

WALKING THROUGH **ROMANS**

A 45 Day Devotional

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Walking Through Romans
Salvation . Sanctification . Service

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Introduction

The Christian life is a journey of walking by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ in the context of healthy spiritual relationships—the church. Relationships matter. Your relationship with Jesus matters, but so does your relationship to one another in the body of Christ. What can be easily missed as we envision our spiritual maturity, is the absolute importance of growing our faith in the context of walking by faith together with our local church family.

What exactly do we mean when we say, “Walking Through Romans”? I’m glad you asked. The idea can be summarized with one word, interdependence. We need one another to grow in our faith. We can’t do it alone; we won’t do it alone. We grow *together* in our faith as we learn to *walk* together. This is how God designed his church to function (Acts 2:42-47).

We grow as we meet together,
read and obey God’s Word together,
laugh and cry together,
pray together and love another together,
share meals together,
sing and praise God together,
give generously to meet needs together,
encourage one another and reach people together,
receive the Lord’s Supper together,
and so much more...

To help us learn how to walk by faith together, we’re going to walk through the Book of Romans by reading daily devotionals (5 per week over 9 weeks) and discussing what we’re learning as we gather together in small groups. Our Sunday morning message series along with our small group discussions will help you make the most of this study.

We encourage you to commit to all parts of this important study: messages, devotionals, and small group discussions. And as you do, you will learn how to walk by faith together with your church family.

We’re looking forward to seeing how the Lord will use these three essential parts to build your faith, hope, and love.

Let’s get started!

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Day 1

One Burning Passion

Romans 1:8-15: *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

The Apostle Paul was a man on fire for God. He was full of great passion and unbending commitment to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This was Paul's *singular* focus. It was his purpose for living. To accomplish this, Paul's strategy was to strengthen the church while reaching those who were not yet believers in Jesus.

Paul had a burning passion to see the believers in Rome with the purpose of building them up and encouraging them in their faith. Paul prayed for these believers constantly. His heart longed to see these believers face-to-face. Although Paul wanted to be with them as soon as possible, he faced obstacles to get to Rome.

But notice, Paul's burning passion was both to the *church* and to those *outside* the church. His passion was to reach people with the transforming message of Jesus Christ. As the church grows to maturity in Christ, the people outside the church walls should hear the message of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Our burning passion, therefore, should be to build up the faith of fellow believers in Christ through our encouragement and the use of our spiritual gifts. And this passion should *overflow* to our friends, co-workers, family members, and neighbors who have not yet accepted Jesus as Savior.

Prayer: Lord, align the burning passion of my heart with the advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Use me Lord today to build up and encourage your people with the gifts you've given me. Forgive me for being so busy with life that I sometimes forget what is truly priceless—the souls of people. Show me Lord how I can encourage someone to take the next step in their walk of faith.

Day 2

God's Power for Salvation

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

The momentum of Paul's burning passion leads us to the key verse in the Book of Romans (1:16-17). We will circle back to the idea of “not ashamed” in tomorrow’s study. For today, we want to focus on God’s amazing power to save us from our sins through the message of the Gospel.

God’s plan to redeem people from every tongue, tribe, and nation came through the incarnation of His son, Jesus. Everyone stands guilty before our holy God (Romans 3:10; 3:23). There is nothing that we can *do* in our own merit to be in a right standing with God. At best, our good deeds are like filthy rags before a just God (Isaiah 64:6). We have all broken God’s Law. We’re all guilty, separated from God, and subject to God’s wrath. This is what we deserve.

The Gospel is the message of salvation that declares God’s love for all people. But God is a *holy* God, and He *must* judge sin. We sin when we do what God’s Word says, don’t do. We sin when we don’t do what God’s Word tells us to do.

