

THOMAS NELSON

NEW KING JAMES VERSION*

THE
LUCADO

ENCOURAGING
WORD

BIBLE

EXPERIENCING *the* HEART *of* JESUS



MAX LUCADO

GENERAL EDITOR

THE
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ENCOURAGING
WORD

BIBLE



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THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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INTRODUCTION

The Lucado Encouraging Word Bible is an exhilarating experience. As you read, you'll uncover a saga of suspense and intrigue. Flip over a few pages and find poetry and romance. Turn the pages again and read tales of clashing conquerors, brave shepherds, and a captivating Carpenter. Chronicles of faith, miracles, misdeeds, and good deeds. Kings, queens, peasants—the uncommon and the commonplace. Mystery, suspense, intrigue, drama, humor, poetry, romance . . . it's all in these pages. Stories of real people, with real problems, real joys, and a real Savior. All of that, plus some distinctive features, will help you see that what happened on these pages is still happening today—that the truths of old are truths for our age.

To enrich your study, this Bible has some unique features. These tools will help expand your understanding of Scripture and provide you encouragement in your spiritual journey.

FOR YOUR JOURNEY

You'll notice encouraging devotional notes in the margins. Each of these notes contains a Situation, Observation, Inspiration, and Application section.

The Situation gives a quick look into the context of the chapter; it answers the question, What's going on in this passage?

The Observation goes beneath the action to explain the point of the action: What truth or lesson is noticeable in the action of these people?

The Inspiration takes a point or lesson found in the chapter and amplifies it. Excerpted from the writings of Max Lucado, these inspirations extend the main point and give it a contemporary message that will be useful in your private devotion or for sharing with a group.

The Application brings the message home and helps you ask the right questions: How can I use what I've learned in this chapter? Is there anything about my life that I should change based on what I've learned?

PEOPLE OF THE WORD

Follow the journeys of others from long ago in this feature of nearly one hundred bios of people found or mentioned throughout the Bible. In these articles, you'll see their struggles, triumphs, and God's hand in their lives. These character studies will provide encouragement as you face various circumstances in your life.

“CONSIDER” STUDIES

Throughout the text you will discover Bible studies to help you “consider” various situations you might be confronted with. Use the Articles Index in the front of this Bible to locate specific topics of interest.

JESUS THROUGH THE BIBLE

The Jesus Through the Bible articles are helpful tools for understanding how the Bible truly is one story—the story of God's plan of salvation as fulfilled through His Son, Jesus Christ. These notes help you discover the presence and attributes of Jesus Christ throughout the Old and New Testaments. For example, observe how Jesus is foreshadowed as our High Priest in the Book of Exodus and how His title as Lamb of God can be seen in Leviticus.

GROWING IN CHRIST

The Growing in Christ articles help you walk through God's plan of salvation as it unfolds through the Old Testament and is fully revealed with the birth, life, and ministry of Jesus in the

New Testament. This series of short articles will also help you explore the path of discipleship. Let the questions found at the end of each article help prompt you in your growth in Christ.

GOING DEEPER STUDIES

These short devotions will help you ponder your faith and will answer some of the hard questions that may be on your mind. The studies cover a variety of topics, such as how to know that you're saved, how to pray, how to face temptation, and much more.

GOD CARES FOR YOU VERSES

These verses reveal more about who Jesus is and what He did for you. They will help you personalize God's message and draw closer to your Savior.

GROWING UP SPIRITUALLY VERSES

These verses cover topics of spiritual growth such as your daily walk with God, listening to Him, and forgiving others.

"WHERE TO TURN WHEN" SCRIPTURE LIST

This list leads you to relevant verses for many of life's complicated questions and situations.

—Karen Davis Hill, Executive Editor for Max Lucado

A WORD OF THANKS

FROM THE GENERAL EDITOR, MAX LUCADO

You're reading the work of a small army of professionals who spent a couple of years producing *The Lucado Encouraging Word Bible*. This project would not have been completed (or even begun) without the steadfast diligence of my Editorial Assistant, Karen Hill. She tirelessly poured over each and every page. Thank you, Karen. In addition, my deepest gratitude to Daniel Marrs and Jill Smith for shepherding this project all along the way; Jenna Lucado Bishop, Ashley Riggs, Christopher Hudson, and Len Woods for editorial and creative contributions, and a host of proofreaders and designers for creating a readable, beautiful, encouraging Bible.

THE BOOK OF
ROMANS

INTRODUCTION

At the moment I don't feel too smart. I just got off the wrong plane that took me to the wrong city and left me at the wrong airport. I went east instead of west and ended up in Houston instead of Denver.

It didn't look like the wrong plane, but it was. I walked through the wrong gate, dozed off on the wrong flight, and ended up in the wrong place.

Paul says we've all done the same thing. Not with airplanes and airports, but with our lives and God. He tells the Roman readers,

"There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10).

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23).

We are all on the wrong plane, he says. All of us. Gentile and Jew. Every person has taken the wrong turn. And we need help.

In this profound epistle, Paul explores all the wrong options and takes us to the only correct one. The wrong solutions are pleasure and pride (see chs. 1–2); the correct solution is Christ Jesus (see 3:21–26). According to Paul, we are saved by grace (undeserved, unearned favor) through faith (complete trust) in Jesus and His work.

The letter concludes with practical instruction for a growing church, including thoughts on spiritual gifts (see 12:3–8); genuine love (see 12:9–21); good citizenship (see ch. 13). The final chapters provide brilliant instruction for dealing with everything from church division to difficult brethren.

Romans is a life-changing letter for people who are willing to admit they are sinners. For those who admit they are on the wrong plane, the letter provides the correct itinerary.

Read it and take note. That flight home is one you don't want to miss.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

AUTHOR:

Paul

DATE WRITTEN:

c. AD 57

KEY THEMES:

- All people are in need of a relationship with God.
- God has prepared for that relationship through His own sacrifice.
- Faith is the requirement of that relationship.
- Forgiveness is available from God for anyone.

KEY PEOPLE:

Paul, the church in Rome

KEY VERSE:

"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

CONTENTS:

- I. The Bad News—The Nature of Humanity 1:1—3:20
- II. The Good News 3:21—5:21
- III. The Ongoing Problem of Sin 6:1—8:39
- IV. Israel's Place in God's Plan 9:1—11:36
- V. Christian Living 12:1—16:27

GREETING

1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God ²which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, ³concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴and declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. ⁵Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, ⁶among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

⁷To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

DESIRE TO VISIT ROME

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. ⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, ¹⁰making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. ¹¹For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— ¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

¹³Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. ¹⁴I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. ¹⁵So, as much as is in me, *I am* ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

THE JUST LIVE BY FAITH

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,^a for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”^a

GOD’S WRATH ON UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.



1:1–32

SITUATION

Paul wrote this letter to teach the Christian faith to the first believers in Rome. He taught that no one deserves God’s love.

OBSERVATION

Sin paints an ugly picture in people and in a culture. Without God’s intervention, we have no way to deal with sin.

INSPIRATION

An uninfected computer can be bought—but an uninfected person? Impossible. Trace a computer virus back to a hacker. Trace our mental viruses back to the fall of the first man, Adam. Because of sin, our minds are full of dark thoughts. “Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools” (vv. 21–22).

Sin messes with the mind. But what if the virus never entered? Suppose a person never opened Satan’s emails? What would that person be like?

A lot like the twelve-year-old boy seated in the temple of Jerusalem. Though He was beardless and unadorned, this boy’s thoughts were profound. Just ask the theologians with whom He conversed. Luke gives this account: “[His parents] found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers” (Luke 2:46–47).

