiles (non-Jews).

This letter was written by Paul while he stayed in Corinth around AD 57. Paul had never visited the Roman church, so that explains why this letter does not address specific people or issues at the church, as we see in Corinthians and Galatians. Instead, Paul laid out a clear understanding of what the church in Rome and every church needed to believe—the truth. The whole truth.

Why was that important here in Rome? Rome was the capital of the Roman empire. The empire rose to power from the 5th Century BC to the 5th Century AD, quite an achievement for any empire to last so long. These Romans worshipped the Caesars/Emperors of the time in temples in addition to the Roman gods such as Jupiter, Venus, Mars, Apollo, Mercury and others. The culture accepted a pluralistic religion of many gods, believing they were all correct and they all needed respect.

Surprisingly, somehow, a church started in the midst of all this and began to thrive. It’s unclear who started it. Most likely

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someone visited Jerusalem, maybe during Pentecost, and returned filled with the Holy Spirit. This was not Paul's church, but he heard about and knew it would be strategic to see it thrive at this time. He felt it needed some apostolic leadership and felt God was leading him there.

The church in Rome was effective, so much so that it received attention. Roman Emperor Claudius took office in AD 41 and around AD 49, he expelled the Jews from Rome for their "disturbances"—caused over their new faith in Jesus. During the reign of Emperor Nero, there was a fire in Rome in AD 64 that destroyed seventy percent of the city. Many blamed Nero himself for the fire, but Nero blamed the Christians and the persecutions ramped up. Paul wrote this letter in the middle of those crises, around AD 57. He stated he wanted to visit Rome on his way to Spain, which was his ultimate goal.

The premises of the entire letter to the Romans is found in verses 16-17—righteousness comes about by faith in Jesus Christ. What does that mean?

To be right with God you need to put your faith in Jesus Christ. There you find the power of salvation.

Paul will proceed to unfold that truth in the remaining sixteen chapters, outlining the gospel that he implored the Roman church to not be ashamed of—a gospel for everyone.

Even you. Today. Right now.

Prayer Focus:

- That God will explain the Gospel clearly to you.
- That you won't be ashamed to share the gospel with others.
- For faith during whatever season you are in.

Day 2

Read Romans 1:18-32

For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse.
Romans 1:18-20

The Privileged Planet, by Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards, argues that Earth isn't a cosmic accident but is uniquely suited for both life and scientific discovery, challenging theories such as evolution and the big bang saying we are a random accident. Here is a summary of their scientific findings:

- The earth is habitable and can sustain billions of people.
- The solar system can be observed through our atmosphere (not all planets allow for that).
- Certain physical constants and conditions are just precise enough to allow for complex life, such as the temperature of the earth, magnetic pull and gravity. If any of these were slightly tuned one way or the other, life would die.
- The design of life is complex, not rudimentary.
- The moon perfectly blocks the sun during an eclipse and is precisely distanced from the earth.
- Planets in our orbit protect us from debris through their gravitational pull.

Scientifically, the evidence is clear—God made the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). Scientists should be the greatest evangelists for God.

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Logically, creation asks the question—if there is design then who is the designer? Paley's Watchmaker Argument, from William Paley's *Natural Theology*, suggested that if you found a watch in the forest, wouldn't you wonder who designed it? A person would never look at something so complex and think it just randomly organized. Order and design require a creator, making the universe's complexity evidence for a divine "Universe-Maker."

Many wonder what happens to those distant tribes who never heard the gospel or read about Jesus Christ...how are they saved? Paul says that creation is God's resume, his "Bible" tract, announcing his power and what he can do.

- Our God is knowable like a clear sky.
- Our God is eternal like the solar system.
- Our God is powerful like a volcano or earthquake.
- Our God is light like the sun.
- Our God satisfies like water from a mountain creek.
- Our God is creative like the species of animals.
- Our God is about order and purpose.

But for some reason, people look at all this and say there is no God. And when they deny God, they sin, doing unnatural and brutal things because they do not believe they are accountable to anyone. God has given them the evidence and yet they deny it. Suicide rates escalate as people lose footing on truth. Hate takes center stage and violence ensues, innocent people being killed in stores, schools and on the street corner.

Our job is to know God and to make him known. God wants to be findable, accessible, explorable. Once we know him, we find peace and purpose.

Prayer Focus:

- How do you see God in creation?
- Who do you know that denies God?
- How can you pray for them?

Day 3

Read Romans 2:1-11

Because of your hardened and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed. He will repay each one according to his works; eternal life to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality; but wrath and anger to those who are self-seeking and disobey the truth while obeying unrighteousness. Romans 2:5-8

I was arrested back in September, 1984. Fresh out of college, I went to Los Angeles with a bad drinking habit. One night, after a celebration of our 100th show for a game show I was working on, I was stopped by an officer and charged with a DUI.

When I went to court, the Public Defender gave me some good (and free) advice—admit you are guilty before the judge. I did so and received a lenient punishment.

Paul in this section of Romans addressed the works-minded Jews. They did not understand grace, mercy or leniency. They acted as the judges infected by the law. In their minds, people got what they deserve. They determined everyone's guilt.

Self-righteous judges feel justified to point out sin in others. Judgment is fun and makes you feel important. When I was put in a holding cell after my arrest, I remember looking around at the “criminals” in the cell with me and thinking, “I don’t deserve to be in this place with these bad people. I’m better than they are.” Boy, was I wrong. Even in prison there is judgment.

These Jews who Paul wrote about here disregarded God's “kindness, restraint and patience (verse 4),” choosing instead to bring a swift and harsh judgment to law-breakers. While they did not want to show kindness to others, they themselves would ask for kindness when “God's righteous judgment is revealed (verse 5).”

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Paul goes on in this section to explain judgement. A righteous judgment, he explains, compares one's life with a righteous example, in our case, Jesus. At first, Paul's argument appears to say we are judged according to our works.

We are and we aren't. The works-minded Jew felt their actions saved them. Do all the right stuff and you will be judged rightly.

But what's "the truth (verse 3)" about judgment? The truth is...judgers will not "escape God's judgment (verse 3). Why? They despise kindness. The truth is they don't know God (his heart). They only know his law.

If a database was provided for our lives listing all our good works and all of our bad works, not one person on this earth would pass the test. Would there be someone who had more good works than bad works? Maybe. But we're forgetting the real standard.

One bad work sentences you to life in prison. All the good works do not make a difference. We believe justice is a scale, weighing one against the others. That's not God's judgment.

Here's the real judgment—one sin and you're done.

Those who accept, follow and love Jesus have their death sentence lifted, as Jesus pays for our sins out of his kindness, restraint and patience. To receive that forgiveness, we have to admit our guilt and accept his payment.

But what about verses 7-8? Are we repaid according to our works? Our actions don't save us, but our actions reveal Jesus in us. God sees the truth of our intentions. As believers, we should be seeking God's "glory, honor and immortality (verse 7)" which would be evident by our actions.

Even Jesus did good works, but the world judged him.

Prayer Focus:

- Are you a judger?
- Do people see Jesus in your actions?
- Ask forgiveness for judging someone.

Day 4

Read Romans 2:12-29

So, when Gentiles, who do not by nature have the law, do what the law demands, 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. Their consciences confirm this. Their competing thoughts either accuse or even excuse them on the day when God judges what people have kept secret, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus. Romans 2:14-16

What if you were a law student, going into a test for a class that would help to complete your degree. Your class is International Commercial and Investment Arbitration, but the test covered “The Last Great American Songwriter: Storytelling With Taylor Swift Through the Eras” (a real college course at Stanford).

You would be appalled and angry. People would say, “You Need to Calm Down,” and “Shake It Off.” Your mind would hit a “Blank Space.”¹

It’s not fair to be judged on a subject you know nothing about. Which brings up a good question—are people judged at the end of their lives on Jesus if they never heard of him? Paul addressed that question in this section.

Specifically he addressed the Gentiles who never heard about the law of Moses. They may not know about the rules regarding temple sacrifices, mold and mildew, eating vultures, boundary lines or even the Ten Commandments. So, when they die, are they judged by whether they followed the law they knew nothing about?

In our court systems today, ignorance is not an excuse. *Ignorantia juris non excusat* (Latin for 'ignorance of the law

¹ Sorry, these are all Taylor Swift songs. I had to look them up.

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excuses not') and *ignorantia legis neminem excusat* ('ignorance of law excuses no one') are legal principles stating that a person who is unaware of a law may not escape liability for violating that law merely by being unaware of its content. We are expected to know the law and cannot claim we had no idea.

When someone stands before God the judge, ignorance about the law won't work. Why? Because the law "is written on their hearts (verse 15)." Subconsciously, everyone everywhere through all of time knows that murder is wrong.

For example, Cain murdered his brother Abel in Genesis chapter 4 and yet the "Do not murder" commandment does not show up until Exodus 20 – 66 chapters later! Could Cain claim ignorance of the law? No, he knew what he did was wrong. We know stealing, adultery, idol worship are all wrong because their sinfulness has been programmed into our hearts. "Their consciences confirm this (verse 15)." Remember, we were made in the image of God. We know what God wants because we've been designed like him.

