

ROMANS

THE POWER OF LIFE MADE NEW

*A 10-Day
Devotional Journey*

Brought to you by

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INTRODUCTION

Of all the 27 books in the New Testament, the book of Romans stands apart. There is simply nothing else like it. The rest of the New Testament is made up of stories, letters in response to crises, and a vision of heaven. Only Romans is a calm, reflective, insightful conversation about Christian truth. The Apostle Paul was sitting in the bustling, immoral city of Corinth and he was writing believers in the metropolis at the heart of the known world at the time—the city of Rome. There was no immediate crisis, as there was when Paul wrote Galatians. There was no urgent personal matter, as in Philemon. Instead, Paul is eager to give the Roman followers of Jesus a thorough treatment of core Christian truth. We should be glad he did. Romans is majestic, reasoned, deep, and at times fiery. It is what every generation of Christians needs in order to live the Christ life in truth and power.

ROMANS

THE POWER OF LIFE MADE NEW

All scripture references are NIV

1. The Heart of the Problem (Romans 1:21)
2. A Vision Made New (Romans 2:7)
3. A Grace That is New But Long Predicted (Romans 3:21-22)
4. The Grand Simplicity of Jesus (Romans 4:25)
5. The Hope That Transforms (Romans 5:2-4)
6. To Be With Jesus in Life and Death (Romans 6:8)
7. The God Who Knows Our Struggles (Romans 7:24-25)
8. New Guidance for a New Life (Romans 8:14)
9. The Making of One New Man (Romans 10:1, Romans 9-11)
10. Being Rewired by Jesus (Romans 12:2)

THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Romans 1:21 NIV

In the first chapter of the Apostle Paul's magnificent book of Romans—which has been called “the cathedral of the Christian faith”—there is a stunning declaration. Paul says that even people who do not live for God actually know that there is a God. They may not give him thanks or glorify him, but they know that he is there.

How do they know this? Romans 1:19 tells us. They know God from what is revealed about him in creation. His “eternal power and divine nature” are “made plain.” This means that in soaring mountains and the sweetness of babies, in the surging oceans and the beauty of those we love—in all of creation—God is revealed. Mankind knows that God is real whether they turn to him or not.

In fact, Paul tells us why men fail to turn to God even though they know he is real. He says that we “suppress the truth.” We know that God exists but we try to pack this knowledge away so we don't have to face it. There is a word picture that helps us here. We can envision the word “suppress” as being what we would do if we had a wild animal trapped in a trash can. We would use the lid of that trash can to hold the animal down, to keep him in the can. We would “suppress” him.

This is what we humans tend to do with the knowledge of God. We know he is there. We see him revealed in creation. Yet we do not want to face the claim of God on our lives. We need to stop suppressing the truth, face it, and let God reign in our hearts. This is the true meaning of life.

Oh God, forgive us for suppressing the truth that you exist. We see you. We want you. We yield to you. Make our lives all you intended for us to be. Amen.

A VISION MADE NEW

*To those who by persistence in doing good
seek glory, honor and immortality,
he will give eternal life.
Romans 2:7 NIV*

It always helps us when we are reading Paul's words to try to envision where he is and to whom he is writing. In the case of his letter to the Romans, Paul is likely in Corinth and he is writing, of course, to a people in the grand metropolis of Rome. He is in a huge city, then, and he is writing to people in another huge city.

This helps us with the words of Romans 2:7. Paul speaks of seeking "glory, honor and immortality." He has carefully chosen these words. You see, the city of Corinth and the city of Rome were both filled with monuments. There were statues of emperors and monuments to victorious generals. There were hundreds of stone tributes to heroes past. And each of these statues and monuments included inscriptions—words describing the greatness of some human being. And what words did Paul read in these inscriptions as he walked the streets of Corinth? What would the Roman Christians have seen constantly as they walked to market or went about their work? Glory. Honor. Immortality. Paul is surrounded by these words. So are the Romans he is writing.