For three days Joseph and Mary were separated from Jesus. The temple was the last place they thought to search. But it was the first place Jesus went. He didn’t go to a cousin’s house or a buddy’s playground. Jesus sought the place of godly thinking and, in doing so, inspires us to do the same. By the time Joseph and

1:16^aNU-Text omits of Christ. 1:17^aHabakkuk 2:4

Mary located their son, He had confounded the most learned men in the temple. This boy did not think like a boy.

Why? What made Jesus different? The Bible is silent about His IQ. When it comes to the RAM size of His mental computer, we are told nothing. But when it comes to His purity of mind, we are given this astounding claim: Christ “knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). Peter says Jesus “committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth” (1 Pet. 2:22). John lived next to Him for three years and concluded, “In Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5).

Guess what. That is God’s goal for you! You are made to be like

²⁴Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. ²⁷Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

²⁸And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality,^a wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, ³⁰backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud,

1:29^aNU-Text omits *sexual immorality*.

CONSIDER: ANGER OF GOD

We have to see the mess we are in before we can appreciate the God we have. Before presenting the grace of God, we must understand the wrath of God.

Many don’t understand God’s anger because they confuse the wrath of God with the wrath of man. The two have little in common. Human anger is typically self-driven and prone to explosions of temper and violent deeds. We get ticked off because we’ve been overlooked, neglected, or cheated. This is the anger of man. It is not, however, the anger of God.

God doesn’t get angry because He doesn’t get His way. He gets angry because disobedience always results in self-destruction. What kind of father sits by and watches his child hurt himself?

What kind of God would do the same? Do we think He giggles at adultery or snickers at murder? Do you think He looks the other way when we produce television talk shows based on perverse pleasures? Does He shake His head and say, “Humans will be humans”?

I don’t think so. Mark it down and underline it in red. God is rightfully angry. God is a holy God. Our sins are an affront to His holiness. His eyes “cannot look on wickedness” (Hab. 1:13).

God is angry at the evil that ruins His children.

The question is not, “How dare a loving God be angry?” but rather, “How could a loving God feel anything less?”

STUDY GUIDE

READ ROMANS 1:18–20.

- When have you seen righteous anger?
- Describe in your own words the difference between God’s anger and human anger.
- Compare God’s discipline to the way a parent disciplines a child.
- What does it mean to you that a God powerful enough to destroy us, loves us enough to discipline us?
- What feelings or attitudes keep us from returning to God after we have suffered the consequences of our own sin?
- If we know that sin destroys us, why do we keep on sinning?
- In what ways does God’s anger lead us to His grace?
- In the last few weeks, how has God helped you resist temptation?

boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,³¹ undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving,^a unmerciful;³² who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

2 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.² But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.³ And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵ But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶ who “will render to each one according to his deeds”;^a ⁷ eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; ⁸ but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, ⁹ tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; ¹⁰ but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹ For there is no partiality with God.

¹² For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law ¹³ (for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; ¹⁴ for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*) ¹⁶ in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

THE JEWS GUILTY AS THE GENTILES

¹⁷ Indeed^a you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, ¹⁸ and know *His* will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, ¹⁹ and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. ²¹ You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? ²² You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? ²⁴ For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,”^a as it is written.

Christ! God's priority is that you be “transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). You may have been born virus-prone, but you don't have to live that way. There is hope for your head! Are you a worrywart? Don't have to be one forever. Guilt plagued and shame stained? Prone to anger? Jealousy? God can take care of that. God can change your mind.

APPLICATION

How does the bleak side of life reflect your experience? Is that where you were? Is that where you are? If it is, switch sides—join God's side. If you already have, then thank Him throughout the day for His mercy.



2:1–3:8

SITUATION

Paul encouraged the church in Rome to be set apart from the world. God made a right relationship with Him available to all people.

OBSERVATION

God hates sin and desires all to follow Him in word and action.

INSPIRATION

I've wondered, at times, what kind of man this Judas was. What he looked like, how he acted, who his friends were.

But for all the things we don't know about Judas, there is one thing we know for sure: he had no relationship with the Master. He had seen Jesus, but he did not know Him. He had heard Jesus, but he did not understand Him. He had religion, but no relationship.

As Satan worked his way around the table in the upper room, he needed a special kind of man to betray our Lord. He needed a man who had seen Jesus but did not know Him. He needed a man who knew the actions of

1:31^a NU-Text omits *unforgiving*. 2:6^a Psalm 62:12; Proverbs 24:12
2:17^a NU-Text reads *But if*. 2:24^a Isaiah 52:5; Ezekiel 36:22

Jesus but had missed out on the mission of Jesus. Judas was this man. He knew the empire but had never known the Man.

We learn this timeless lesson from the betrayer. Satan's best tools of destruction are not from outside the church, they are from within the church. A church will never die from the immorality in Hollywood or the corruption in Washington. But it will die from corrosion within—from those who bear the name of Jesus but have never met Him, and from those who have religion, but no relationship.

Judas bore the cloak of religion, but he never knew the heart of Christ. Let's make it our goal to know . . . deeply.

APPLICATION

Spend uninterrupted time with Christ today. Tell Him your thoughts, dreams, worries, sins.

CIRCUMCISION OF NO AVAIL

²⁵For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? ²⁷And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, *even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?* ²⁸For he is not a Jew who is *one outwardly*, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹but *he is a Jew who is one inwardly*; and circumcision is *that of the heart*, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

GOD'S JUDGMENT DEFENDED

3 What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? ²Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. ³For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? ⁴Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written:

“That You may be justified in Your words,
And may overcome when You are judged.”^a

3:4^a Psalm 51:4



Jesus Through the Bible

Jesus: The Judge of the Living and the Dead

“You are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things” (Rom. 2:1).

Who is this person? It could be anyone (“O man, whoever you are”) who filters God's grace through his own opinion. Anyone who dilutes God's mercy with his own prejudice. He is the prodigal son's elder brother who wouldn't attend the party (see Luke 15:11–32). He is the ten-hour worker, upset because the one-hour worker got the same wage (see Matt. 20:1–16). He is the fault-finding brother obsessed by his brother's sins and oblivious to his own.

If you “judge another,” Paul has a stern reminder for you. It's not your job to hold the gavel. “God judges those who do wrong things, and we know that his judging is right” (Rom. 2:2 ncv). The key word here is “judges.” It's one thing to have an opinion. It's quite another to pass a verdict. It's one thing to have a conviction; it's another to convict the person. It's one thing to be repulsed at the acts of a Jeffrey Dahmer (and I am). It's another entirely to claim that I am superior (I'm not) or that he is beyond the grace of God (no one is).

In his book *The Message of Romans*, John Stott wrote: “This [verse] is not a call either to suspend our critical faculties or to renounce all criticism and rebuke of others as illegitimate; it is rather a prohibition of standing in judgment on other people and condemning them (which as human beings we have no right to do), especially when we fail to condemn ourselves.”

It's our job to hate the sin. But it's God's job to deal with the sinner. God has called us to despise evil, but He's never called us to despise the evildoer. But, oh, how we would like to. Is there any act more delightful than judging others? There is something smug and self-satisfying about donning the robe, stepping behind the bench, and slamming down the gavel. “Guilty!”

Besides, judging others is the quick and easy way to feel good about ourselves. A convenience store ego boost. Standing next to all the Mussolinis and Hitlers and Dahmers of the world, we boast, “Look, God, compared to them, I'm not too bad.”

But that's the problem. God doesn't compare us to them. They aren't the standard. God is. And compared to Him, Paul will argue, “There is none who does good, no, not one” (3:12).

For more on Jesus Through the Bible, see Jesus: A God of Everlasting Love.

⁵But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? *Is God unjust who inflicts wrath?* (I speak as a man.) ⁶Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?

⁷For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? ⁸And *why* not say, “Let us do evil that good may come”?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.