Paul went on to call out those who know the law! He challenged the Jewish Christians by saying "you know the Old Testament laws, you know Jesus and the law is written on your hearts"...but are you following the law in your lives?

This is harsh statement Paul made: "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you (verse 24)."

You are a Christian not only because you claim to be a Christian, but because you also act like a Christian.

Christianity is inwardly known and outwardly shown.

Jesus is our example. There's no excuse.

Prayer Focus:

- What sin are you committing that you know is wrong?
- Ask forgiveness and pledge not to do again.
- Do others know you are Christian by your actions?

Day 5

Read Romans 3:1-18

*There is no one righteous, not even one.
There is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.
All have turned away;
all alike have become worthless.
There is no one who does what is good,
not even one. Romans 3:10-12*

One of the most frustrating issues with a car is that it breaks down. Cars are heavenly when they work—demonic when they don't. A car that routinely has problems is called a lemon.

The term goes back to the early 1900s when it was applied to various faulty, substandard items passed from one person to another. Then around the 1960s it got specifically applied to cars. By 1975, the government established lemon laws, protecting buyers from defective automobiles.

It's assumed that of all the fruits that the lemon was chosen to represent all loser cars because it creates a sour taste along with a sour face when applied. The same face you make when the mechanic hands you another repair estimate for your car.

A car is a lemon when it's defective deep into its manufacturing. The central core of the car is bad and won't work as it was designed to work.

You know what else is a lemon? All of us. Every single person on this planet, through all time. We are all defective. We stall and come up short. We fail to get to our destination. We steer out of control. We have become worthless and deserve to be tossed into a junkyard.

We were designed to be better, but a flaw passed down over the years cannot be self-corrected.

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What is that flaw? Sin.

In chapter 3 of Romans, Paul continued the previous thoughts in chapters 1 and 2 regarding righteousness and judgment to say this: no one is right and we will all face judgment.

Paul emphasized that whether you are domestically made (Jews) or foreign made (Gentile), you are a lemon-flavored sinner.

Why do we fall short? What are the signs of our defect? Verses 10-18 outline the characteristics of a sinner.

- You are not right with God (verse 10).
- You don't understand God (verse 11).
- You don't seek God (verse 11).
- You have turned away from God (verse 12).
- You don't do good (verse 12).
- Your throat speaks of death (verse 13).
- Your words are deceiving (verse 13).
- You poison people with your words (verse 13).
- You curse and speak bitterness (verse 14).
- You run off and shed blood (verse 15).
- You destroy everything in your path (verse 16).
- You never seek peace (verse 17)
- You don't fear God (verse 18).

Your first response, if you are like me, is this: "Hey, you don't know me!" Paul would answer: "If you're a human being, God does know you and says you are guilty of many of these failures today." Then you would answer (again if you're like me): "I'm not that bad!" Paul would answer: "It's not a case of how bad or how good, you are either perfect or a lemon. There's no in between."

Salvation starts by admitting you are a failed lemon.

Prayer Focus:

- Ask forgiveness for your sins.
- Recognize how your sins hurt your relationship with God.
- Recognize how your sins hurt your relationship with others.

Day 6

Read Romans 3:19-31

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God presented him as the mercy seat by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed. God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be just and justify the one who has faith in Jesus. Romans 3:23-26

Sometimes when I spoke at our church's Upward program, I would use a visual experiment to help people understand Romans 3:23. I would stand under the basket and ask for a volunteer to come down and make the shot.

Usually, some self-confident child progeny from the audience would volunteer and turn to make the easy lay-up. I would shake my head. "No, no, no. I meant make that shot." I pointed to the rim on the other side of court—94 feet away.

The kid's confidence waned. Usually the hot shot took the shot. This is when I got nervous. It's not an impossible basket to make, people have made incredible long shots in games, but it's unlikely. So far, every time, no one has come close to sinking the basket from so far away. All have fallen short.

One though, hit the backboard. Too close! I followed up that demonstration by asking, "What if the basketball rim was in downtown Orlando. Could you hit it then?" Everybody agreed. Impossible. Nobody on earth, ever, could make that shot. Not even Michael Jordan on a good day.

I went on to explain that we think that our attempts to hit the perfect shot, to live a perfect sin-free life to please God, are easily within reach. We try short cuts, redefining the world

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standards so we can score with doable works. Or, we make Hail-Mary attempts to score some points with God.

We all fall short. All the time.

No human being in history has a perfect record in God's eyes. Not the holiest of popes. Not Billy Graham or Mother Teresa.

Except one. Jesus. God Himself put on human skin, then conquered life and death on this earth, becoming the standard of human perfection. God's law, his Word, is His rule book to show us how much we've fallen short.

You have not and cannot sink the perfect life. In fact, it's too late. You've already lost the game.

However, Jesus won. He conquered life by slipping by the opponents who tried to steal his victory. He took the shot, and when it looked like he lost the game, Jesus emerged victorious.

In baseball, a perfect game is when a pitcher retires every single batter in nine innings without anyone reaching base—meaning no hits, no walks, no hit batters, and no errors that allow a runner to get on base. 27 up, 27 down. Only 24 of these games were officially recorded in Major League Baseball history.

A perfect game in bowling is 300, throwing 12 consecutive strikes. It's rare, but it's been done. A perfect round in golf would be a score of 18 – 18 consecutive holes-in-one. That's impossible, even for the greatest golfer in history.

We cannot achieve sinlessness but we can receive the sinless reward by putting our faith in Jesus. Jesus did the impossible. Possible for God, but impossible for man.

Prayer Focus:

- When have you come up short recently?
- When do you trust yourself more than God?
- Thank God for his perfection.

Day 7

Read Romans 4

Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. Romans 4:4-5

A German sociologist name Max Weber expressed an idea in his 1904 book The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism that said one's worldly success could be seen as a sign of one's eternal salvation. He believed since we were called by God to work, then our work would be successful as long as we worked diligently in an orderly fashion. He felt this is what built America.²

The best example of this work ethic was seen in the Puritans who came to America starting in 1630. They worked hard, denied simple pleasures and believed 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "*Those who don't work shall not eat.*"

Sounds good? Not so fast. The Puritans believed if you're lazy, then you weren't really a Christian. Our work, and our success, was a sign of our salvation. No work...no success...then, most likely, no salvation. Now the Puritans are starting to sound like Job's friends, blaming his crises on his lack of faith.

But that idea of works and salvation existed way before the Puritans and the Protestant Work Ethic. Paul addressed it heavily in all of his letters. The law of Moses was established 1,400 years before Jesus and the Jewish culture reflected the law. Over time, it stretched and redefined itself to appear more lawful.

The Jewish work ethic was to earn your salvation. Paul frequently described salvation as a gift. We have a similar approach to gifts. How many times have you received a gift then

² <https://www.britannica.com/money/Protestant-ethic>

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felt obligated to give one in return? Many times we feel guilty for not getting someone a gift who gave us a gift. Why?

My mom's love language was giving gifts. She was very generous and made sure everyone had something to unwrap, especially at Christmas. In fact, if the price tag for the gifts was not equal among the family members, she wrote a check for the difference. I could receive a check for \$14.52 because my sister's gift cost more.

While her love language was giving, she also felt loved when she was given gifts. This put a lot of pressure on us on Mother's Day, birthdays and Christmas. Mom needed to get the gift she wanted. Rarely were we able to give her a gift she didn't ask for but she liked. One year, we had a window cleaner come out and clean all her windows, inside and out. She loved that one!

Something along the way turned the spirit of giving gifts into an obligation. If you didn't give you experienced the wrath of Mom! But then, you could ask, why didn't I want to give to a mom who was so generous?

My wife and I are different. Many Christmases and birthdays go by with no gifts given. We feel no obligation to give, in fact, every Christmas we say "no gifts" then we end up giving gifts to each other. It's better to give with no obligation.

God gives us the absolute best gift ever of salvation free of charge. No work required to earn the gift because then it would become a wage.

But this gift does come at a cost. Someone's life. Jesus died for this gift so I may enjoy it for eternity. And, he asks that I give my life to him. Why? Because that's what love does. Sacrifices for sacrifices. No strings attached. One's life for one's life.

Prayer Focus:

- What kind of gift giver are you?
- Pray that you would give freely.
- Do you feel you need to earn salvation?

Day 8

Read Romans 5:1-6

And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. Romans 5:3-4

Hard times are good.

Isn't that the dumbest statement you've ever heard? But think about it...prosperity and blessing may be fun, but rarely do we learn anything of significant value through it.

Right now, in America (and the world to an extent) we are going through a difficult time. Right means wrong. Wrong means right. Good is bad and bad is good. We're not sure if up is down or male is female. Everything is flipped. Truth is losing its grip.

But, Bible sales are up. Church attendance is up. Colleges groups are baptizing people. Athletes boldly share their faith. It's not a revival in the purest sense, but it's close.

How did all of this start? Some say Charlie Kirk. His assassination on September 10, 2025 rocked the world. 90,000 people showed up at his memorial in Arizona and some estimates say over 100 million streamed or watched some part of the service. And all throughout that five hour memorial, Jesus Christ was glorified.

An outsider would think such a response to a man's murder would be nonsense. A friend, father and husband was murdered. The most eloquent advocate for Christianity was shot to death on video. And that's a good thing?