So he tells us that we ought to seek these things too. Yet they come only by "persistence in doing good." And here's what Paul wants us to know. We can only do good when we are changed by Jesus Christ. We can only do it through his power, by his wisdom, and in his name. Then, glory, honor and immortality—in Jesus Christ—come to us. And God answers the grace of Jesus in our lives with eternal life.

Oh Lord, we yearn for the glory, honor and immortality that you offer, that you call us to. Change us and align our desires that we might do the good that glorifies you. And grant us eternal life with your Son, we pray. Amen.

A GRACE THAT IS NEW BUT LONG PREDICTED

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Romans 3:21-22 NIV

There is a tension built into the message about Jesus we find in the New Testament. It is a tension between the old and the new, between what had been for centuries and what Jesus taught and did. This is the tension that Paul's Jewish readers in Rome must have been feeling.

Imagine that for centuries your ancestors have been obeying the law. It is what pleases God, they were taught. It is the path of righteousness. It is what makes a person holy. Then comes Jesus. He challenged the rabbinic thinking of His day. He said that what is within our heart is more significant than the food we select or that the intent of our heart is even more important than our outward expressions. Jesus even said a Roman centurion had exceptional faith. Jesus' message challenged the establishment of religious regulations. Paul masterfully opens the law of Moses and integrates it with Jesus' teaching.

Paul explains this mystery in the book of Romans. Jesus has given us grace, an acceptance by God "apart from the law." Yet this was always what God desired. Even the law and the prophets expressed this longing. God wanted our hearts. He wanted us to know him through his Son. He wanted us close to him with his Spirit within us. But none of this was possible through the law alone. And so the Messiah came. The grace we know in Jesus was always the ultimate plan, signaled on every page of the Old Testament. It is, then, both old and new, both accomplished by Jesus and predicted long before.

Living God, thank you that you longed for us for centuries and expressed this longing through both the law and prophets. May we answer that longing by pleasing you and by honoring your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

THE GRAND SIMPLICITY OF JESUS

He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Romans 4:25 NIV

In the book of Romans, we have a chance to see the Apostle Paul as the great mind that he was. He is scholar, theologian, and verbal swordsman in Romans. His vast learning is on display. He reasons, he uses literary devices, and he persuades at length. It is a wonder to behold.

Then, as great scholars can, he states the heart of a matter with such clarity and precision that there is no mistaking his meaning. This is what he does in Romans 4:25. Let's read the words again: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification."

The words are simple but glaring in meaning. Jesus went to the cross because of our sin. We are sinners. He is not. He died for our sins, as a replacement. We could both grieve and worship for the rest of our lives on these words alone.

Then there is the turn, typical in Paul's writings. Jesus was raised to life for our justification. Paul loves this word—justification. He uses it 27 times in the New Testament. It is a legal term. It means "guiltless." It means a judge has ruled a person to be without fault.

This is what happens to those who believe in Jesus. It is the status before God of those who know Jesus died for their sins but who also know that Jesus was raised to life again—for them. Now, they stand clean and accepted before God. Justified. It is free. It is a gift of grace. In God's mind, it is final.

Here is the heart of it all: Believe in Jesus and be justified before God.

God our Father, thank you for the gift of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the raising of Jesus to life again. And thank you that through all of this, those of us who believe are clean and guiltless before you. We praise you for your great mercy, Lord. Amen.

THE HOPE THAT TRANSFORMS

And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Romans 5:2-4 NIV

Paul is the master of the verbal progression. Because one thing is true, he teaches us, here are the other things that must also be true. Here are the results, the implications, the outworkings. Paul helps us, then, to think about the processes of God.

At the beginning of chapter 5, Paul reminds us of his great central idea in his letter to the Romans. We are justified— “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” But Paul does not want us to think only of this idea. He wants us to see the next step. If we have peace with God and access to him, then we also have hope, an inner certainty of future spiritual realities. We can rest. We can trust. We can be at peace.