But when Jesus arrived, everything changed. God’s grace (His unmerited favor) came through the finished work of Jesus on the cross at Calvary. When we *believe* in Jesus, we have *peace* with God through *faith* in the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 5:1; 1 Peter 3:18). We’re now justified by *grace* alone, through *faith* alone, in *Jesus Christ* alone (Ephesians 2:8-9).

God’s righteousness was made known through Jesus. We’re right with God as we are united by faith in Jesus. But notice a few things. First, this power for salvation is available for everyone, everywhere. Neither language, ethnicity, culture, social status, nationality or any other man-made obstacle can stop God’s salvation. We all come to God the *same* way —through *faith* in Jesus.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for your incredible gift of salvation. Help me to never forget the great price you paid to remove my sins and give me eternal life. Give me the courage and the words to share the message of salvation with someone today. Help me to be sensitive to your Spirit as I speak with others.

Day 3

Not Ashamed of the Gospel

Romans 1:16: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

Are you ashamed of God's message of Salvation through faith in Jesus? Before you answer this too quickly, there are several things to consider. First, when we're ashamed about someone we don't want to talk about them. When we're ashamed of something that we've done for example, we refuse to talk about it until God's Spirit changes our attitude.

Since God's message of salvation is for all people, and we know that we're to tell others about it, why don't we tell them? Could it be because we're embarrassed? That's hard to admit right? I mean, Jesus saved us from all of our sins by suffering an excruciating death—and a very public one—while being mocked and beaten by those who needed a Savior.

So, why don't I tell more people about the good news of Jesus? Maybe I automatically lock my tongue by overthinking how others will respond. Maybe I feel inadequate, not educated enough or not truly worthy to tell others.

Please read this next sentence carefully. Your story of transformation through faith in Christ is living *evidence* of God's power—the gospel—so don't forget that. God *has* changed you by His Spirit. He will *continue* to change you as you *submit* to His sanctifying work in your life moment-by-moment.

Why is it so important to share this good news with others? God could have used angels or written these truths in the clouds. Instead, God chose to use His people to deliver His eternal message of hope. This means *you...it means us*.

Don't allow your thoughts of spiritual inadequacy to keep you from telling others about Jesus. Write down a few bullet points on a flashcard if needed. Get ready and prepare to speak with others about Jesus. When you do, watch God bring more and more people to you who need to hear about God's grace.

Prayer: Father, your grace in my life is beyond words. You know at times I feel unworthy to tell your story of salvation to others. Please help me to stop worrying about what others might say or how they might respond. Enlarge my heart for those who live without the hope of Jesus. Guide my hands and my words as I prepare for those who you will lead in my direction.

Day 4

A Foolish Exchange

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

Sin will lead you to sin more. This is why it's so important to confess your sins to the Lord now rather than later. As believers, God forgives us when we admit our sins and confess them to the Lord in prayer (1 John 1:9-10). When we *refuse* to repent, we live in *broken* fellowship with our Lord.

God makes His eternal power and divine godhead known. We can clearly see the glory of God as the sun rises. We see the wisdom of God as we explore the depths of the ocean. We catch a glimpse of the infinite knowledge of God when we study the universe.

So what's the problem? When people refuse to repent (turn from their sins to God), they attempt to *remove* God from their conscience. They refuse to believe or accept the truth. Those who refuse to repent *redirect* the truth; they live in spiritual denial. They *exchange* the truth, the greater, for a lie, the lessor.

God makes himself known to us through His creation. This is General Revelation. Specific Revelation involves making God known through Jesus. Both types of revelation are rejected by the unrepentant sinner. Although they reject God, they're "without excuse" before God. When you refuse to repent, you begin to make foolish exchanges. Replacing God with something else is very foolish. When God is replaced as the object of our worship, our hearts will be darkened.

Prayer: Lord, in this quiet moment, would you bring to mind any sin that remains unconfessed to you. Don't allow me to make excuses. Am I redirecting your truth about my current choices? If I need to ask for someone's forgiveness as a result of my sin, bring them to my mind at this time. Please don't allow my sin to remain. Lead me to confess my sins right away.