During hard times, people seek hope which is what this section of Romans says.

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If we have faith (verse 1), then we can boast. Boasting sounds bad, but only if you're boasting about how great you think you are. Boasting about how great Jesus is...yes.

What should we boast about? Peace with God. The grace of God to forgive sinners like us. The hope of the glory of God one day to be revealed.

We can also boast during our afflictions because there will be personal growth, public awareness and spiritual strength. Paul walked through the process in verses 5:1-6.

Affliction happens which leads to ENDURANCE. Endurance is the strength to power through the moment. Affliction is the workout, stressing your spiritual muscles and rebuilding your confidence in God.

Then endurance leads to CHARACTER. Character is the development of personal qualities that God desires in your life, such as compassion, forgiveness, integrity and grace. You learn those things in hard times because you want those qualities exhibited to you. Now you understand how others feel

Finally, character produces HOPE. As you understand that God will get through this (endurance) and as you develop Godly personal qualities (character), you stop looking back at all your mistakes and who is to blame for your situation. Now you look forward with the hope of God sustaining or reconciling your relationships. It's going to be okay!

You will not be disappointed by hard times as long as you look to God for strength and meaning. He loves you and the Holy Spirit is near to you.

Prayer Focus:

- For the hard time you are experiencing now.
- What lessons do you want God to teach you?
- Be ready to face this as long as God thinks is needed.

Day 9

READ Romans 5:6-21

So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone. For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Romans 5:18-19

Can one man do so much damage? Apparently.

One man made the decision to push the Titanic through icy waters without listening to warnings.

One man decided to shoot Abraham Lincoln.

One man led the Nazis to invade Poland.

One man pushed for planes to fly into American territory on 9-11, killing thousands and changing our modern world.

Was this all just one man? Surely, there were influences by others around that man to make a decision that led to tragedy and disaster. Support and recognition from others fueled that one man to make one decision to end the lives of one or more people plus many more after that man. For example, the decisions of many of these men fueled wars that saw millions more die.

But the man behind all these men is Adam. Adam's disobedience in the garden bred a legacy of disobedience and anarchy against God and the laws.

Is Adam unfairly judged for this one moment in the garden? Yes. We believe that our mess is all because of his mess. Just like Adam and Eve did, we too search for someone to blame for our mistakes. But we would have done the same thing. Satan's deception spoke to the desires my selfish self craves—control,

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purpose and rewards. Adam wanted what we all want and he made the choice we would have made.

We are all Adam.

There have been trillions of people born since Adam and not one of them have been able to overcome their sin problem. We also blame Adam because we think his sin was too easy. He seems weak. Really? All this over a piece of fruit?

But what if a beautifully naked person shows up in your presence and offers you power and significance if you just take a bite? The distraction plus the deception makes the temptation possible. Many of us have said yes to lesser circumstances.

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned (verse 12).” So yes, one man caused all this because he represented all men and women who followed him. But that same pattern can work the other way too. Not just leading others to death, but leading others to life.

“For if by the one man’s trespass the many died, how much more have the grace of God and the gift which comes through the grace of the one man Jesus Christ overflowed to the many (verse 15).” One man could offer a gift for others to receive. It would apply to that person’s life in the same way Adam’s sin is received into a person’s life—by choice.

“So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone (verse 18).” One choice by one man can lead many to righteousness and eternal life.

That one man is Jesus. The ultimate man. The new Adam.

Prayer Focus:

- Do you follow the pattern of Adam or Jesus?
- Thank Jesus for dying for you.
- What legacy will you pass on to others?

Day 10

READ Romans 6

So what fruit was produced then from the things you are now ashamed of? The outcome of those things is death. But now, since you have been set free from sin and have become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in sanctification—and the outcome is eternal life! For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:21-23

Every two weeks I get paid for my job. I receive a check for the work I have done. I earned that money.

Sin also pays us for our efforts. Not with a check, but a bill. We go to our mailbox and receive the bill, marked “Death” in the amount. If there were a numerical amount tied to it, it would contain more zeroes than Elon Musk ever earned in his lifetime. We can go to the main offices to complain, but the woman at the front desk would say, “There’s nothing we can do about it.”

We earned that bill for a job poorly done. The only way I could pay off that bill is by dying myself then sitting in prison for eternity. Sin is costly.

Sin has been billing humans since the beginning of humanity. When Adam and Eve sinned, God condemned them with these words: *“You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust.”* (Genesis 3:19)

We came from the ground and we will return to the ground, six feet under. We are as good as dead even though we live and breathe and walk around alive holding these outrageous bills in our hands.

Sin rules over us. Sin enslaves us. We asked for it.

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Every year at Christmas our staff receives a love offering. This is given to us above and beyond what we receive for our work. It's a gift. A bonus. It's given from the hearts of the givers, not contractually obligated by our employment status. If the church decided not to pay me for my weekly work, I could take them to court. It's a legal matter. But if I don't receive a staff love offering, I have no legal basis to stand on. Why? It's a gift.

Wages are from my work. Gifts are from the giver's heart.

And yet, while I have earned my death because of my sin, Jesus takes my "death bill" and pays it with his life. Since he's an eternal God, he covers all the zeroes in the bill. How does that happen?

I have to give him my dead life and he will "gift" me a new life. I didn't earn it legally. I receive it graciously.

Romans 6 tells us that our old selves were crucified on the cross with him, put there by sin. That old self died with Christ, setting it free from the eternal bill of sin (verses 6-7). So if we allow our old selves to die with Christ, then our new selves rise with Christ into a new life (verse 8), no longer alive with the threat of death hanging over us (verse 9).

So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:9

Since sin no longer rules over us (verse 14), stop offering yourself to sin (verse 13). You are no longer a slave to sin because you've received the gift of freedom, given to you out of love by your new master—God. You have eternal life!

Stop walking around with the paycheck of death for your sins. Receive the free gift of eternal life and freedom from Jesus Christ.

Prayer Focus:

- Pray for your job.
- Are you free from the debt of sin? Then thank God.
- Do you live free?

Day 11

READ Romans 7: 1-13

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also were put to death in relation to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another. You belong to him who was raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions aroused through the law were working in us to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from the law, since we have died to what held us, so that we may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the law. Romans 7:4-6

I have always wanted a full sized leather recliner with cup holder, phone charger and back massager. I'm 6'6" so it must be long, like Shaq sized.

My wife Barbie says no. It doesn't fit the look, theme or ambiance of the room. She says when she dies I can have one.

I joke that when I drive away from her funeral, I'm going right to La-Z-Boy to order my leather throne. You know, it'll help me through my grieving process...

There's other things you're free to do when a spouse dies—like marry another spouse. Right now, I'd rather have the chair.

Paul in Romans 7 used a similar illustration from marriage when talking about the law. The law only applies to people who are alive. When they die, the law has no power over them (verses 1-3). If I'm alive and speeding, I can get a ticket. If I die while speeding, I can't get a ticket (imagine that one). Dead people are free from earthly laws.

The law is a good thing. The law reminds us of what to do and what to avoid (verse 7). I love playing games but I hate learning the new rules. Game instruction manuals reads like Greek

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text, in some foreign language. But to enjoy the game, I need to know the rules.

The law—or the rules for living a holy, righteous life like God—condemn us because one sin separates us from God.

For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions aroused through the law were working in us to bear fruit for death. Romans 7:5

In the earthly flesh, I'm alive but spiritually dead. When I die, I'm condemned to spiritual separation.

Once I was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life again and I died. The commandment that was meant for life resulted in death for me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. Romans 7:9-11

Along comes Jesus, taking on the penalty that resulted in our death. Jesus released us from the law, *so that we may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the law* (verse 6). But we must accept his death as the payment for our sins.

Now, we are free from the law.

You were once married to that old sinful self since birth, but through Jesus you can bury that old self in the grave and move on with a life free of condemnation.

All the sinfulness that the law pointed out has been paid by one person—Jesus. Now you live a new life, “married” in a new relationship to your savior.

He wants you to join him in eternity in other believers where you will sit on a throne, which undoubtedly will be a large, leather recliner with cup holders. A man can dream...

Prayer Focus:

- Your relationship with Jesus.
- Are you free or still under the law?
- Who do you know who needs true life?

Day 12

READ Romans 7:14-25

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself am serving the law of God, but with my flesh, the law of sin. Romans 7:24-25

Flip Wilson was a legendary stand-up comic and host of a variety show that showed off his talents from 1970-1974. His show launched two catchphrases that are easily recognizable today. Both came from a character he played on the show, Geraldine. Geraldine had attitude and would tell people, “What you see is what you get” and “the devil made me do it,” finding blame for her bad behavior.

We still use that phrase today, in a way, to blame Satan for our bad choices. Was Geraldine right? Does the devil always make us do it?

Yes and no. The devil can’t make us do anything, but the devil can be persistent and strategic in the way he packages sin (see the Garden in Genesis 3). He goes after God’s children just like he goes after those who are far from God, but he doesn’t have to work so hard for them.

Remember, Satan’s goal is always separation. He wants to separate us from God because he knows he can’t separate God from his people. In fact, nothing can separate that (coming soon in Romans chapter 8).