ALL HAVE SINNED

⁹What then? Are we better *than they*? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

¹⁰As it is written:

- “There is none righteous, no, not one;
¹¹ There is none who understands;
 There is none who seeks after God.
¹² They have all turned aside;
 They have together become unprofitable;
 There is none who does good, no, not one.”^a
¹³ “Their throat is an open tomb;
 With their tongues they have practiced deceit”;^a
 “The poison of asps is under their lips”;^b
¹⁴ “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”^a
¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood;
¹⁶ Destruction and misery are in their ways;
¹⁷ And the way of peace they have not known.”^a
¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”^a

¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH

²¹But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²²even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all^a who believe. For there is no difference; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

BOASTING EXCLUDED

²⁷Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸Therefore we conclude that

^{3:12}^a Psalms 14:1–3; 53:1–3; Ecclesiastes 7:20 ^{3:13}^a Psalm 5:9 ^b Psalm 140:3
^{3:14}^a Psalm 10:7 ^{3:17}^a Isaiah 59:7, 8 ^{3:18}^a Psalm 36:1 ^{3:22}^a NU-Text omits *and on all*.



3:9–31

SITUATION

Paul showed that no one can claim innocence. Everyone has sinned. But through Christ’s death on the cross God has redeemed us.

OBSERVATION

Willing and ready, God will forgive us if we come to Him in faith.

INSPIRATION

God is building a family. A permanent family. Earthly families enjoy short shelf lives. Even those that sidestep divorce are eventually divided by death. God’s family, however, will outlive the universe. “I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph. 3:14–15).

Jesus even defined His family according to faith not flesh. “A multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, ‘Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You.’ But He answered them, saying, ‘Who is My mother, or My brothers? . . . Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother’” (Mark 3:32–33, 35).

When you transfer your trust into Christ, He not only pardons you; He places you in His family of friends.

Common belief identifies members of God’s family. And common affection unites them. Paul gives this relationship rule for the church: “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love” (Rom. 12:10). The apostle plays the wordsmith here, bookending the verse with fraternal-twin terms. He begins with *philostorgos* (*philos* means friendly; *storgos* means family love) and concludes with *philadelphia* (*phileo* means tender affection; *adelphia* means brethren). An awkward but accurate translation of the verse might be “Have a friend-family devotion to each other in a friend-family sort of way.” If Paul doesn’t get us with the first adjective, he catches us with the second. In both he reminds us: the church is God’s family.

You didn’t pick me. I didn’t pick you. You may not like me. I may not like you. But since God picked and likes us both, we are family.

APPLICATION

Have you accepted the free gift of God, forgiveness and eternal life, won for you by Christ? Submit to Christ’s rule in your life and kneel to His lordship. Don’t wait. Join God’s forever family.



4:1-25

SITUATION

Paul showed that Abraham's leadership in God's family was due to faith.

OBSERVATION

We accept God's gift by faith; we cannot earn it by good works.

INSPIRATION

Jesus makes no mention of Nicodemus's VIP status, good intentions, or academic credentials, not because they don't exist, but because, in Jesus' algorithm, they don't matter. He simply issues this proclamation: "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Behold the Continental Divide of Scripture, the International Date Line of faith. Nicodemus stands on one side, Jesus on the other, and Christ pulls no punches about their differences.

Nicodemus inhabits a land of good efforts, sincere gestures, and hard work. Give God your best, his philosophy says, and God does the rest.

Jesus' response? Your best won't do. Your works don't work. Your finest efforts don't mean squat. Unless you are born again, you can't even see what God is up to.

Nicodemus hesitates on behalf of us all. Born again? "How can a man be born when he is old?" (John 3:4). You must be kidding. Put life in reverse? Rewind the tape? Start all over? We can't be born again.

Oh, but wouldn't we like to? A do-over. A try-again. A reload. Broken hearts and missed opportunities bob in our wake. A mulligan would be nice. Who wouldn't cherish a second shot? But who can pull it off? Nicodemus scratches his chin and chuckles.

"Yeah, a graybeard like me gets a maternity-ward recall." Jesus doesn't crack a smile. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). About this time a gust of wind blows a few leaves through the still-open door. Jesus picks one off the floor and holds it up. God's power works like that wind, Jesus explains. Newborn hearts are born of heaven. You can't wish, earn, or create one. New birth? Inconceivable. God handles the task, start to finish.

Nicodemus looks around the room at the followers. Their blank expressions betray equal bewilderment.

a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.²⁹ Or is *He* the God of the Jews only? Is *He* not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also,³⁰ since *there* is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.³¹ Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

ABRAHAM JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

4 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?^a ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."^a ⁴Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

DAVID CELEBRATES THE SAME TRUTH

⁵But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, ⁶just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

- ⁷ "Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
And whose sins are covered;
⁸ Blessed *is the man* to whom the LORD
shall not impute sin."^a

ABRAHAM JUSTIFIED BEFORE CIRCUMCISION

⁹Does this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. ¹¹And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, ¹²and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised.

THE PROMISE GRANTED THROUGH FAITH

¹³For the promise that he would be the heir of the world *was* not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if those who are of the law *are* heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, ¹⁵because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law *there is* no transgression.

¹⁶Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all ¹⁷(as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations"^a) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls

4:1^a Or *Abraham our (fore)father according to the flesh has found?*

4:3^a Genesis 15:6 4:8^a Psalm 32:1, 2 4:17^a Genesis 17:5

those things which do not exist as though they did; ¹⁸who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “So shall your descendants be.”^a ¹⁹And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, ²¹and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. ²²And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.”^a

²³Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, ²⁴but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

FAITH TRIUMPHS IN TROUBLE

5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have^a peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces

4:18^a Genesis 15:5 4:22^a Genesis 15:6 5:1^a Another ancient reading is, *let us have peace.*

Old Nick has no hook upon which to hang such thoughts. He speaks self-fix. But Jesus speaks—indeed introduces—a different language. Not works born of men and women, but a work done by God.

APPLICATION

Picture yourself at a department store. On the shelf you see something you’ve wanted for years, but the price is still too high. How would you feel if a caring friend or relative bought the item, wrapped it, and gave it to you? Thank God for giving you a gift you could never afford.



5:1-21

SITUATION

Paul described the experience of salvation for Christians. He outlined the magnitude of God’s love revealed in Jesus Christ.

OBSERVATION

God proved His love by giving His Son to die on the cross on our

CONSIDER: *DISAPPOINTMENT*

If God is good, why do I hurt so bad?

Though the circumstances have changed, the questions haven’t. They are asked anytime the faithful suffer the consequences of the faithless. Anytime a person takes a step in the right direction, only to have her feet knocked out from under her, anytime a person does a good deed but suffers evil results, anytime a person takes a stand, only to end up flat on his face . . . the questions fall like rain.

“If God is really there, why am I here?”

“What did I do to deserve this?”

“Why are the righteous persecuted?”

Does God sometimes sit on His hands?

Does God sometimes choose to do nothing?

Does God sometimes opt for silence even when I’m screaming my loudest?

If you’ve asked for a mate, but you are still sleeping alone . . . if you’ve asked for a child, but your womb stays barren . . . if you’ve asked for healing, but you are still hurting . . . don’t think God isn’t listening. He is. And He is answering requests you are not even making.

STUDY GUIDE

READ ROMANS 5:1-8.

- How would you answer the question, “Why is life so unfair?”
- What helps you keep going when life is unfair?
- What unfair treatment did Christ endure? Why?
- How can Christ’s example help us endure unfair hardships?
- What was the goal Christ had in mind that helped Him endure His suffering?
- What kind of mindset can help carry us through life’s difficulties?
- Why does God allow the godly to suffer?
- What have you prayed for that you feel has not been heard?
- What can you do this week as a step of faith that God is still listening?

behalf while we were still sinners. Christians now have peace with God because they have been forgiven. They rejoice because they are assured of their salvation.