Day 5

God Gave Them Up

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

What happened? God essentially declared that enough is enough. God let them have what they really wanted. Refusing to repent is the *start* of sin rather than the end of sin. Unrepentant thinking leads people to practice and promote ungodly living. We promote what we practice.

God let the unrepentant do what they desired in their sinful hearts. They *replaced* worshipping God for worshipping natural images. They *exchanged* the truth of God to fulfill their sinful lusts and desires. They *worshipped* everything created rather than the Creator.

Notice the list of “dishonorable passions” and “shameless acts” mentioned that are celebrated today all-over social media and in our culture. None of these things please God. Therefore, none of these things should mark your life. If they do, and your attitude is casual about it, you’ve made a foolish exchange. Stop and repent.

As you read this list, pray for people by name that are involved in these sins. Ask God to convict their hearts through the Holy Spirit. Speak with them in grace and in truth about their sin.

Prayer: Lord, I don’t want to live for the passions of my flesh. May your holy Word cleanse my mind and heart. Remove any hidden desire to satisfy my flesh illegitimately. Use me Lord to help those who live in sin today to find forgiveness and hope in your name.

Day 6

God's Righteous Judgement

Romans 2:1-11: *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.*

God's judgement will be carried out in truth and justice at the time God has established. God warns us against hypocrisy. We can't tell someone not to do something while we turn and practice the same thing. Although God's judgement may not start while you're reading this devotional, you should always be ready and remain alert. God's *kindness* gives you time to *repent* from your sins.

When we believe that God's judgement is sometime far into the future, we're in trouble. It will absolutely affect the way that we live. This is why the ungodly live as they do. To the ungodly, even if they believed in such a judgement, they might also believe that it won't affect them at all. After all, "they're good people."

There's a clear distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous, the godly and the ungodly. God will judge the ungodly by their *works*. The results for the ungodly will be the same: God's wrath and fury, tribulation and distress. For those of us who have been forgiven by God through Jesus Christ, glory, honor, and peace waits for us in the presence of our Savior.

Prayer: Father, let me speak and practice the truth in all areas of my life. You love righteousness. Lead my heart to love what is true and right in your sight (Philippians 4:8). Teach me Lord how to maximize my days for the glory of your name and the advancement of your church. Help me Lord to be a good example as I meet with believers and unbelievers.

Day 7

Are You a “Hearer” or a “Doer”?

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

Hearing is one thing and doing is another. Listening to instruction is one thing and practicing what you’re learning is something different altogether. Throughout the Bible, we discover the critical importance of hearing God’s Word *and* obeying God’s Word. It’s *not* enough to hear what’s being said. We’re to hear God’s Word with the goal of *practicing* what it says.

The unique thing about our walk of faith is what it produces in our lives. You see, *real* faith always produces good *works*. In other words, Hearing God’s Word leads you to do something that pleases God. In Christ, we were created to practice these good works to those inside the church and to those who are outside the church family (Galatians 6:10).

How do you know if you’re hearing the Word of God well or not? Answer: *look at what* you practice. What you practice is truly what you *believe* in your heart. Look at the patterns of thinking you regularly establish. How do you treat others at school, work, and at home? If your daily habits reflect what God’s Word says, you’re not only *hearing* well, but you’re also *doing* well too.

Prayer: Father, I have heard more sermons and read more Scripture than I could possibly practice in my lifetime. Help me to establish new patterns of obedience to your Word. I want to do and practice what you say with all of my heart, mind, soul, and strength. Let me delight in your commandments. May they guide my attitude and lead my daily habits.

Day 8

God Remains Faithful

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

Paul works through the contemporary arguments of his day by reminding the Jews about God’s enduring faithfulness. The Jews were blessed with the Prophets, God’s deliverance from slavery, God’s protection from their enemies, God’s Word, His many promises, and the Anointed One, Jesus.