Satan tried to separate Jesus from his plan and purpose for being on this earth when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, a stark difference from a beautiful, lush garden. Even after denying food for forty days, Jesus could not be tempted. We think sure, he’s God, but remember, Jesus chose to be confined to human flesh which comes with flesh desires. The devil could not make Jesus “do it.”

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Satan is more successful making humans commit sin. We are weak to the demands of the flesh and dumb when it comes to Satan's tricks.

Paul felt that and expressed his own dissatisfaction with himself. He recognized his flesh nature that was a slave to sin (verse 14). And even though he trusted and surrendered his life to Jesus, he could not explain why he kept being drawn to sin. Paul claimed that he hated what he was doing (verse 15).

The only possible explanation for his sinful musings was that something else was at work inside him. Sin worked overtime on his flesh and drew Paul to sin (verses 16-20).

Paul wanted to do good (verse 21). He loved God's law and saw all its benefits (verse 22).

However, the reality was this: sin would wage war on him for the rest of his life. Paul had to surrender to that idea, calling himself weak and wretched (verses 23-24). The devil would always want him to do it.

But Paul didn't have to surrender to Satan. In fact, while deep down he was a prisoner to attacks, Paul did not accept defeat.

Jesus rescued him and saved him from sin, despite the weakness of his flesh. Paul was committed to serving God in his mind and spirit, while his flesh fought Satan's demands.

We too battle sin. If Paul did, so will we. Sin will always try to kick in the door and turn our sinful thoughts into destructive actions. Don't let it!

You are not holding back the devil alone. You have the Holy Spirit and the promises of God with you.

The devil wants to make you do it, but you don't have to.

Prayer Focus:

- Pray for that nagging desire to sin inside you.
- Ask for forgiveness.
- Acknowledge your weakness and God's strength.

Day 13

READ Romans 8:1-17

*Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through his Spirit who lives in you.
Romans 8:10-11*

One of the most understated jobs in boxing is the cornerman. We always look at the boxer's performance in the ring, his stamina, punches and technique, however, he could not be champion without a good cornerman. (A cornerman can be the same person as a trainer, depending on the level of boxing.)

A cornerman provides support and guidance to a boxer during a fight. Think about it...you are getting punched in the face. You are not thinking clearly. You need someone to be able to see your fight objectively and with a clear mind.

A cornerman gives advice, sensing weaknesses in the opponent and fine tuning necessary adjustments in the boxer's strategy. They help with injuries, cuts and swelling of wounds. They hydrate the boxer, making sure the energy levels are high. There's emotional support and mental focus. They keep their eye on the boxer's equipment, gloves and mouthpieces. And they can make the crucial decision to end the fight.

One of the greatest boxing cornermen was Angelo Dundee who helped Muhammad Ali win many championship fights. He also saw success with Sugar Ray Leonard and George Foreman. Every boxer who had Angelo in their corner thanked him for their success. They understood the strength of a cornerman.

You have someone in your corner also. The Holy Spirit.

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In this chapter, Paul outlines what the Spirit does in the life of a believer.

1. The Spirit gives life, setting you free from the law of sin and death (verses 1-4).
2. The Spirit keeps your mind focused on Christ, not the flesh (verses 5-6).
3. The Spirit keeps you close to God, on his side, not hostile to God (verses 7-9).
4. The Spirit will one day raise you to life (verse 11).
5. The Spirit protects you from death caused by the flesh (verses 12-13).
6. The Spirit reminds you that you are family to God not a slave to the world (verses 14-17).

Boxing is a game of flesh versus flesh fighting to see who will conquer the other. We are spiritual beings living in flesh bodies who find ourselves in the ring daily, fighting fleshly desires that want to conquer our bodies and overcome us.

Our cornerman, the Holy Spirit, shouts out to us while we are in the fight.

“Keep focused. Remember who you are. You aren’t alone. We’ll get through this. God is on your side!”

During the fights we forget that we are sons and daughters of the living God. The Holy Spirit himself is in our corner crying out when we get hurt and healing us with life.

Don’t despair. Don’t give up. God is truly with you.

Prayer Focus:

- For the fight you are in.
- What kind of help do you need?
- Anyone you know who needs a cornerman?

Day 14

READ Romans 8:18-27

In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. Romans 8:26-27

I remember as a young teenager the hurt of a lost love. I was always attracted to a certain type of girl—one who didn't feel the same way about me. We were always friends but never more than that. I started to hate hearing that phrase: "Can't we just be friends?" Friends...I had plenty of those.

One girl liked me when I was a senior in high school. She was very cute and people were telling me that she liked me, so that made it kind of easy. I took her out on a date, met her parents. This seemed promising. Then, all of a sudden, she didn't like me. Didn't return my calls and turned away from me in social settings.

I came home after one rejection as a high school senior on a Saturday night and cried all night. I mean—ALL NIGHT. If I did fall asleep, I woke up within an hour or so crying. When it was time for church, my parents looked at me and told me to stay home. I was pitiful. Blotchy face. Red eyes.

So, there I was sitting in my house alone, dressed in my Sunday suit and crying, when all of a sudden...I felt better. Like, healed. Immediately. I was shocked. What happened? My relationship with God was not developed at all, I really didn't like church or God, but something about that moment felt like God was with me. That everything would be okay.

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I drove to church in our other car and my parents looked at me in shock when I squeezed into their pew. I was smiling. Things were going to be fine.

I always look back at this moment as a nudge from God telling me that he cared for me and was actively involved in my life even when I wasn't actively involved in God's purpose. While the moment impacted me, it didn't immediately change me. I completely ignored God through the rest of my senior year and college, not surrendering to him until I was 22 years old, but this moment helped me to understand his love.

What always reminds me about that moment and all the other unattainable love relationships is that those were temporary sufferings that eventually led to my marriage to a woman I've loved since I first saw her in 1986, asked her out, dated and married her eventually in 1988. Those hurts were really nothing in the big picture. I don't think about except in moments like this.

Romans says it best:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18

We groan in anticipation (verse 19) for that day when the primary eternal relationship will be revealed, as we step into our Father's house as God's children coming home (verse 21). It's an incredible hope that we cannot see, but we have hope which will one day be fully realized (verses 24-25).

In the meantime, the Spirit helps us through our weaknesses by praying for us, groaning with us (verse 26), preparing us for eternity, whether we understand it or not.

Prayer Focus:

- Thank God that he groans for you.
- Pray for your current pain.
- Ponder that moment of future glory.

Day 15

READ Romans 8:28-30

We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

Really? Does God really work out all things for good?

The often misused and misquoted verse does not say that everything and every crises will work out just fine. Not all stories have happy endings.

Fairy tales have popularized that final phrase in their stories—happily ever after. Snow White overcomes death through the kiss of a prince who defeats the evil queen and they move into a castle. Happily ever after? Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Ariel, Rapunzel to just name a few seem to have happy endings, but many heartaches happened along the way. There are always scars of some sort that happen emotionally, physically, mentally, spiritually. No one is really “happy” forever after.

Story writers are told that in order to make the best story, throw every hardship you can at the main character. A man who takes a train to work, arrives without incident, goes home to his wife and has dinner, watches TV then safely goes to bed—that’s a happy ending.

But it’s a boring story. Nobody learned anything or grew from their experience.

However, if the man is on a train going to work and hijackers take over and he saves everyone on the train, that’s a good story. If he goes to work and the building is on fire and he must rescue his co-workers, that’s a good story. If he goes home and his wife leaves a note saying that she’s leaving him, that’s a bad story...but one that’s intriguing. Why? What does he do next?

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If he realizes she was a spy and has been kidnapped by the enemy and he must rescue her—that's one story. If she left him for his brother—that's another story.

Nothing is truly a story unless some choice has been made by the main character. If the man escapes from the train leaving everyone to die, the story changes. Our view of the hero turns to zero. If the man sees the building is on fire and goes home safely. Wow, he saw conflict and protected himself. Big deal. If the man shrugs reading the note from his wife and eats dinner by himself, goes to bed alone—pitiful.

If when faced with conflict, our hero reacts and fights for what is good and right, realizing something about himself or others in the process, then it's a good story because he learned something he can take with him for the rest of his life.

But did all things work out for good in any of these stories? People could die. Pain felt. Heartache experienced. Maybe the solution turned out favorable but the process hurt people.

God is that scriptwriter of all these great stories and we are those characters.

Romans 8:28 tells us the heart of the scriptwriter. He desires to work out all things for good for those who love God and who seek his purposes. Those who hate God and don't seek his purposes ultimately fall and fail without finding meaning.

He desires this—that we conform to the image of his son (not the world). If we follow Jesus, that means we experience the glory and the suffering too. Suffering turns into good things for those who love God and seek his purposes. Separation, pain and loss turns into restoration, reconciliation and resurrection.

As you suffer, seek God's purposes and find the good.

Prayer Focus:

- What hardship in your life needs some good?
- What past suffering turned into something good?
- Pray for meaning, insight and purpose in your life.

Day 16

READ Romans 8:31-39

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39

An internet search for the greatest love story movie (aka romantic or rom-com) of all time produces interesting results.

Titanic. The Sound of Music. Say Anything. When Harry Met Sally. Pretty Woman. Pride and Prejudice. Love Actually. Princess Bride. Wedding Singer. And so on...