INSPIRATION

“Free flight: Rio de Janeiro to Miami, Florida.” I wasn’t the only person to hear about the offer but one of the few to phone and request details. The courier service offered an airline ticket to anyone willing to carry a bag of mail to the States. The deal was tantalizingly simple. No company makes such offers anymore. But this was 1985—years before intense airport security. My dad was dying of ALS, airline tickets were expensive, and my checking account was as thin as a Paris supermodel. Free ticket? The offer sounded too good to be true.

So I walked away from it.

Many do the same with John 3:16. Millions read the verse. Only a handful trust it. Wary of a catch perhaps? Not needy enough maybe? Cautioned by guarded friends?

I was. Other Rio residents saw the same offer. Some read it and smelled a rat. “Don’t risk it,” one warned me. “Better to buy your own ticket.”

But I couldn’t afford one. Each call to Mom brought worse news.

“He’s back in the hospital.”

“Unable to breathe without oxygen.”

“The doctor says it’s time to call hospice.”

So I revisited the flyer. Desperation heightened my interest.

Doesn’t it always?

When he asks for a divorce or she says, “It’s over.” When the coroner calls, the kids rebel, or the finances collapse. When desperation typhoons into your world, God’s offer of a free flight home demands a second look. John 3:16 morphs from a nice verse to a life vest.

Some of you are wearing it. You can recount the day you put it on. For you, the passage comforts like your favorite blanket:

God so loved . . .

believes in Him . . .

shall not perish . . .

eternal life.

These words have kept you company through multiple wind-swept winters. I pray they warm you through the ones that remain.

Others of you are still studying the flyer. Still pondering the

perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

CHRIST IN OUR PLACE

⁶For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ¹⁰For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

DEATH IN ADAM, LIFE IN CHRIST

¹²Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned— ¹³(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. ¹⁶And the gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned. For the judgment *which came* from one *offense resulted* in condemnation, but the free gift *which came* from many offenses *resulted* in justification. ¹⁷For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

¹⁸Therefore, as through one man’s offense *judgment came* to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.

²⁰Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, ²¹so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

DEAD TO SIN, ALIVE TO GOD

6 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ²Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

⁵For if we have been united together in the likeness of His

death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness of His* resurrection, ⁶knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

FROM SLAVES OF SIN TO SLAVES OF GOD

¹⁵What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? ¹⁷But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading* to *more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves of righteousness for holiness.

²⁰For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death. ²²But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. ²³For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

FREED FROM THE LAW

7 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? ²For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband. ³So then if, while *her* husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. ⁴Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. ⁵For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. ⁶But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter.

possibility, wrestling with the promise. One day wondering what kind of fool offer this is, the next wondering what kind of fool would turn it down.

I urge you not to. Don't walk away from this one. Who else can get you home? Who else has turned His grave into a changing closet and offered to do the same with yours? Take Jesus' offer. Get on board. You don't want to miss this chance to see your Father.

I didn't. I called the company and signed up. Denalyn drove me to the airport. I found the courier employee, accepted the passage, checked the bag, and took my seat on the plane, smiling as though I'd just found a forgotten gift under the Christmas tree.

Do likewise. You don't need to go to the airport, but you do need to make a move. You need to give God your answer:

"Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in" (Eph. 3:17 MSG). Say yes to Him. Your prayer needs no eloquence, just honesty.

APPLICATION

When God's love impacts our lives, it completely changes us so that selfishness turns to generosity. How would you describe your life before and after becoming a Christian? What major changes have you experienced since becoming a Christian? Write your story down and read it when you feel discouraged.



6:1-23

SITUATION

Since Christ's righteousness brought us into a favored relationship with God, we should live by God's standards.

OBSERVATION

Christians are not slaves to sin but can overcome by the power of God.

INSPIRATION

Think of it this way. Sin put you in prison. Sin locked you behind the bars of guilt and shame and deception and fear. Sin did nothing but shackle you to the wall of misery. Then Jesus came and paid your bail. He served your time; He satisfied the penalty and set you free. Christ died, and when you cast your lot with Him, your old self died too.

The only way to be set free from the prison of sin is to serve its

penalty. In this case the penalty is death. Someone has to die, either you or a heaven-sent substitute. You cannot leave prison unless there is a death. But that death has occurred at Calvary. And when Jesus died, you died to sin's claim on your life. You are free.

Christ has taken your place. There is no need for you to remain in the cell. Ever heard of a discharged prisoner who wanted to stay? Nor have I. When the doors open, prisoners leave. The thought of a person preferring jail over freedom doesn't compute. Once the penalty is paid, why live under bondage? You are discharged from the penitentiary of sin. Why, in heaven's name, would you ever want to set foot in that prison again?

Paul reminds us: "Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin" (vv. 6–7).

He is not saying that it is impossible for believers to sin; he's saying it is stupid for believers to sin. It's not the literal impossibility, but the moral incongruity of the saved returning to sin.

What does the prison have that you desire? Do you miss the guilt? Are you homesick for dishonesty? Do you have fond memories of being lied to and forgotten? Was life better when you were dejected and rejected? Do you have a longing to once again see a sinner in the mirror?

It makes no sense to go back to prison.

APPLICATION

Select a habit that you'd like to kick, a habit that hurts your life. Pray for help. Write down three steps you can take to remove that habit from your life. Do it today—enjoy your new life.



FOR YOUR
JOURNEY

7:1–25

SITUATION

Paul taught the Romans that the law could never guarantee eternal life. He proved again that Jesus Christ could save.

OBSERVATION

The Bible teaches us how sinful we have become, but Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit provide the power to overcome sin.

INSPIRATION

You and I know what it is like to endure a moment of temptation

SIN'S ADVANTAGE IN THE LAW

⁷What shall we say then? *Is the law sin?* Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."^a ⁸But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all *manner of evil* desire. For apart from the law sin *was* dead. ⁹I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. ¹⁰And the commandment, which *was* to *bring* life, I found to *bring* death. ¹¹For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed *me*. ¹²Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

LAW CANNOT SAVE FROM SIN

¹³Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. ¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. ¹⁶If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good. ¹⁷But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹For the good that I will to *do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not to *do*, that I practice. ²⁰Now if I do what I will not to *do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

²¹I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²²For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

FREE FROM INDWELLING SIN

8 *There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,^a who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. ⁷Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to

7:7^a Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21 8:1^a NU-Text omits the rest of this verse.

the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. ¹¹But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

SONSHIP THROUGH THE SPIRIT

¹²Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

FROM SUFFERING TO GLORY

¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ¹⁹For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; ²¹because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance.

²⁶Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us^a with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

²⁸And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren. ³⁰Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

or an hour of temptation, even a day of temptation. But *forty days*? That is what Jesus faced. “Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil” (Luke 4:1–2).

We imagine the wilderness temptation as three isolated events scattered over a forty-day period. Would that it had been. In reality, Jesus’ time of testing was nonstop, being tempted for forty days by the devil. Satan got on Jesus like a shirt and refused to leave. Every step, whispering in His ear. Every turn of the path, sowing doubt. Was Jesus impacted by the devil?

Apparently so. Luke doesn’t say that Satan *tried* to tempt Jesus. No, the passage is clear: “tempted for forty days by the devil.” Jesus was *tempted*; He was tested. Tempted to change sides? Tempted to go home? Tempted to settle for a kingdom on earth? I don’t know, but I know He was tempted. A war raged within. Stress stormed without.

Like Jesus we are tempted. Like Jesus we are accused. But unlike Jesus, we give up. We give out. We sit down. How can our hearts have the endurance Jesus had?