To be a Jew was a great *honor*, but it was also a great *responsibility*. The Jews were entrusted to deliver God’s Word to the nations (Genesis 12:1-3). They were to be a light to the nations. Unfortunately, most of Israel rejected God’s ways and committed spiritual idolatry. They killed the Prophets and worshipped other gods.

Does Israel’s sin reflect poorly on God’s character? Absolutely not. God did not change, but Israel certainly did. Paul’s argument is that God remains as God has been—faithful, true, just, and holy—and Israel’s sin will *not* alter God’s character.

No matter what you did yesterday, what you do today, or what you plan to do tomorrow, you can trust God’s character to remain *faithful* at all times. Like Israel, we have to come back to God in repentance when we wander away from God’s Word. As our Father, God will lead us back to Him when we stray. No matter what God may have done for us in the past, we are to follow Him today and submit to His ways.

Prayer: Lord, when I look back, I can see your faithfulness. As I look at today, I can trust your character. As I look ahead, I know that you will be with me as my walk of faith continues. You Lord are faithful and true. Today I worship you and only you. Let your love and faithfulness be the song of my heart today.

Day 9

We're All Guilty of Sin

Romans 3:9-19: *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.*

The word “all” is a small word, but it has a BIG meaning. “All” includes everybody. “All” leaves out nobody. Tag, you’re included and so am I. If anyone felt they were getting away with their sin up to chapter two, chapter three makes sure that nobody misunderstands God’s indictment. For the Jews and the Gentiles, for the Greeks and the Barbarians and everyone else, *ALL* are *guilty*.

If no one is right before God, then we’re all wrong before God. Our sin, which affects and infects all of us, equally condemns us before God. All of us have sin in our spiritual bank account. We’re no better off than the religious or the irreligious, the atheist or the agnostic. We’re all guilty before God. Period!

God is the judge and we’re on trial. The evidence is overwhelming. The verdict has arrived. Regardless of how we plea, we’re all guilty before a just and holy judge. We can deny it, reject it or totally ignore the verdict. But none of these will change our condition before God. We’re therefore condemned to eternity without God because sin brings death and separation from God.

This is the weight we all carry *until* God leads us to His son, Jesus. When we turn from our sins (repent) and place our faith in Jesus, we are no longer guilty before God. We are forgiven. We are justified and free from all condemnation.

Prayer: Lord, do not allow me to live in the sin of my past. I’m ashamed of past sins. I regret attitudes and actions that went against your Word. But now Lord, in Christ, lead me to live through my new identity. Remind me to bury the past and leave it behind me. I am free in Christ and no longer a slave to my past. I can now live for Christ. I am free from my past guilt and shame.

Day 10

Faith in Jesus Makes You Right With God

Romans 3:20-31: *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.*

Paul points out another common spiritual misconception: If I keep God's Law I will be right with God. There's one major problem with this idea—no one keeps God's Law perfectly. To make matter worse, if we break one of God's Laws, we're guilty of breaking all of them. Ouch!

But there's good news in Paul's teaching. God's righteousness is found *apart* from God's Law rather than in *keeping* God's Law. Paul delivers the good news: "the righteousness of God {is} through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." There it is! What makes us right with God is faith in Jesus Christ. Good works is what God produces in us through His Spirit as a result of our faith in Christ.

You have to remember one thing here. Salvation is a *work* of God's grace. And the work that God has started, He promises to finish (Philippians 1:6). As you meditate on these things, ask yourself: Do I serve God because I believe He will love me more? Do I pray, read my Bible, or go to a weekend service because I feel like I have to do it or because I really want to pray, read, and go?

Prayer: Father, thank you for your generous grace in my life. You died in my place, you received my penalty for sin. There's no way I could ever pay you back. I choose instead to give you my life each day to be used to seek and save the lost as I make disciples and bring people to maturity in Christ.