While your personal taste may agree or disagree with the best romance, a good romance story does follow certain rules, a story template. What are the keys to a heart-wrenching love story?

Two likeable characters. You have to really like the guy and the girl and want them to find each other.

There has to be some tension. If a relationship started with the opening scene and the guy and the girl see each other in the book store, talk, go on a date, then many dates, then a proposal, followed by two families who adore each other, a wedding date, and we cut to them driving off with “Just Married” on their window—we may be happy for them but we wouldn’t really like the movie. It’s unrealistic.

The key to every love story is the obstacle. The old boyfriend. The self-doubt. The stubborn father in law. The brain tumor. Or the villains trying to take over the office building (what, *Die Hard* is not a love story?).

The obstacle is important because it proves the love the two have for each other.

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Let's take for example *The Notebook* starring Ryan Gosling and Rachel McAdams. Their love faces such obstacles such as World War II, disapproving parents, time, distance and dementia.

The more obstacles, the better the love story. It's probably why many rank it at number one. The two lovebirds fight seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

What about our relationship with God? Is it a love story too? It faces a number of obstacles, such as our sinfulness and God's holiness. We are unworthy, existing on the other side of the tracks.

Distance. We live in different dimensions.

Visibility. We see the earth, but not God.

Ourselves. We desire the things of this world. We want control. We want what's best for us.

I used to work in a movie theater as an usher and one movie that I saw the end to fifty times was *An Officer and a Gentleman* starring Richard Gere and Debra Winger. In the end, despite all the obstacles, Gere shows up at Winger's work, lifts her up and carries her away to supposedly marital bliss. He came to her and swept her off her feet.

Jesus crossed that distance to come to us to rescue us from the relentless work we try to do to please God or to please ourselves and takes us to be with him in his heaven forever. Jesus literally died for us. That's the ultimate expression of love.

And no obstacle can separate us from the love of Christ (verses 35,38-39). Jesus fights through every obstacle for us.

That's the greatest love story ever told.

Prayer Focus:

- Thank God for his love for you.
- How are you showing that love to others?
- Who needs to hear of that love?

Day 17

READ Romans 9:1-5

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. Romans 9:1-5

How much do you love “your people”?

By the way, who are your people? Americans? People born in your state? People who root for your team? Your neighbors? Your church? Your school?

Now ask yourself...what would you be willing to do for them? I'll go right to the extreme.

Would you be willing to die for them?

How about this? Would you be willing to go to hell for them?

That's a hard idea to follow, but it's what Paul expressed in his opening to Chapter 9.

His heart broke over his people—the Jews. So much so he said that he wished “that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel (verse 3-4).”

Understand what “cursed and cut off from Christ” means...

No Christ. No grace. No forgiveness. No hope. Abandoned.

Hell.

Paul was saying he would be willing to be cursed for his people, putting the curse that belongs on his people on himself so they would not have to suffer.

We've all done something like that. A parent who wishes that could take their child's sickness. A friend who wishes they could take the burden another friend is facing.

I remember when my wife went through cancer treatment, many times wishing I had her cancer so she would not suffer. In retrospect, she probably handled it better, never complaining. I'd be throwing my suffering in people's faces all the time.

But Paul's request is extreme. Why would he do such a thing? He saw the honored privilege that the Jews were instrumental in bringing to the world.

Paul lists them: the adoption to sonship by God, divine glory, the covenants, the law, the temple worship and the promises. The human ancestry that revealed Jesus Christ! They knew all those things and were part of their unveiling to world. And yet they rejected it.

God used the Jews to show the world what it means to be loved by God as a child of God and yet they missed that message. They totally rejected it and now they were doomed to eternal separation. Paul was willing to take their place.

Although he never would never go to hell, for each person will bear their own consequences for their own choice, Paul showed his love for others to bear their burdens.

So who are your people and what would you be willing to do to see them saved?

Prayer Focus:

- Who are your people?
- Pray for your people
- What can you do so they can know Jesus?

Day 18

READ Romans 9:6-33

Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses,

“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

Romans 9:11-15

Yesterday I called a woman from our church. Her 9 month old grandson was diagnosed with a brain tumor. It cannot be removed because of its location at this time. His prognosis can go many ways. Its location inhibits some motor movement and cognitive growth, but it’s not imminently life threatening. The little guy could grow into it, develop fine, but nobody knows for sure. Her voice message said something like, “How could God allow this to happen to a little child?”

Walk the halls of Arnold Palmer or Winnie Palmer hospital in Orlando, the cancer and ICU wing, and it will break your heart. Children suffering and dying. Add to that every Tim Tebow Facebook video I see tells the horrors of child sex trafficking and the heroes who arrest the perpetrators. One sting led to arrest of dozens who were willing to have sex with 8 year old girls.

There’s a little voice that whispers to us during these moments...“Is there really a God” or “How could your God allow this happen?” To handle this question, you have to understand the will of God and the brokenness of this world. Man has broken all the covenants God introduced. Not God. He is not unjust (verse 14). We are sinful and this world is reflection of disease, evil, heartache, sweat and death.

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Some wonder how others seem to get by this life unscathed. Everything goes their way. Every time their social media posts come up they are happy and having fun. But we don't see the moments between those posts. Most pastors will tell you, nobody's getting out of this world unscathed. Everyone has issues. We all will face death.

The tension occurs between God's will (election) and man's will (freewill). Does God choose who to bless and who to not bless? Charles Spurgeon said election and freewill are like two rails on a railroad, both heading in the same direction, both necessary to keep the train on the tracks. It's not one or the other.

In the Bible, the words for *choosing* and *loving* are closely related words which explains why it says God loved Jacob and hated Esau (verse 13). Remember, God took care of Rahab, Esau's mother, when she got kicked out of Abraham's camp (Genesis 21 and 25). As Esau grew, God took care of him too (see Genesis 33 to 36) so God didn't despise him to the extent we call hate.

From our vantage point, it may seem like God hates us but that is never true. God used people like Rebekah, Issac, Esau, Pharaoh to accomplish his will. He also punished the nation of Israel whom he chose and loved.

You have to have faith in a God who shows mercy on who he has mercy and compassion on those he has compassion (verse 15). That goes for hardships too. God showed love to people they never expected him to love—the Gentiles (verses 30-31).

God loves you despite what your circumstances may be. In fact, he loves you so much he promises to be right by your side all the way through, in the hopes that your love, faith and trust will grow in the process. If God "hated" you, he wouldn't be with you.

Prayer Focus:

- What moment are you facing that challenges your faith?
- Have you ever thanked God for the hard times in your life?
- Who do you know that could use encouragement?

Day 19

READ Romans 10:1-13

If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. Romans 10:9-10

Paul gives us in Romans 10 a two-step process to salvation. It seems easy but it’s not that easy.

He starts the chapter continuing his plea for the Jews to accept to Jesus (verse 1). Paul recognizes that they have zeal for God, but they are ignorant of the truth (verse 2). As a result they do not have the correct path to God which is righteousness (being right with God). As a result, they manufacture their own path of righteousness (following the law) instead of God’s path (Verse 3).

What is that path? Christ is the epitome, final answer, ultimate goal of righteousness (verse 4).

It’s a righteousness by our faith in Jesus. Some believe they have to do something like live by the law (verse 5), or crash heaven to get things going (verse 6) or storm the grave to pull Jesus from the dead (verse 7). Ridiculous? But when we add our action to Jesus’ three-day redemption process, from cross to grave, we are saying Jesus didn’t do enough. He needs our help.

Paul says on the contrary. The action on our part is having faith, revealed through our mouth and our heart.

These are two interesting choices for faith communicators but they are important. Mouth and heart reveal two aspects of us: the external and the internal.

Our mouth expresses outwardly. By itself it cannot be trusted. People can say they believe in Jesus, but if it’s not in their

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heart, what difference does it make? It's all for show. We've seen many pastors say one thing, but live another.

The heart is key also. The heart includes our thoughts, will power and motivation. But is someone truly saved if they never express it? What difference does the message of Jesus' resurrection mean if they never tell anyone?

Now let's look at the communication reflected from the mouth and heart found in verse 9.

First, you must confess (say outwardly) that Jesus is Lord. What does that mean? You must express that Jesus is your authority. He rules the earth. He rules your life. He's the boss. He's the creator. He is God. That's more than just a savior.

Second, you must believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. This is trusting, without seeing, that the greatest event that ever happened on this earth 2,000 years ago happened as Old Testament prophecies and New Testament eyewitness accounts came together just as God predicted. Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of every sin ever committed (because he's God as stated above), then rose from the dead as he predicted to conquer death and prove he is God.

Belief from the heart makes you right with God. Confession from your mouth leads you to salvation. Belief is more than just a mental acceptance. It's a full body—heart, soul, mind and strength—experience (verse 10)

Everyone who believes will not suffer from the shame of their sins (verse 11-12). Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord, expressing their belief, trust and acknowledgment of the one true God will be saved (verse 13). Even you...

Prayer Focus:

- Have you confessed your belief this way?
- Ask God what may be missing.
- Who else needs to understand this truth in your life?