By focusing where Jesus focused: on “the joy that was set before Him” (Heb. 12:2). He lifted His eyes beyond the horizon and saw the table. He focused on the feast. And what He saw gave Him strength to finish—and finish strong.

Such a moment awaits us. In an hour that has no end, we will rest. Surrounded by saints and engulfed by Jesus Himself, the work will, indeed, be finished. The final harvest will have been gathered, and we will be seated, and Christ will christen the meal with these words: “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:23).

APPLICATION

What sin do you struggle to avoid? Thank God that He will one day rescue you from the struggle. Until then, let a prayer for strength be a reflex reaction to temptations.



8:1–39

SITUATION

In one of the greatest chapters in the Bible, Paul reminds believers that through Jesus, condemnation is finished and they are adopted children of Abba Father. He urges them to follow the Spirit

8:26^aNU-Text omits *for us*.

instead of their sinful natures. He states that absolutely nothing can separate us from God's love and that God is always working things for our good.

OBSERVATION

Even though not everything that happens in our life is good, God delights in working for our good in everything.

INSPIRATION

God at times permits tragedies. He permits the ground to grow dry and stalks to grow bare. He allows Satan to unleash mayhem. But He doesn't allow Satan to triumph. Isn't this the promise of Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose"? God promises to render beauty out

GOD'S EVERLASTING LOVE

³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies. ³⁴Who is he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written:

"For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."^a

³⁷Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸For I am persuaded that neither

8:36^a Psalm 44:22

CONSIDER: ADOPTED

Can you imagine prospective parents saying, "We'd like to adopt Johnny, but first we want to know a few things. Does he have a house to live in? Does he have money for tuition? Does he have a ride to school every morning and clothes to wear every day? Can he prepare his own meals and mend his own clothes?"

No agency would stand for such talk. Its representative would lift her hand and say, "Wait a minute. You don't understand. You don't adopt Johnny because of what he has; you adopt him because of what he needs. He needs a home."

The same is true with God. He doesn't adopt us because of what we have. He doesn't give us His name because of our wit or wallet or good attitude. Adoption is something we receive, not something we earn.

We are welcome in God's house because we have been adopted by the owner. God has adopted you. God sought you, found you, signed the papers and took you home.

It would be enough if God just cleansed your name, but He does more. He gives you His name. It would be enough if God just set you free, but He does more. He takes you home . . . God adopted you simply because He wanted to. You were in His good will and pleasure. Knowing full well the trouble you would be and the price He would pay, He signed His name next to yours and changed your name

to His and took you home. Your Abba adopted you and became your Father.

STUDY GUIDE

READ ROMANS 8:12-17.

- How does salvation compare with adoption?
- List some advantages of being God's child rather than just His creation.
- How has God been like a good father to you?
- How would your life be different if you didn't belong to God?
- In what ways have you tried to work for your "sonship" rather than just accepting your adoption into God's family?
- Why do people expect punishment rather than grace when they think about returning to God?
- What is our inheritance as God's children?
- In what ways do we share our inheritance with Jesus Christ?
- As children of God, how do we share in Christ's sufferings?

death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF CHRIST

9 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,² that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen^a according to the flesh,⁴ who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of *God*, and the promises;⁵ of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen.

ISRAEL'S REJECTION AND GOD'S PURPOSE

⁶But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel,⁷ nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called."^a ⁸That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children

9:3^aOr *relatives* 9:7^aGenesis 21:12



Jesus Through the Bible

Jesus: A God of Everlasting Love

Can anything separate us from the love Christ has for us?

Stepping from the throne, He removed His robe of light and wrapped Himself in skin, pigmented, human skin. The light of the universe entered a dark, wet womb. He whom angels worship nestled Himself in the placenta of a peasant, was birthed into the cold night, and then slept on cow's hay.

Mary didn't know whether to give Him milk or give Him praise, but she gave Him both since He was, as near as she could figure, hungry and holy. Joseph didn't know whether to call Him Junior or Father. But in the end called Him Jesus, since that's what the angel said and since he didn't have the faintest idea what to name a God he could cradle in his arms.

Don't you think their heads tilted and their minds wondered, *What in the world are You doing, God?* Or, better phrased, *God, what are You doing in the world?*

"Can anything make Me stop loving you?" God asked. "Watch Me speak your language, sleep on your earth, and feel your hurts. Behold

of "all things," not "each thing." The isolated events may be evil, but the ultimate culmination is good.

We see small examples of this in our own lives. When you sip on a cup of coffee and say, "This is good," what are you saying? The plastic bag that contains the beans is good? The beans themselves are good? Hot water is good? A coffee filter is good? No, none of these. Good happens when the ingredients work together: the bag opened, the beans ground into powder, the water heated to the right temperature. It is the collective cooperation of the elements that creates good.

Nothing in the Bible would cause us to call a famine good or a heart attack good or a terrorist attack good. These are terrible calamities, born out of a fallen earth. Yet every message in the Bible, especially the story of Joseph, compels us to believe that God will mix them with other ingredients and bring good out of them.

But we must let God define *good*. Our definition includes health, comfort, and recognition. His definition? In the case of his Son, Jesus Christ, the

the maker of sight and sound as He sneezes, coughs, and blows His nose. You wonder if I understand how you feel? Look into the dancing eyes of the kid in Nazareth; that's God walking to school. Ponder the toddler at Mary's table; that's God spilling His milk.

"You wonder how long My love will last? Find your answer on a splintered cross, on a craggy hill. That's Me you see up there, your maker, your God, nail-stabbed and bleeding. Covered in spit and sin-soaked. That's your sin I'm feeling. That's your death I'm dying. That's your resurrection I'm living. That's how much I love you."

"Can anything come between you and Me?" asks the firstborn Son.

Hear the answer and stake your future on the triumphant words of Paul: "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38–39).

For more on Jesus Through the Bible, see Jesus: We Are One in Him.

good life consisted of struggles, storms, and death. But God worked it all together for the greatest of good: His glory and our salvation.

Our choice comes down to this: trust God or turn away. He will cross the line. He will shatter our expectations. And we will be left to make a decision.

Is God good when the outcome is not? During the famine as well as the feast? The definitive answer comes in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the only picture of God ever taken. Do you want to know heaven's clearest answer to the question of suffering? Look at Jesus.

APPLICATION

Recall a time in your life that wasn't good. Ask God to help you see the good He worked in that situation. Have dinner with a discouraged friend and encourage him or her with your story.



FOR YOUR
JOURNEY

9:1-33

SITUATION

Paul reminded the Romans that no good work could bring salvation. Rather, God saves His people through His love.

OBSERVATION

The Sovereign God told Moses that He would show mercy where He wants to show mercy, although no one deserves or can earn His mercy.

INSPIRATION

When we come to Christ, God not only forgives us, He also adopts us. Through a dramatic series of events, we go from condemned orphans with no hope to adopted children with no fear. Here is how it happens. You come before the judgment seat of God full of rebellion and mistakes. Because of His justice He cannot dismiss your sin, but because of His love He cannot dismiss you. So, in an act which stunned the heavens, He punished Himself on the cross for your sins. God's justice and love are equally honored. And you, God's creation, are forgiven. But the story doesn't end with God's forgiveness.

It would be enough if God just cleansed your name, but He does more. He gives you *His* name. It would be enough if God just set you free, but He does more. He takes you home. He takes you home to the Great House of God.

Adoptive parents understand this more than anyone. I certainly don't mean to offend any biological

of the promise are counted as the seed. ⁹For this *is* the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son."^a

¹⁰And not only *this*, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac ¹¹(for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), ¹²it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger."^a ¹³As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."^a

ISRAEL'S REJECTION AND GOD'S JUSTICE

¹⁴What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! ¹⁵For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."^a ¹⁶So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. ¹⁷For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth."^a ¹⁸Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

¹⁹You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" ²⁰But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, "Why have you made me like this?" ²¹Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

²²*What* if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

²⁵As He says also in Hosea:

"I will call them My people, who were not My people,
And her beloved, who was not beloved."^a

²⁶"And it shall come to pass in the place
where it was said to them,
'You *are* not My people,'
There they shall be called sons of the living God."^a

²⁷Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel:^a

"Though the number of the children of
Israel be as the sand of the sea,
The remnant will be saved.