Day 11

What We Produce is Spiritually Insufficient

Romans 4:1-2: *What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.*

Abraham was the physical *and* spiritual father of the people of Israel. God appeared to Abraham and promised to bless the entire world through Abraham's offspring—Jesus, the Messiah. So if you want to make a BIG statement to the Jews and get everyone's attention, all you have to do is simply include Abraham in your statement. And this is exactly what Paul does.

Although Abraham wrestled with sin like all of us do, he was still considered to be one of the greatest spiritual men who ever lived. Paul masterfully uses the familiarity of Abraham to make his unprecedented point. What did Abraham gain in his flesh? Well, that's a great question.

Immediately, many Jews reading Paul's letter would bring up Abraham's circumcision. Circumcision was a command. It was the mark of God on God's people. It represented blessing and identity and belonging. But the question remained. What spiritual *profit* or righteousness was gained? *Zero* is the answer.

I can hear someone say, "You mean to tell me that this ritual meant nothing?" To be clear, there was both spiritual and physical value, but there was *not* saving faith as a result. Circumcision nor any other physical sign will make you right with God. *Only* by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. That's it!

As we follow this logic, we can envision the shock and disappointment of the Jews. If Abraham was *not* justified through circumcision—or any work for that matter—then we are *not* justified either through the works of the flesh.

Prayer: Lord, I'm so thankful that I don't have to worry about producing enough good things to be justified in your sight. I'm thankful for not having to depend on religious markings or ceremonies or legalistic practices to receive your grace. The life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is sufficient for my salvation. Since I believe in Jesus, I stand justified before you. Thank you for producing what I could never produce on my own.

Day 12

We're Made Right With God Apart From Works

Romans 4:3-8: *For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”*

Have you ever asked God to credit back all of your past sins to your spiritual bank account? Never. Why not? First, you know there are many sins to recount from your past. Second, God has forgiven you. For this reason, we don't have to recount the sins of our past. God has applied His grace to our spiritual bank account through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. We can now live by *grace* and walk by *faith*.

Abraham was just like us. He needed God's grace. Abraham was made right with God because Abraham *believed* God. He believed what God revealed about himself and God's purposes for Abraham's family. And Abraham's belief (faith) in God, is the reason why God credited a *right* standing (righteousness) to his spiritual bank account. Abraham was made right with God *through* faith alone.

This spiritual truth is both incredibly simple and complex for many people. We always want to *do* something and participate. But in God's spiritual economy, He only wants us to *believe* Him. He wants us to trust Him and believe what He's revealed about himself and His eternal purposes.

So, what about those who spend their lives trying to gain access to God through good works apart from faith? For these individuals, their works are actually counted *against* them. They will never meet God's perfect standard. These good works only fill their hearts with pride. They do not lead anyone to God's salvation.

Prayer: Father, I am grateful for your salvation. Although it is easy to understand, it was purchased at a great price, the death of your Son. Thank you for forgiving me of my sins. Thank you for covering my sins through the blood of Jesus. Thank you for crediting my spiritual bank account with grace when I was in more debt than I could ever repay you. You, Eternal Father, are immeasurably gracious and kind.

Day 13

The Promise: By Grace Through Faith

Romans 4:16-25: *That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

The promise of grace through faith started with Abraham. He became an example for us to follow. Abraham believed against hope. His body was old and weak. Abraham and Sarah were far beyond the age to conceive a child. None of that mattered. All that mattered was that Abraham believed God *could* give him a son and *would* give him a son in due time. He believed in the God who brings life from the dead. Abraham believed that God was *able*.

What about you? What example of faith are you practicing? Abraham believed against hope when his body said, “Dude, this child idea is not happening. It’s too late my friend.” But seriously, what stops you today from believing in what God has promised? Don’t interpret what God *can* do in your life by only what you can *see* with your eyes.