Day 20

READ Romans 10:14-21

How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. Romans 10:14-15

I was a mission trip junkie. I would say the only reason I've backed off is my height (6'6") and airline flights make traveling expensive for tall people. (Okay, maybe age too).

I've traveled to Turkey, Egypt, Costa Rica, Colombia, Burundi, Tanzania, Zanzibar, Cuba and Brazil. I have stories from every location. In some places, I was greeted in small dirt homes (or huts) and shared with a family or stood on a stage presenting the Gospel with a couple thousand in attendance.

Places like Zanzibar, Turkey and Egypt have strong Muslim governments that frown on "proselytizing" and threaten jail time or worse if you share Jesus in the streets. We had to shift our tactic but the end goal was always the same.

I'm sure others could have done a better job, with their superior communications skills, but the message was very consistent everywhere we went—*Jesus loves you and he wants a relationship with you, offering to redeem you from your sinful past and secure with you an eternal relationship by faith.*

Paul asked this question of those reading this letter. He earlier outlined how to communicate the Gospel. Now the question he asked was *who is going to communicate that Gospel to others?*

There's no way anyone can know the truth about Jesus Christ unless someone tells them. That can be done online, through

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movies, in written texts, but the best way has always been a person proclaiming that message in front of other people.

The audience won't always be receptive. The Jews should have been the best audience. They carried the story of the Old Testament through the best and worst of times. They knew the prophecies pointing towards a Messiah. They lived and knew the culture with its symbolic festivals. Should be a slam dunk, right?

Paul said the Jews heard, but they did not understand (verses 18-19). So God said, "Fine, I'll take my message to someone else." The target of Paul's ministry was the Gentiles (non-Jews). They received it. They were not even looking for Jesus (verse 20). The invitation just showed and they welcomed it.

Israel, the jealous boyfriend, crossed its arms while people like Paul swooned the Gentiles with God's love. All along, God held out his hands to an ungrateful, disobedient and dismissive people (verse 21). There are two types of people who will hear the message that we've been called to deliver to the world:

- Those who reject.
- Those who receive.

I know, that feels a little simplistic. But Paul gives us insight into their reasons.

Those who reject are jealous of another God slipping into their territory. They don't understand the unconditional love of this God (verse 19) who holds out his hands to them all the time.

Those who receive were not looking for love. Love found them. Smitten and surprised, they meet this forgiving, kind God named Jesus and fall in love with him (verse 20).

How do you know the receivers from the rejectors? You don't until you tell them. Go tell the world so they can respond.

Prayer Focus:

- Were you looking for Jesus when you met him?
- Have you been on a mission trip?
- What have you learned about evangelizing?

Day 21

READ Romans 11:1-10

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? Absolutely not! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Romans 11:1-2

Ayaan Hirsi Ali was born in Somali as a Muslim. She experienced female genital mutilation at the age of five. She sought political asylum in the Netherlands at the age of 23, then by her 30s, Ayaan renounced her Muslim upbringing and supported atheism, fueled by such thinkers as Richard Dawkins.

She spoke more openly against the oppression of women by Islam, ultimately in a documentary by filmmaker Theo van Gogh, who was subsequently murdered by a Muslim for the film. Ayaan went into hiding, eventually moving to the United States where she wrote books about her life and atheism.

Then in 2023, she announced she was a Christian. After experiencing depression, she critically looked at the atheism and found no freedom or hope. Her analysis of the Christian faith found it more appealing and truer than anything else. Her announcement prompted a new wave of attacks, calling her Islamophobic but she's remained steadfast. Ayaan Hirsi Ali was on that list of one of the last people you would ever imagine becoming a Christian.

So was Paul. In fact, he persecuted Christians physically while Ayaan only attacked philosophically. God's arms reach out to the most unlikely people.

In Romans 11, Paul began the chapter by asking a question: Has God rejected his people? By "his" people, he of course means the Jews. Paul answered that question by pointing first to himself, the number one person God should have rejected.

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Then Paul gives proof that God has not rejected the Jews, borrowing a story from Elijah who wondered the same thing—had God abandoned him? The answer then was no and it's still no. The proof is this—God has a remnant, a group of followers working as insiders and preserving God's faith (verse 5).

Paul was part of that remnant. The other apostles too. The mission of that remnant was to work from the inside to bring the Gospel to hardcore, impossibly-to-reach Jews.

In verse 5, Paul made one more distinction about this remnant. They were chosen by grace. Why is that a big deal? They were not chosen by their works, looks, smarts, accomplishments...they were chosen because God said so.

Since they were not chosen by their good works, they were also not rejected because of their bad works. Ayaan Hirsi Ali could attest to that. Even after a life of attacking Christianity, convincing others that there was no God, she suddenly confessed there was a God.

Now if by grace, then it is not by works; otherwise grace ceases to be grace. Romans 11:6

Those that reject the Christian faith have hard hearts, blind eyes, deaf ears to the truth. God allowed them to be that way. Why? Sometimes so that their eventual acceptance of Christ wows the world. Like Paul. Like Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

The harder the heart, the harder they fall and the louder the noise they make to the world when God picks them up. Many hardcore haters of Jesus have turned their lives around because of the grace of God.

Maybe you know someone like that?

Prayer Focus:

- Who in your life rejects God passionately?
- What would it look like if they accepted Jesus?
- What can you do to help them see the truth?

Day 22

READ Romans 11:11-32

I ask, then, have they stumbled so as to fall? Absolutely not! On the contrary, by their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel jealous. Now if their transgression brings riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fullness bring! Romans 11:11-12

An article by Jan-Benedict Steenkamp in Medium listed the top 10 most evil men in the world in the 20th Century:

- #10. Dr. Josef Mengele (1911–1979)
- #9 Mengistu Haile Mariam (1937-)
- #8 Idi Amin (1925–2003)
- #7. Saddam Hussein (1937–2006)
- #6 Kim Il-Sung (1912–1994)
- #5 Leopold II (1835–1909)
- #4 Pol Pot (1925–1998)
- #3 Joseph Stalin (1878–1953)
- #2. Mao Zedong (1893–1976)
- #1. Adolf Hitler (1889–1945)

We're not here to debate the list. Maybe someone else deserves to be on that list. Like say...your boss. But we want to ask ourselves a question about the world's worst dictators...

Could they have surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ?

The answer is yes. They could have, but they didn't (as far as we know).

Did Jesus die for the worst dictators in human history?

The answer is yes. Jesus died for the worst people in the world.

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Now, somewhere between the worst, most evil people in the world and the best person who ever lived—Jesus—is us.

We're not perfect, but we're not horrible. So whatever applies the worst applies to the "not-so-bad." This means Jesus died for the wife-beaters, child molesters, drunks, addicts, habitual prisoners and those on death row as well as the gossipers, speeders, dog-kickers and those with a potty mouth.

Jews looked at Gentiles as the worst possible group of people. They categorized Gentiles as pagans, idol-lovers, blood drinkers, unredeemable and evil. They put them in the worst of the worst. And sometimes that characteristic fit. Most times it was wrong. Paul defended the Gentiles and sent them a message of Jesus's love that God originally sent to the Jewish people. Sadly, most rejected it.

Why? Jesus didn't meet their traditional criteria. He didn't follow their rules. They wanted heavenly pomp and circumstance. He presented himself humbly, a poor tradesman from Nazareth riding on a donkey.

Their rejection was a choice, but Paul said God hardened their hearts. One other leader who made the top 10 list of evil leaders also had his heart hardened—Pharaoh. God dialed up his rejection to historic levels so that God could accomplish his purpose—to save the Israelites and be glorified in the process.

Israel also experienced a partial hardening until enough Gentiles have crossed over to belief (verse 25). Then, one day, the hardening will be lifted and Israel will receive Jesus in a powerful flood of acceptance.

God always has a plan to reach the least likely. Nobody is too far gone.

Prayer Focus:

- Who in your life rejects God passionately?
- What would it look like if they accepted Jesus?
- What can you do to help them see the truth?

Day 23

READ Romans 11:33-36

*Oh, the depth of the riches
and the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments
and untraceable his ways!
For who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?
And who has ever given to God,
that he should be repaid?
For from him and through him
and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:33-36*

A doxology means:

The dictionary defines doxology as “an expression of praise to God, especially a short hymn sung as part of a Christian worship service.” The word doxology comes from the Greek doxa, (“glory, splendor, grandeur”) and logos, (“word” or “speaking”). Most doxologies are short hymns of praise to God in various Christian worship services...³

Many of you probably heard another doxology called “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow,” written in 1674 by Thomas Ken, a priest in the Church of England. It’s a classic:

*Praise God from Whom all blessings flow
Praise Him all creatures here below
Praise Him above, you heavenly host
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

You won’t find the word doxology in the Bible (except in the notes section) but a doxology has common themes:

³ <https://www.gotquestions.org/doxology.html>

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- God blesses us— “all blessings flow.”
- We should all glorify him—“Praise Him.”
- All heaven glorifies him – “The heavenly host.”
- The character of God – “Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”

Paul pauses in his letter for a moment to praise God.

Why?

He’s about to head into a new section of Romans.

Chapters 1-11 do a great job of discussing the character of God and his expectations for our lives. We all fall short. We cannot achieve righteousness by our works. Faith is the key to salvation.