²⁸ For He will finish the work and cut
it short in righteousness,
Because the LORD will make a short
work upon the earth."^a

9:9^aGenesis 18:10, 14 9:12^aGenesis 25:23 9:13^aMalachi 1:2, 3

9:15^aExodus 33:19 9:17^aExodus 9:16 9:25^aHosea 2:23 9:26^aHosea 1:10
9:27^aIsaiah 10:22, 23 9:28^aNU-Text reads *For the LORD will finish the work
and cut it short upon the earth.*

²⁹And as Isaiah said before:

“Unless the LORD of Sabaoth^a had left us a seed,
We would have become like Sodom,
And we would have been made like Gomorrah.”^b

PRESENT CONDITION OF ISRAEL

³⁰What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; ³¹but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.^a ³²Why? Because *they did not seek it* by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law.^a For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. ³³As it is written:

“Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling
stone and rock of offense,
And whoever believes on Him will
not be put to shame.”^a

ISRAEL NEEDS THE GOSPEL

10 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel^a is that they may be saved. ²For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. ⁴For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

⁵For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, “The man who does those things shall live by them.”^a ⁶But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’”^a (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*)⁷ or, “‘Who will descend into the abyss?’”^a (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”^a (that is, the word of faith which we preach): ⁹that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”^a ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”^a

ISRAEL REJECTS THE GOSPEL

¹⁴How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

^{9:29}^aLiterally, in Hebrew, *Hosts* ^bIsaiah 1:9 ^{9:31}^aNU-Text omits of righteousness. ^{9:32}^aNU-Text reads *by works*. ^{9:33}^aIsaiah 8:14; 28:16 ^{10:1}^aNU-Text reads *them*. ^{10:5}^aLeviticus 18:5 ^{10:6}^aDeuteronomy 30:12 ^{10:7}^aDeuteronomy 30:13 ^{10:8}^aDeuteronomy 30:14 ^{10:11}^aIsaiah 28:16 ^{10:13}^aJoel 2:32

parents—I'm one myself. We biological parents know well the earnest longing to have a child. But in many cases our cribs were filled easily. We decided to have a child, and a child came. In fact, sometimes the child came with no decision. I've heard of unplanned pregnancies, but I've never heard of an unplanned adoption.

That's why adoptive parents understand God's passion to adopt us. They know what it means to feel an empty space inside. They know what it means to hunt, to set out on a mission, and take responsibility for a child with a spotted past and a dubious future. If anybody understands God's ardor for His children, it's someone who has rescued an orphan from despair, for that is what God has done for us.

God has adopted you. God sought you, found you, signed the papers and took you home.

APPLICATION

Since the Father has adopted you and shown you mercy, you should show mercy to others. Make a list of those to whom it is hard for you to show mercy. What could you do to soften your heart toward them? Act on what you know to be true.



10:1-21

SITUATION

Though the Old Testament emphasized God's mercy and pointed to God's salvation by faith, many first-century Jews preferred to count on their own righteousness to make them acceptable to God. Paul admires their zeal but is heartbroken that they have failed to understand God's plan for salvation.

OBSERVATION

God offers salvation to every individual, regardless of ethnic background. Salvation comes through believing in Jesus—no amount of good works can ever be sufficient to win God's approval.

INSPIRATION

He was our “Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:5–6). Who is a mediator but one who stands in between? And what did Christ do but stand in between God's anger and our punishment? Christ intercepted the wrath of heaven.

Who does that? What kind of person would take the blame for something he didn't do?

When you find the adjective, attach it to Jesus. “The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:6). God treated His innocent Son like the guilty human race, His Holy One like a lying scoundrel.

Christ lived the life we could not live and took the punishment we could not take to offer the hope we cannot resist. His sacrifice begs us to ask this question: if He so loved us, can we not love each other? Having been forgiven, can we not forgive? Having feasted at the table of grace, can we not share a few crumbs? “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

APPLICATION

Have you understood God’s plan for salvation? God welcomes you with open arms when you come to Him in faith. Trust God’s mercy, because it brings the joy of a relationship with God. Then share that mercy with others.



11:1–36

SITUATION

Were the Jews still God’s chosen people? What role did the non-Jewish people have? Paul set out to answer these questions.

OBSERVATION

Christians often feel superior to other groups—as if we had done something great to earn our acceptance before God. Instead, God’s gift of salvation should make us humble and grateful.

INSPIRATION

Paul calls the Holy Spirit a foretaste. “We have the Holy Spirit . . . as a foretaste of future glory” (Rom. 8:23 NLT). No person with a healthy appetite needs a definition for that word. Even as I draft this note, my mind drifts toward a few foretastes. Within an hour I’ll be in Denalyn’s kitchen sniffing the dinner trimmings like a Labrador sniffing for wild game. When she’s not looking, I’ll snatch a foretaste. Just a bite of turkey, a spoon of chili, a corner of bread—pre-dinner snacks stir appetites for the table.

Samplings from heaven’s kitchen do likewise. There are moments, perhaps far too few, when time evaporates and joy modulates and heaven hands you an hors d’oeuvre.

- Your newborn has passed from restlessness to rest. Beneath the amber light of a midnight moon, you trace a soft finger

“How beautiful are the feet of those who
preach the gospel of peace,^a
Who bring glad tidings of good things!”^b

¹⁶But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “LORD, who has believed our report?”^a ¹⁷So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

¹⁸But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed:

“Their sound has gone out to all the earth,
And their words to the ends of the world.”^a

¹⁹But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says:

“I will provoke you to jealousy by
those who are not a nation,
I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.”^a

²⁰But Isaiah is very bold and says:

“I was found by those who did not seek Me;
I was made manifest to those
who did not ask for Me.”^a

²¹But to Israel he says:

“All day long I have stretched out My hands
To a disobedient and contrary people.”^a

ISRAEL’S REJECTION NOT TOTAL

11 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ²God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, ³“LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life”?^a ⁴But what does the divine response say to him? “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”^a ⁵Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. ⁶And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.^a But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

⁷What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. ⁸Just as it is written:

“God has given them a spirit of stupor,
Eyes that they should not see
And ears that they should not hear,
To this very day.”^a

^{10:15}^aNU-Text omits *preach the gospel of peace, Who.* ^bIsaiah 52:7; Nahum 1:15 ^{10:16}^aIsaiah 53:1 ^{10:18}^aPsalms 19:4 ^{10:19}^aDeuteronomy 32:21 ^{10:20}^aIsaiah 65:1 ^{10:21}^aIsaiah 65:2 ^{11:3}^a1 Kings 19:10, 14 ^{11:4}^a1 Kings 19:18 ^{11:6}^aNU-Text omits the rest of this verse. ^{11:8}^aDeuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah 29:10

9And David says:

“Let their table become a snare and a trap,
A stumbling block and a recompense to them.

10 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see,
And bow down their back always.”^a

ISRAEL’S REJECTION NOT FINAL

11I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles. 12Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

13For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of them. 15For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead?

16For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches. 17And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, *remember that* you do not support the root, but the root *supports* you.

19You will say then, “Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.” 20Well *said*. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. 21For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. 22Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness,^a if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. 23And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who *are* natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree?