Choose to look beyond what you can see or understand. Abraham was “fully convinced” that God would do what He promised. Are you? One of the benefits of walking by faith together with others is that we find encouragement through the many stories of faith in God’s promises. Listen closely and learn from others as we walk by faith together.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the example of Abraham’s faith story. You did the impossible in the past and I know you can do the impossible today. Increase my faith. Help me to focus on you more than what I can see with my eyes. Help me to grow stronger in my faith and be a good example to others.

Day 14

Triumphant Faith

Romans 5:1-5: *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Have you ever expressed your faith in Christ as “triumphant faith” or something similar? Jesus conquered the sin of the entire world along with the sting of death in *one* weekend. In Christ, your sins are forgiven; your eternity is secure. This is certainly triumphant and glorious. Would you agree?

In Christ, we have peace with God and access to God by faith into His abounding grace. Here is where we stand secure. At *any* moment of the day, we can enter the throne of God’s grace. We don’t have to wait for a special ceremony or a date on the calendar to enter God’s presence. We can enter right now. Our hope is that the One who has all power and authority is always ready to listen.

There’s a spiritual progression for us to consider: sufferings, endurance, character, and hope. Jesus said that we will have trouble in this life. When we suffer, we must never forget about God’s purpose for suffering. Among other things, we experience suffering to *build* our spiritual endurance. Difficult tests produce amazing endurance in our lives.

As we continue to persevere through our sufferings, our character has an opportunity to be formed into the image of Christ. This is not painless work, but it is a good work. God shapes your character to *prepare* you for what’s next. Resilient character can endure every hardship and temptation. However, when your character is weak, trials and temptations will overpower you.

What does “triumphant faith” produce? It produces hope. Regardless of the trials, and no matter how much loss we experience in the process, hope leads us forward. God’s Spirit infuses us with living hope. And if we let Him, this hope will lead us to take new steps of faith, obedience, and generosity.

Prayer: Lord, I realize today that the trials and difficulties I’m working through may be your gifts to develop endurance, character, and hope in my life. Help me to learn the lessons as I walk by faith together with others. Give me a renewed hope for what you can do through this challenging experience.

Day 15

Justified and Reconciled to God

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

When things remain pending in our lives, we tend to get a little nervous. The more things remain open or incomplete, the more stress can build throughout our day. Jesus broke through the spiritual tension that existed between God and man. Once and for all, Jesus shed his blood and died for the ungodly—that was us—that was you and that was me too.

However, Jesus justified us through his precious blood as he reconciled us to God. Jesus settled the spiritual tension and pleased the Father. Jesus resolved the sin problem by becoming the substitutionary death for sin. He finished the job!

Out of the overflow of God's love, Jesus came to redeem us. The love of God sent us the life of God. Jesus laid down his life so that you would have peace with God and eternal life. So, what should our response be to this amazing love? Let me suggest for you to live as if you are totally dead to sin and fully alive to God. In Christ, the life of God dwells in you.

Since Jesus made a great sacrifice to bring you to God, make an intentional sacrifice today of your time, talents, and treasures to help someone know the love of God through Jesus. We're reconciled by his blood and saved through his life. Remember to express your deep appreciation for what *only* Jesus could do for you.

Prayer: Lord, today I celebrate you coming down to bring me to the Father. I am deeply grateful to be reconciled to God. Just as you came to bring me to the Father, let me do the same with others today. Don't allow my insecurities, fears or anything else get in the way of inviting others into a relationship with the Savior. Show me Lord how to do this with love, grace, and truth.

Day 16

From Sin and Death to Grace and Life

Romans 5:12-21: *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Adam, spread sin and death to the entire world through his sin. As a result of Adam's disobedience, the earth groans, disease spreads, violence increases, and people suffer unjustly. The sin nature of Adam was transferred to us. We sin intentionally and unintentionally. We do what we know is wrong and don't do what we know to be right. The battle between our fleshly desires and God's Spirit is *constant*.