Paul goes even further. This hope, he says, transforms our understanding even of our hard times. Because God exists and because he loves us, he works through the circumstances of our lives to shape us. And a progression begins. We suffer, but we know that suffering produces perseverance—not on its own, but with God’s help. Then, perseverance produces character—the positive imprint of hard times upon our lives. Yet because this process is true, we can return to hope—the absolute confidence that God rules in our lives and so all things have a purpose.

Hope is not just our eagerness for heaven. It is our absolute certainty that a loving God is working through every day to make us his. This is the kind of hope that transforms everything we experience, even every hard thing we go through.

Lord God, you have given us peace with you through Jesus Christ and so all our lives are your workshop. You are always shaping, always chiseling, always making better. We have this hope because you are good and you are awesome in your power. May we cooperate with your every purpose for our lives—in hope! In Jesus’s Name. Amen.

TO BE WITH JESUS IN LIFE AND DEATH

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Romans 6:8 NIV

The gospel of Jesus Christ is truly a simple thing. Jesus died and took the sins of the world with him. He then rose from the dead, establishing the ultimate victory over sin and all the powers of hell that try to use sin to destroy mankind. Those who believe these simple truths—those who believe that Jesus died for their sins in particular—are born again. They now have peace with God, are free from sin, and can start fulfilling God’s purposes for their lives.

This relationship with Jesus, then, begins with death. It begins by us accepting his death as our own. Yet we should never forget that it is a relationship we are called to. That is the heart of the matter. That is what God always yearned for with mankind. He wanted them to know him. He wanted to walk in beautiful gardens with them. He wanted to be at their side as they ruled his creation.

Paul uses two different Greek words in the New Testament to describe relationships. One word refers to the kind of relationship in which you know things about a person, but from a distance and without closeness. This is the kind of knowledge you have of a person in a movie whom you’ve never met. The other word that Paul uses refers to knowledge of someone that comes from intimacy. You know a person. You know things about him or her because you have spent time together. This is the way a mother knows her child or a man knows the wife he loves or we all know our closest friends. We have knowledge because we are near.

Our relationship with Jesus starts with the profound mystery of spiritual death but leads to a relationship full of life— one that is meant to be close, one that leads to knowledge, one that is transforming. This is the ultimate meaning of the gospel of Jesus.

Oh God, grant us to enter the death of Jesus Christ so that we might know him and lively intimately with him forever. We are grateful for this gift, Father. Amen.

THE GOD WHO KNOWS OUR STRUGGLES

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!
Romans 7:24-25 NIV

The seventh chapter of the Book of Romans is one of the most surprising chapters in the entire New Testament. It is where Paul, who often thrillingly described the victory over sin that believers in Jesus enjoy, decided to speak of the great and terrifying force of sin. And Paul used his own life as an illustration.

It is almost shocking to read. Paul wrote that the law “produced in me every kind of coveting.” That’s quite an admission! He explained that when the “commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.” He described himself as “deceived,” “unspiritual,” “a slave,” and a man who wanted to do good but instead did “the evil I do not want to do.” He concludes simply, “For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”

Clearly, Paul was describing life without Jesus, what it can be like apart from the grace of God in our lives. Yet there is something tender here. You see, Paul did not write these words alone. God’s Spirit worked through him. These words are scripture because God wanted them on the page. He wanted all people to know that he understands our human struggles. He is not harsh and condemning, but rather compassionate.

And he has made a way out. Paul’s great conclusion gives us the key: “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

*Oh Lord our God, thank you that you know what it is to be human and to fight with sin as we are forced to do. Thank you that you care and have made a way of escape. Help us to walk in it fully.
We ask this in your holy name. Amen.*

NEW GUIDANCE FOR A NEW LIFE

*For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.
Romans 8:14 NIV*

From the moment we are born, we live guided by inner impulses. When we are little, we see a toy. We want it. We pick it up. We've acted on a desire. This continues as we grow. Inner impulses—some call them voices in our minds—guide our lives. Our outer life is determined by an inner control room, an inner set of signals that orders how we live.