25For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26And so all Israel will be saved,^a as it is written:

“The Deliverer will come out of Zion,
And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

27 For this *is* My covenant with them,
When I take away their sins.”^a

28Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers. 29For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable. 30For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have

across tiny, sleeping eyes and wonder, *God gave you to me?*
A prelibation from heaven's winery.

- You're lost in the work you love to do, were made to do. As you step back from the moist canvas or hoed garden or rebuilt V8 engine, satisfaction flows within like a gulp of cool water, and the angel asks, "Another aperitif?"
- The lyrics to the hymn say what you couldn't but wanted to, and for a moment, a splendid moment, there are no wars, wounds, or tax returns. Just you, God, and a silent assurance that everything is right with the world.

Rather than dismiss or disregard such moments as good luck, relish them. They can attune you to heaven. So can tough ones. "Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23).

APPLICATION
Though we have a responsibility to follow Christ, we need to recognize we could only achieve it by God's Spirit.



11:10^a Psalm 69:22, 23 11:22^a NU-Text adds *of God*. 11:26^a Or *delivered*
11:27^a Isaiah 59:20, 21



12:1-21

SITUATION

Paul told the Roman Christians how to live so that their behavior would be worshipful to God.

OBSERVATION

God desires you to surrender every part of your life to Him.

INSPIRATION

Would you buy a house if you were only allowed to see one of its rooms? Would you purchase a car if you were permitted to see only its tires and a taillight? Would you pass judgment on a book after reading only one paragraph?

Nor would I.

Good judgment requires a broad picture. Not only is that true in purchasing houses, cars, and books, it's true in evaluating life. One failure doesn't make a person a failure; one achievement doesn't make a person a success.

"The end of the matter is better than its beginning," penned the sage (see Eccl. 7:8).

"Be patient when trouble comes," echoed the apostle Paul (see Rom. 12:12).

We only have a fragment. Life's mishaps and horrors are only a page out of a grand book. We must be slow about drawing conclusions. We must reserve judgment on life's storms until we know the whole story.

"Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things" (Matt. 6:34).

He should know. He is the Author of our story. And He has already written the final chapter.

APPLICATION

What particular sin stalks you? When does it seize you with temptation? As a safeguard, memorize Romans 12:1-2. Whenever you feel tempted, repeat these verses in your mind and by God's power plan not to sin.

now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³²For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!

³⁴"For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?"^a

³⁵"Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"^a

³⁶For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.

LIVING SACRIFICES TO GOD

12 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

SERVE GOD WITH SPIRITUAL GIFTS

³For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ⁴For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ⁶Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; ⁷or ministry, *let us use it* in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

BEHAVE LIKE A CHRISTIAN

⁹*Let love be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. ¹⁰*Be* kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; ¹¹not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹²rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; ¹³distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If it is possible, as much as depends

on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay;”^a says the Lord. ²⁰Therefore

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
If he is thirsty, give him a drink;
For in so doing you will heap coals
of fire on his head.”^a

²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

SUBMIT TO GOVERNMENT

13 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. ³For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. ⁵Therefore *you* must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. ⁷Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

⁸Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,”^a “You shall not covet,”^b and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”^c ¹⁰Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law.

PUT ON CHRIST

¹¹And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. ¹²The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.

THE LAW OF LIBERTY

14 Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things. ²For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables. ³Let not him

^{12:19}^a Deuteronomy 32:35 ^{12:20}^a Proverbs 25:21, 22 ^{13:9}^a NU-Text omits “You shall not bear false witness.” ^b Exodus 20:13–15, 17; Deuteronomy 5:17–19, 21 ^c Leviticus 19:18



13:1–14

SITUATION

Paul encouraged Christians to obey the government even though submitting to a pagan government would be difficult. He also encouraged Christians to love each other.

OBSERVATION

Christians should be well known in their communities for their obedience to government and their love for each other as well as for those outside the church.

INSPIRATION

God calls us to change the way we look at people. Not to see them as Gentiles or Jews, insiders or outsiders, liberals or conservatives. Not to label. To label is to libel. “We regard no one from a worldly point of view” (2 Cor. 5:16 NIV).

Let’s view people differently; let’s view them as we do ourselves. Blemished, perhaps. Unfinished, for certain. Yet once rescued and restored, we may shed light, like the two stained-glass windows in my office.

My brother found them on a junkyard heap. Some church had discarded them. Dee, a handy carpenter, reclaimed them. He repainted the chipped wood, repaired the worn frame. He sealed some of the cracks in the colored glass. The windows aren’t perfect. But if suspended where the sun can pass through, they cascade multicolored light into the room.

In our lifetimes you and I are going to come across some discarded people. Tossed out. Sometimes tossed out by a church. And we get to choose. Neglect or rescue? Label them or love them? We know Jesus’ choice. Just look at what He did with us.

APPLICATION

Say a prayer for your governmental leaders. Whether you agree with them or not, they need your prayers because God has placed them in their positions. And pray for those of your community who have been “discarded.” How might you and your church help?



14:1–15:13

SITUATION

Paul continued to call Christians to unity and love, particularly between those who were weak or

strong in their faith and walk with God. Paul addressed the habit of holy days and the eating of meat sacrificed to idols.

OBSERVATION

The church should be marked by how we love each other rather than how we judge each other.

INSPIRATION

None of us can do what all of us can do. Remember His commission to the disciples? “You [all of you collectively] shall be witnesses to Me” (Acts 1:8). Jesus didn’t issue individual assignments. He didn’t move one by one down the line and knight each individual.

“You, Peter, will be My witness . . .”

“You, John, will be My witness . . .”

“You, Mary Magdalene, will be My witness . . .”

But rather, “You [the sum of you] shall be witnesses to Me.” Jesus works in community.

We are in this together. We are more than followers of Christ, disciples of Christ. “We are members of His body” (Eph. 5:30). “He is the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18). I am not His body; you are not His body. We—together—are His body.

But His body has been known to misbehave. The brain discounts the heart. (Academics discount worshippers.) The hands criticize the knees. (People of action criticize people of prayer.) The eyes refuse to partner with the feet. (Visionary thinkers won’t work with steady laborers.)

What if the whole body were an eye? If you were a collection of eyeballs, how would you function? Five eyes on your hand, which is an eye, attached to your arm-sized eye, affixed to a torso eye from which extends your neck eye, and . . . The thought is ludicrous! You’d have to bathe in Visine. But, then again, you couldn’t bathe, for you wouldn’t have hands.

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’” (1 Cor. 12:21).

No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.

Our only hope is to work together.

APPLICATION

Examine your own taboos and look for some that may be unnecessary points of contention with other Christians.

who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. ⁴Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

⁵One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord;^a and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. ⁷For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. ⁸For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. ⁹For to this end Christ died and rose^a and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.^a ¹¹For it is written:

“As I live, says the LORD,
Every knee shall bow to Me,
And every tongue shall confess to God.”^a

¹²So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. ¹³Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother’s way.

THE LAW OF LOVE

¹⁴I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is nothing unclean of itself*; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is unclean*. ¹⁵Yet if your brother is grieved because of *your* food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸For he who serves Christ in these things^a *is acceptable to God and approved by men*.

¹⁹Therefore let us pursue the things *which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another*. ²⁰Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed *are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense*. ²¹*It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.*^a ²²Do you have faith? Have^a *it to yourself before God*. Happy *is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves*. ²³But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*^a

14:6^a NU-Text omits the rest of this sentence. 14:9^a NU-Text omits *and rose*. 14:10^a NU-Text reads *of God*. 14:11^a Isaiah 45:23 14:18^a NU-Text reads *this*. 14:21^a NU-Text omits *or is offended or is made weak*. 14:22^a NU-Text reads *The faith which you have—have*. 14:23^a M-Text puts Romans 16:25–27 here.