In chapters 12-16, he will shift to the application of those truths in our lives. How do we live now that we know who God really is and we are supposed to really act?

But you won’t be able to apply those truths unless you appreciate and celebrate them.

Take a moment to celebrate God and give him all the glory he deserves.

Prayer Focus:

- Praise God for who he is.
- Praise God for his blessings.
- Praise God for the truths he has taught you.

Day 24

READ Romans 12:1-8

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. Romans 12:1-2

“Therefore” is an important word. It prepares us for a transition. Paul is about to shift gears.

In chapters 1-11, Paul powerfully described the love, sacrifice, mercy and grace of God through Jesus Christ. He outlined our desperate situation and said we should be dead in our sins and yet...Jesus.

Knowing that truth, we cannot live the same way as we always have. Paul tells us to present ourselves as “living sacrifices.” Sacrifices end up dead, lifeless, useless.

But a living sacrifice is alive, active, engaged. It’s dead to self. Its “self” no longer matters. Therefore...the sacrifice lives for others. This sacrifice is an act of worship. This is not about glorifying God through song, but glorifying God through actions.

Paul then issues a warning. Don’t conform...transform.

Remember the warning to the church of Laodicea in Revelation chapter 3? Jesus chastised the church for becoming lukewarm, not hot or cold. What happened? The church conformed and became the temperature of the surrounding atmosphere. Hot or cold describe a church that counters its culture, providing healing and refreshment.

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Conforming and transforming are polar opposites. Conforming means to be like something. Transforming means to become something different (think caterpillar to butterfly). You will either conform to the world's standards or be transformed into something different from the world's standards. This world wants you to conform to its ways. Don't do it. Transformation occurs when you renew your mind, not focusing on the flesh (world) but the spirit (God).

To display and counter this conforming, one must be active. Paul tells the people to stop thinking of themselves too highly (verse 3) and start serving. Paul's complete list of spiritual gifts is found in 1 Corinthians 12. Here he lists a few: prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership and mercy. It's not an exhaustive list, but an important list of qualities necessary for a thriving church.

As he did in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul echoes the image of a body with many parts all working together for one purpose. Every part of our body works to keep our bodies alive, thriving, moving, engaging and making a difference in this world.

It's the same for our church. But we are not serving ourselves or serving the world, we are serving the head—Jesus Christ.

Now that you understand the *what* and know the *why*, therefore *how* are you going to act now?

Prayer Focus:

- Thank God for what he has done for you.
- Are you truly a living sacrifice?
- Where does God want you to serve?

Day 25

READ Romans 12:9-21

Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Romans 12:9-16

This section describes how a Christian should love others. Verses 9-16 focus on your neighbors and Verses 17-21 focus on your enemies.

And what value leads the list? Love.

1. Be loving (not a hypocrite)
2. Hate evil
3. Always do and believe in good
4. Show brotherly affection
5. Show honor
6. Have zeal for the things of God
7. Be spiritually passionate
8. Serve God
9. Be hopeful
10. Be patient
11. Always be praying
12. Give
13. Be hospitable
14. Bless persecutors
15. Be compassionate, rejoice and weep
16. Be in harmony with others

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17. Don't be haughty or arrogant
18. Hang out with the humble
19. Be teachable
20. Do what's honorable, without revenge
21. Live at peace with others (as much as you can)
22. Let God avenge
23. Feed and give them something to drink
24. Fight evil with good

Some may say, I'm a Christian...now what should I do? Paul outlines 24 characteristics of a Christian who engages with a hostile world. This is hard work! It's even hard to live this way with other Christians!

If you want a character profile of Jesus, look no further than this. This is the heart of God. Every Christian must represent God on this planet this way.

This is the church.

Act like Jesus.

Prayer Focus:

- Which of these qualities challenges you?
- Which of them come naturally?
- How can you live this way today?

Day 26

READ Romans 13:1-7

Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God. So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. Romans 13:1-2

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution sets an important precedent.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The Founding Fathers asked this question—what is freedom? They said freedom is the ability to establish a religion, freely exercise one's faith, speak without repercussions, write without repercussions, assemble peacefully and tell the government what bothers you.

So why should a government allow those things?

The second sentence of the Declaration of Independence answers that why:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Why should we have those rights? Because God created us with equal value and with certain rights, such as life (the right to exist), liberty (the right to be free) and the pursuit of happiness (the right to do what makes you happy).

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What has happened since 1776 when America started this grand experiment? People have pursued their own life, freedom and happiness many times at the expense of others, restraining their ability to freely speak so that others can have happiness. We've lost common sense and community appreciation.

As difficult as our freedoms may be in America today, they were nothing like the Roman empire in the days of Paul. Rome sought a good thing—peace—and it was willing to jail, punish and kill for it. This seems like a contradiction but Rome brutally desired peace and quiet, everywhere it occupied. Jesus was killed because he ticked off too many people and crucifying him hopefully would quiet the opposition. It didn't work.

But Paul (nor the apostles) did not seek revenge against the government that killed Jesus. He advocated submission. He believed every government was in power because God put them in power. Resisting that power was, in essence, opposing God.

Governments react severely to bad behavior, so Paul told his followers to do good, pay taxes and show respect to those in charge. Why? If Christians don't stir the waters, then they won't face opposition. But is that always true?

A Christian may have to oppose the government if the powers try to restrain one's freedom to express one's faith. Churches have grown in China and Iran despite being banned. Governments that allow dangerous practices and effect our children must be stopped. Abortion must be opposed.

Paul is not saying roll over and take the government's abuse. God's authority comes first and resisting oppression may be the most godly thing you can do. Running for office is also a Christian obligation. Christians must be good citizens.

Prayer Focus:

- For your nation today.
- For your involvement in politics.
- For government leaders in your community.

Day 27

READ Romans 13:8-14

Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. Romans 13:13-14

I have a method to my closet madness. I have a section for casual work shirts (polos), a section for casual T-shirts (those without paint on them), a section for pants (jeans and dressy), a section for dressier shirts (Sunday and special events) and then a section for the dressiest shirts and suits (weddings, funerals or when the White House calls). I also have a section that's the next step to trash but for some reason I can't get myself motivated to toss them. They have meaning, you understand.

Then, each section has an organizational principle. I put the just-worn-in-public shirt on the left side and choose a new shirt from the right side. I know many of you are keeping track what shirts I wear, so this way keeps me from repeating a shirt too often.

My clothing choice reflects my day's purpose. I wouldn't wear a suit to pull weeds in the garden. I wouldn't wear a torn t-shirt and tattered gym shorts to a wedding. The weather is also a huge factor in my clothing choice. Hot day with 100% humidity? Not wearing a long sleeve shirt. Cold day with a freeze warning? Not wearing just a T-shirt though it may be under two other layers.

As a Christian, we choose our outer self every time we walk out the door. We determine how we are going to present ourselves to the world.

Starting in chapter 12, Paul discussed how Christians should live in light of Jesus' death on the cross for our sins. In 12:1-2, Paul told Christ followers not to wear what everyone else is

wearing but wear something transformational. In 12:9-21, he described that outer self in detail. At the beginning of chapter 13, Paul continued that thought in light of our current government and democratic system. Now, at the end of the chapter 13, Paul furthers his Christian “fashion” sense.

Our everyday outer wear must be to put on in love. Love fulfills every law ever written—both a love for God and a love for others. If you truly love your neighbor, you wouldn’t sleep with his wife, kill him at night, steal his stuff or even desire his polo. None of those things you would want done to you, so why would do it to others? You can keep every law if you would only love.

I’m not a big fan of Christian t-shirts. I totally respect those who do. I have a couple, but when I put one of them on, I’m very conscious about my day. Who will see that shirt and what will their reaction be? Am I going to the car dealership, potentially hearing devastating news that I need to respond by smiling and thanking God. Or eating a restaurant where I’ll be judged by my tip? (Is 20% not enough?)

But I must drape my personality, demeanor and attitude with Christ. Paul calls this fashion choice—day wear. Night wear tries to blend in with the darkness and remain hidden in the shadows. They believe that dressing like a Ninja will hide their drinking, partying, sexual impurity, quarreling and jealousy. It won’t. God has night vision.

The true Christian fashion choice is day wear, living as a light in your world, shining Jesus on every situation. Your life as a Christ-follower should be exposed, obvious, on display. People should not respond in shock saying, “You are a Christian?” doubting the real you they’ve seen. They should say, “I thought you were a Christian” based on your daily reflection of Jesus.

Prayer Focus:

- What’s your favorite thing to wear?
- How do you choose Jesus every morning?
- Where is it most difficult to be a Christian?

Day 28

READ Romans 14

So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another. Do not tear down God's work because of food. Everything is clean, but it is wrong to make someone fall by what he eats. It is a good thing not to eat meat, or drink wine, or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble. Whatever you believe about these things, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. Romans 14:19-22

My doctor didn't like my cholesterol levels so he put me on statin drugs. I started to notice terrible joint pain in my hands in legs after taking them for a few months. I got off statins and the pain disappeared. So how best to manage my cholesterol? My wife just had a diagnosis of breast cancer and her anti-estrogen medication similarly caused joint pain. The best, most natural way for both of us, was to kick meat out of our diet.