Yet this is also where much of our problem is to be found. Our inner guidance system directs us into trouble as much or more than it leads us wisely. When we've made messes of our lives and asked ourselves why, we've had to admit that the damage came from listening to inner voices that led us straight to pain and destruction.

The Bible explains all of this to us clearly. Before we surrender our lives to Jesus Christ, our hearts are “deceitfully wicked.” We run after folly and gravitate to the wrong and the life-destroying. This is what it means to live apart from God.

Then comes Jesus. He offers us a new life, and even a new heart. And he offers us his Spirit. We receive a whole new guidance system for our lives. The Spirit of Jesus in us works to silence the old inner voices and to lead us into fruitful, holy, Jesus-like ways of living.

In this condition, we are “led” differently. This word in the original language means to be “brought out,” “carried along,” and “drawn out” toward the will of God. This is why Paul tell us that those who are led by the Spirit are the children of God. They are new. They are reborn. They have a new guidance system. All of life is being remade by the new inner voice of the Holy Spirit in their lives. This is what it means to be children of God.

Living God, fill us anew with your Holy Spirit and let his voice sound loudly in our lives. Grant us the willingness to be led by your holy guidance system. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

THE MAKING OF ONE NEW MAN

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

Romans 10:1

It must have been a great struggle of the heart. For both the Jews and the non-Jews in the church at Rome, a huge change had occurred. For centuries, God's people had been the Jews. All others were unholy. All others sought after different gods. When the Messiah came, though, rather than lead the Jews to great earthly victory, he instead called the non-Jewish people, the gentiles, to himself and all without them having to become Jews first.

This was a huge change and it wasn't easy even for Jews who followed Jesus to get used to. It was particularly hard for the gentile believers. They looked around and saw that it was mainly the Jews who were persecuting the Christians. It had been the Jewish leaders who helped the Roman officials put Jesus to death. What did all this mean? Were they evil? Was God done with the Jews? Were they no longer his chosen people?

Since the Roman church had both Jews and non-Jews in it, Paul wanted to set the record straight. In his great tract about the Jews in Romans 9-11, the apostle told us for all time that God is not done with the Jews. In fact, God is still reaching to them. In fact, gentiles who follow the Messiah should be grateful to the Jews. The gentiles are grafted into a Jewish tree. God is making one new being, a New Man, out of both Jews and non-Jews. In short, the gospel is breaking down the wall of partition and drawing all men to God. This is glorious news, and how much pain and suffering might have been avoided through the ages if mankind had heeded the words of Paul in these powerful few chapters.

*Oh God, break down the wall of partition between Jew and gentile.
Grant that gentile might love Jew, that Jew might love gentile and
that all might worship the Lord Jesus Christ together.*

In your name we pray, Oh God. Amen.

BEING REWIRED BY JESUS

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Romans 12:2 NIV

As we live in this world, we are being programmed by this world. It happens in nearly every part of our lives. The world shapes us. It presses its values into us. It teaches us how to think. It embeds images into our souls that in turn shape our behavior. Brain scientists even tell us that even our relationships and the things we watch and read literally determine the structure of our brains. In nearly every way, to live in this world is to be conditioned by this world.

We would be slaves, then, if it were not for the power of Jesus. When he died on the cross, he took with him into death the power behind this world. When he was raised from the dead again, he not only conquered the power of this world but he then could offer something new. He offered a new heart. He offered the life of his Holy Spirit inside of us. Then he offered a rewiring of our minds.

We see this in Paul's famous words telling us not to be conformed to the thinking of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. The word "conform" in the original language literally contains the Greek word "schematic." Don't be wired the way the world is wired, Paul is telling us. Think new thoughts. Let the words of Jesus renew you. You don't have to live according to the world's programming. And what will happen? You will be transformed. You will be a new and powerful being, using the gifts of your mind as God intends.

O Maker of Heaven and Earth, free us from the programming of this world. Teach us how to be rewired by Jesus and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Thank you for remaking us. In your name we pray, Oh God. Amen.