BEARING OTHERS' BURDENS

15 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ²Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification. ³For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.”^a ⁴For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. ⁵Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, ⁶that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

GLORIFY GOD TOGETHER

⁷Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us,^a to the glory of God. ⁸Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers, ⁹and that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy, as it is written:

“For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles,
And sing to Your name.”^a

¹⁰And again he says:

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!”^a

¹¹And again:

“Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles!
Laud Him, all you peoples!”^a

¹²And again, Isaiah says:

“There shall be a root of Jesse;
And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles,
In Him the Gentiles shall hope.”^a

¹³Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

FROM JERUSALEM TO ILLYRICUM

¹⁴Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.^a ¹⁵Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on *some* points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, ¹⁶that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things *which pertain* to God. ¹⁸For I will



15:14-33

SITUATION

Having concluded his presentation of the gospel and its impact on those who believe, Paul turned his focus to his ministry.

OBSERVATION

Paul expressed his passion for the unsaved and his love for Christians.

INSPIRATION

A few nights ago, a peculiar thing happened.

An electrical storm caused a blackout in our neighborhood. When the lights went out, I felt my way through the darkness into the storage closet where we keep the candles for nights like this. I took my match and lit four of them.

I was turning to leave with the large candle in my hand when I heard a voice, “Now, hold it right there.”

“Who said that?”

“I did.” The voice was near my hand.

“Who are you? What are you?”

“I’m a candle.”

I lifted up the candle to take a closer look. You won’t believe what I saw. There was a tiny face in the wax . . . a moving, functioning, flesh-like face full of expression and life.

“Don’t take me out of here!”

“What?”

“I said, ‘don’t take me out of this room.’”

“What do you mean? I have to take you out. You’re a candle. Your job is to give light. It’s dark out there.”

“But you can’t take me out. I’m not ready,” the candle explained with pleading eyes. “I need more preparation.”

I couldn’t believe my ears. “More preparation?”

“Yeah, I’ve decided I need to research this job of light-giving so I won’t go out and make a bunch of mistakes. You’d be surprised how distorted the glow of an untrained candle can be.”

“All right then,” I said. “You’re not the only candle on the shelf. I’ll blow you out and take the others!”

But just as I got my cheeks full of air, I heard other voices.

“We aren’t going either!”

I turned around and looked at the three other candles. “You are candles, and your job is to light dark places!”

15:3^a Psalm 69:9 15:7^a NU-Text and M-Text read *you*. 15:9^a 2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49 15:10^a Deuteronomy 32:43 15:11^a Psalm 117:1 15:12^a Isaiah 11:10 15:14^a M-Text reads *others*.

"Well, that may be what you think," said the candle on the far left. "You may think we have to go, but I'm busy. I'm meditating on the importance of light. It's really enlightening."

"And you other two," I asked, "are you going to stay in here as well?"

A short, fat, purple candle with plump cheeks that reminded me of Santa Claus spoke up. "I'm waiting to get my life together. I'm not stable enough."

The last candle had a female voice, very pleasant to the ear. "I'd like to help," she explained, "but lighting the darkness is not my gift. I'm a singer. I sing to other candles to encourage them to burn more brightly."

She began a rendition of "This Little Light of Mine." The other three joined in, filling the storage room with singing. I took a step back and considered the absurdity of it all. Four perfectly healthy candles singing to each other about light but refusing to come out of the closet.

APPLICATION

When was the last time you presented the gospel to someone? Are you scared to be the light-giver that God has created you to be? Pray today that God would bring you opportunities to share your faith and give you the courage to take them. Now step out in faith and keep your eyes open!



16:1-27

SITUATION

Paul sent his warmest greetings to his fellow workers in the kingdom of God.

OBSERVATION

Though often overlooked, the behind-the-scenes service of faithful Christians forms a vital part of any ministry. Paul expressed his thanks to a wide variety of people, most of whom are noted for simple, everyday acts of service.

INSPIRATION

For an extraordinary pitcher he performed few extraordinary feats. Though a veteran of twenty-one seasons, in only one did he win more than twenty games. He never pitched a no-hitter, and only once did he lead the league in any category.

Yet on June 21, 1986, Don Sutton rubbed pitching elbows with

not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—¹⁹in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. ²⁰And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, ²¹but as it is written:

"To whom He was not announced, they shall see;
And those who have not heard shall understand."^a

PLAN TO VISIT ROME

²²For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. ²³But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, ²⁴whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you.^a For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your *company* for a while. ²⁵But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. ²⁶For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. ²⁷It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. ²⁸Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. ²⁹But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel^a of Christ.

³⁰Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, ³¹that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³²that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. ³³Now the God of peace *be* with you all. Amen.

SISTER PHOEBE COMMENDED

16 I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ²that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

GREETING ROMAN SAINTS

³Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house.

Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia^a to Christ. ⁶Greet Mary, who labored much for us. ⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners,

^{15:21}^a Isaiah 52:15 ^{15:24}^a NU-Text omits *I shall come to you* (and joins *Spain* with the next sentence). ^{15:29}^a NU-Text omits *of the gospel*.
^{16:5}^a NU-Text reads *Asia*.

who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

⁸Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. ¹⁰Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the *household* of Aristobulus. ¹¹Greet Herodion, my countryman.^a Greet those who are of the *household* of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

¹²Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. ¹³Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. ¹⁴Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. ¹⁵Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss. The^a churches of Christ greet you.

AVOID DIVISIVE PERSONS

¹⁷Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. ¹⁸For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus^a Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. ¹⁹For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. ²⁰And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen.

GREETINGS FROM PAUL'S FRIENDS

²¹Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you.

²²I, Tertius, who wrote *this* epistle, greet you in the Lord.

²³Gaius, my host and *the host* of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother. ²⁴The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.^a

BENEDICTION

²⁵Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began ²⁶but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith— ²⁷to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.^a

the true legends of baseball by becoming the thirtieth pitcher to win 300 games.

His analysis of his success is worth noting.

“A grinder and a mechanic” is what he calls himself. “I never considered myself flamboyant or exceptional. But all my life I’ve found a way to get the job done.”

He has been called the “family sedan” of baseball’s men on the mound. The connotation is accurate. He certainly boasted none of the Ferrari style of a Denny McClane nor the Mercedes sparkle of a Sandy Koufax, but after they and their types were parked in museums or garages, Don Sutton was still there.

He reminds us of a quality that is a common denominator in any form of greatness—reliability.

It’s the bread and butter characteristic of achievement. It’s the shared ingredient behind retirement pens, Hall of Fame awards, and golden anniversaries. It is the quality that produces not momentary heroics but monumental lives.

The Bible has its share of family sedans. Consistent and predictable, these saints were spurred by a gut-level conviction that they had been called by no one less than God Himself. As a result, their work wasn’t affected by moods, cloudy days, or rocky trails. Their performance graph didn’t rise and fall with roller-coaster irregularity. They weren’t addicted to accolades or applause nor deterred by grumpy bosses or empty wallets. Rather than strive to be spectacular, they aspired to be accountable and dependable. And since their loyalty was not determined by their comfort, they were just as faithful in dark prisons as they were in spotlighted pulpits.

Reliable servants. They’re the binding of the Bible. Their acts are rarely recited, and their names are seldom mentioned. Yet were it not for their loyal devotion to God, many great events never would have occurred.

APPLICATION

Are you a sports car—flashy, fun, nice to look at, but expensive to keep up and not very practical for most of the daily jobs of life? Or are you a family sedan—maybe not always noticed at first, but reliable, and a dear friend of the family? Think through the attitudes you need to change to become more faithful and reliable. Start working on one attitude this week.

16:11^a Or *relative* 16:16^a NU-Text reads *All the churches*. 16:18^a NU-Text and M-Text omit *Jesus*. 16:24^a NU-Text omits this verse. 16:27^a M-Text puts Romans 16:25–27 after Romans 14:23.