We were vegans for a short period of time. However, I missed cheese. And butter. It was hard to navigate life constantly asking what ingredients were in the food set before me.

I managed vegetarianism for nearly 20 years. It worked. The doctors were amazed by my cholesterol levels, shocked I wasn't on any drugs. I didn't want to be one of those people who took a handful of drugs in his old age.

Then I had a heart attack while a vegetarian. I succumbed to the drugs. Now, in my old age, I take a handful of drugs, what I always feared. I've returned meat to my diet in limited quantities.

But I dealt with the amazement of people who wondered why I was a vegetarian. To them it felt weak. I wasn't eating meat? What kind of man was I? Yes, I denied myself bacon all that time.

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My wife and I chose vegetarian for health reasons. We never looked down on people who ate meat. We didn't glorify pigs or hold animals in any high regard. We didn't feel closer to God. We just wanted to be healthy and not experience pain.

Roman Emperor Claudius (AD 42-54) expelled the Jews from Rome in AD 49. When he died in AD 54, the Jews were allowed to return to Rome. When Jewish believers left the church, Gentiles took over. When the Jews returned, the church looked different. Paul wrote Romans in AD 56-58 to unify and define the church so they could return to their mission—to reach the world for Christ.

In chapter 14, Paul addresses their convictions and beliefs. Some worried about those Jewish dietary laws (we call it kosher). They were afraid the meats they purchased at the market were not killed properly or were dedicated to some god in the process. So they turned to vegetables only. For them, they wanted to get close to the Lord.

However, *“the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Lord.”* The truth is we will not be judged by God by what we eat or drink (verse 17) but if it helps someone express their faith and get closer to God, then don't judge them (verse 13).

People sometimes need guardrails to keep them on track (verse 3). Certain clothes, certain foods, certain routines keep them close to God. It's okay. Just give thanks to the Lord. We will all be judged by God. There's no need to judge others. It's not our job.

Seek peace and edification. Build others up. Live by your convictions. Don't force preferences on others. We all belong to the Lord.

Prayer Focus:

- What behaviors do you judge in the church?
- What do you do to stay close to God?
- Pray for the new/weak Christians in your life.

Day 29

READ Romans 15: 1-13

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

Our church has adopted this verse as our purpose statement. And for good reason.

Who doesn't want hope and joy in this world?

Even the most dastardly of villains would desire hope and joy in their lives, but how they get it may not be right, or legal, or lasting. Paul wrapped up his talk about the faith of strong and weak Christians by providing a unifying cry which everyone desires.

There's a four step process required before you can unleash that hope and joy onto the world.

1. Love your neighbor as yourself. (15:1-3)

Paul says to bear the weaknesses of others and not to please ourselves. Make others a priority. Jesus thought of others first...so should we.

2. Read your Bible for endurance and encouragement. (15:4)

The Holy Spirit uses the eternal words of God to feed those places in our heart that grow weak and tender over time. Encouragement pushes us forward and when we push forward and survive, we are hopeful the next time we face discouragement. Secular books may offer good and useful information, but the Bible was written by God for us to help everyone through all circumstances.

3. Live in harmony with one another. (15:5-6)

Harmony in music is two or more notes sung simultaneously, creating a layer of sound that enriches and provides texture and depth to

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a song. The notes, though different, work together. As Christians, in order to live in harmony with others, we may have to adjust our tune to enrich the lives of others. We don't have to change our truth, but alter the notes to help others feel in tune.

4. Glorify God. (15:7-8)

In the end, someone will get the glory. Someone will be hero of the story. If our goal is to get the attention we think we deserve, we have missed the whole goal of Jesus coming to earth. A true follower of Christ brings attention to the one he follows.

The test of our motivation will be how we react to those who feel they don't deserve the full Christian experience. Those who require too much work. Those who are not quite perfect in their faith and require some extra grace. For the Jews of Paul's day, the Gentiles tested their Christlikeness. Paul revealed that the Gentiles were always part of God's plan and prophecy (verses 9-12).

Once you start loving others, discovering endurance and encouragement, living in harmony and glorifying God, then you find the perfect God of hope who will fill you with joy and peace.

The end goal? So that hope will overflow and spill out into the lives of others by the power of Holy Spirit.

And doesn't everyone want more of that?

Prayer Focus:

- For more encouragement.
- For more endurance.
- For more hope and joy.

Day 30

READ Romans 15:14-33

My aim is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, so that I will not build on someone else's foundation, but, as it is written, Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.. Romans 15:20-21

Pioneers are trailblazers, explorers, and initiators who venture into unknown territory to create new paths, while settlers are those who follow, building upon established foundations to create stability, community, and infrastructure. Pioneers embrace change and risk, whereas settlers prefer consistency, structure, and long-term security.

Businesses must take risks to survive in this world. They must adapt to the social media communication climate, open new stores, develop new products.

Pioneers in the early history of America were not content developing their homes in the eastern part of the United States. Driven by profit or freedom, they pack up their homes in horse drawn wagons and ventured into dangerous lands. Some died by conflict, disease or accidents. Some accomplished exactly what they set out to do.

The apostle Paul was a pioneer while the other apostles, such as Peter, were content at the Jerusalem home church. Paul felt a desire to discover new places, raise up new leaders and reach new people with the gospel. However, he could not do that without those at more established churches such as Jerusalem, Macedonia and Achaia (verses 25-26).

Both pioneers and settlers have unique skills and are necessary in the Christian community. In fact, a church should be pioneering and settling at the same time. A church must be always

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searching for new opportunities while maintaining those ministries and people already in place.

If a church was always blazing new trails, they could lose their homebase, their structure collapsing with the finances to support those new opportunities.

If a church only maintained their existing structure, they could get stale, not growing. The base gets older and dies and the church dies with them.

Paul wanted to reach Gentiles scattered all over the world, as far as Spain (verse 24), 1,255 miles east of Rome. Spain was at the top of Paul's bucket list. It drove him and motivated him.

In Acts 23, the Lord told Paul he would make it to Rome. In Acts 28, Paul arrived in Rome and his travels ended. Did Paul make it to Spain? The Bible doesn't say so. The Lord didn't promise Spain. Paul wanted Spain. Going to Spain wasn't a problem. It just wasn't God's plan.

However, Paul felt the call to expand and Spain was about as far as you could go east in the Roman empire.

For me, I've always wanted to go to Antarctica. I don't want to get on dog sleds and travel to the South Pole. Just touch it and have stories to tell. But what will happen to me once I go there? I'll probably find another goal to top my bucket list.

Getting to the destination isn't as important as the motivation it gives the seeker, always pushing outward and onward. For Paul, that was Spain.

What is your goal that may be unreachable, but motivates your Christian life? What is your church's new trail to explore?

Prayer Focus:

- For your "Spain."
- For your church's "Spain."
- For a goal only God could accomplish in your life.

Day 31

READ Romans 16

The report of your obedience has reached everyone. Therefore I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise about what is good, and yet innocent about what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. Romans 16:19-20

As we wrap up Paul's letter to the church in Rome, we have discovered it's a book of deep spiritual truth designed to refocus people's hearts and minds to Jesus Christ.

All of Paul's thirteen letters drive home a unique point to each church, whether it's in Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Galatia, Colossae, Philippi or Crete.

As for Romans, his goal was unity in a divided church.

It's very clear that Paul loved the church and he loved the leaders of the churches he started.

Paul knew everything he worked to start would tragically end if the right people weren't in place.

Chapter 16 is all about his staff, supporters and fellow workers in ministry. Let's take a look at them.

- Phoebe – she financially supported Paul's ministry and many believed she delivered this letter to Rome.
- Priscilla and Aquila – a couple Paul met in Corinth in Acts 18 and who served there and with Timothy in Ephesus.
- Epaphroditus – the first convert in Asia.
- Mary – could be the mother of Jesus, then again Mary was a popular name in those days.
- Andronicus and Junia – fellow prisoners with Paul.

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- Timothy – Paul’s right hand man.
- Ampilatus, Urbanus, Stachys, Apelles, Aristobulus, Herodion, Narcissus, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympas, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Tertius, Gaius, Erastus and Quartus. Included with them are households and more brothers and sisters in Christ.

Thirty-five people were mentioned by name in Romans, the most of any letter. Paul knew it wouldn’t take much for the entire church to collapse. So he ended with three final thoughts for his leadership base.

1. Watch out for those who create division. Avoid them. They serve their own appetites (verses 17-18)
2. Stay obedient to Scripture. Obedience leads to wisdom, keeping people from evil. Satan is helpless and the God of peace will crush him in the process (verses 19-20)
3. Stay strong in Jesus. Give him the glory (verse 27).

As Paul wrote to the church in Rome, he dreamed of starting a church in Spain. Whether he ever got there, we’re not sure. We know Paul arrived in Rome eventually (Acts 28).

It’s important to both remain focused on your current situation and to your future endeavors. Paul was about expansion, but he had to strengthen the base before expanding it to other cities. Paul knew the truth and the people rallied around the truth.

You also have a role in your church’s health and growth. Do your part and follow those final three thoughts in your life.

And that’s the truth.

Prayer Focus:

- For your ministry in the church.
- For those who serve you in the church.
- For the leaders in your church.