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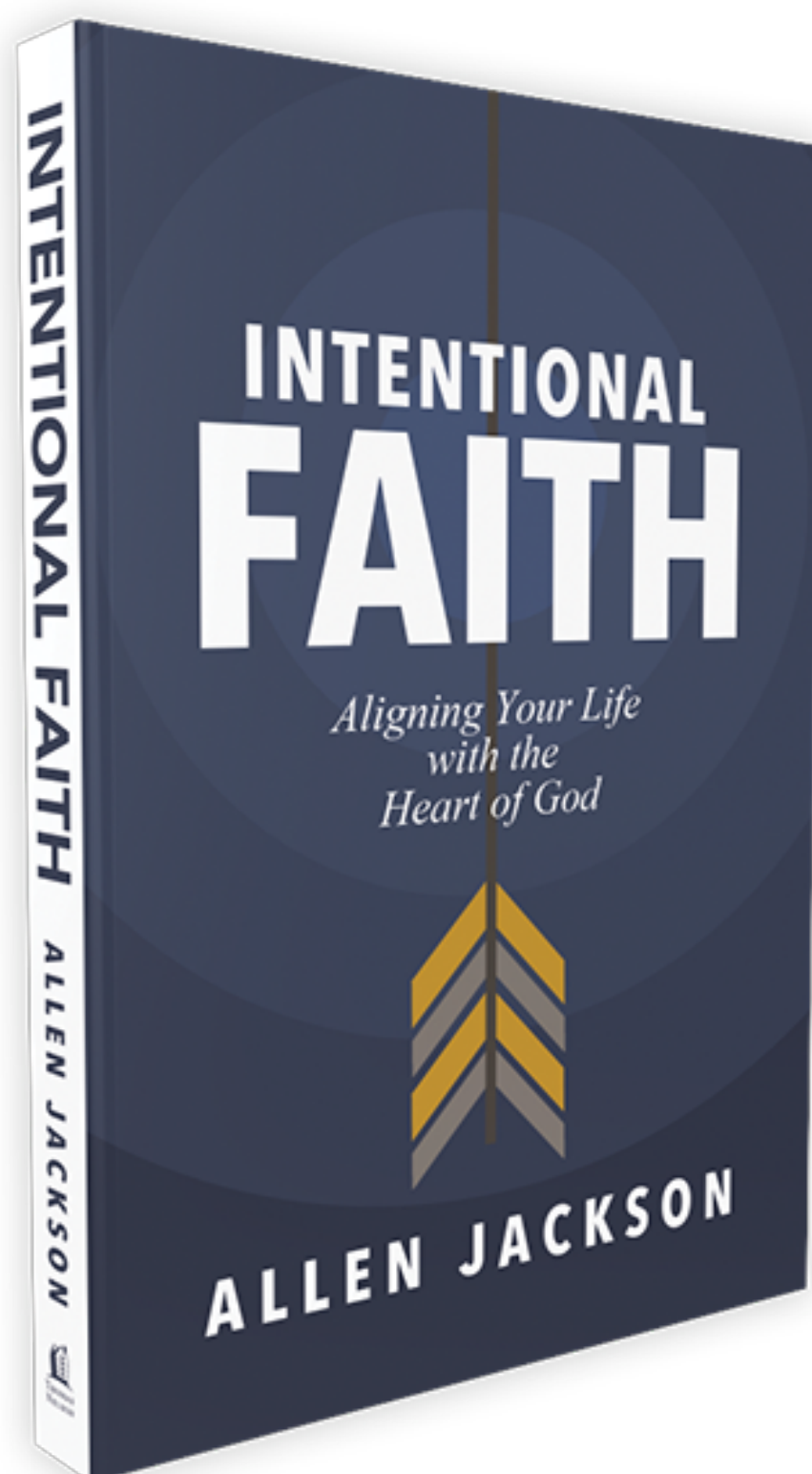
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