Adam, however, was a shadow or a "type" of Christ. Adam was the *lesser*; his life pointed forward to Jesus, the *greater*. As Adam's sin *spread* to all people, God's grace became *available* to all who receive Christ. In Adam, people died as a result of their sin. In Christ, we're given eternal life.

What does all of this mean? We're no longer sons and daughters of Adam. We're children of God in Christ Jesus. Sin no longer rules over us. It no longer has power over our lives—Jesus does. Sin no longer controls us because Jesus is the One who owns us. Jesus reigns in our lives. We are no longer temples of sin, but temples of God's Spirit. We are *righteous*—made right with God—and no one can change our new identity in Christ.

Jesus gave us grace and life through his obedience to the Father. We can live in obedience to God's Word. Do not submit to the illegitimate desires of your flesh. Declare that Jesus is the One who reigns in your life. Live in truth, obedience, love, and grace. You can do this through Christ.

Prayer: Father, my path was filled with sin and trouble and death. Jesus changed my path. Remind me of my new spiritual identity and how that should affect my thinking and my behavior. Let your grace and truth flow through my life to others. Reign in me Lord today.

Day 17

Walk in Newness of Life

Romans 6:1-7: *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.*

Should we live in a way that is inconsistent with our new spiritual nature in Christ? No is the obvious answer. Should we sin more to experience more grace? Absolutely not! How can something dead, our old life of sin, live again? Since we are free in Christ, we're to *live* for Christ. We've identified with Christ in his life, death, burial, and resurrection. Our old nature was transformed, and our lives made totally new.

We've been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20-21). The life of Christ is the life that now dwells in us. We no longer live for ourselves—that's what marked our past—we now live for the glory of Jesus. For this reason, Paul commands us to “walk in newness of life” in light of these truths. In Christ, our new life is marked by *faith* rather than fear, *obedience* rather than sin, *forgiveness* rather than bitterness, and *love* rather than hatred.

Galatians 2:20-21: *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*

What can you expect to see as you crucify your fleshly desires and allow the life of Christ to work in you? First, greater holiness. You will become more aware of temptation and make adjustments early to avoid Satan's traps. Second, you will experience more laughter and joy in your life (John 10:10). Third, your faith will grow. The Spirit will lead you to your next step of faith and you will follow His lead. The fourth is grace. You will love people more and show them new levels of kindness and mercy.

Prayer: Father, as I walk by faith together with others, let the life of Christ flow in me and through me. I commit my life to you. Show me your ways. Give me a heart and mind filled with grace and truth. Increase my hatred for sin and my love for others.

Day 18

Be Dead to Sin and Alive to God

Romans 6:8-14: Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

There are so many amazing things that transpired at our salvation that continue in our lives today. Our lives were marked by being *in Christ* and *with Christ*. The life of Jesus remains with us as He leads us through His Spirit. We no longer live for ourselves, but for God. Sin no longer owns us; we belong to God. We're now *dead* to sin and *alive* to God.

Are you alive to sin or alive to God? The answer to this depends on who's *ruling* your heart today? If you *rule*, meaning, the sinful desires of your flesh, your practice will be marked by *sin*. But If *God* rules, meaning the desires of the Spirit, *pleasing* God will be the normal practice of your life.

Here's the key: Whoever *reigns* in your life, the Spirit or the flesh, *directs* your life. And the one you choose *will* control your life. When sin reigns, you think about sin all the time. You submit to sinful passions and find a way to get what you want. Why? Because you are *alive* to sin although it should be *dead*.

When the Spirit reigns, you can't stop *talking* about Jesus. You can't stop *telling* others about God's grace in your life. You constantly *think* about God and what's close to His heart. You pray continually, speak graciously, and give generously. You love unconditionally and read God's Word expectantly. You do what the Spirit leads you to do. Why? Because you are *alive* to God.

Who are you alive to? Who is directing your life? Is there more evidence pointing to your kingdom and fleshly desires or to God's kingdom and His will?

Prayer: Father, I know that I've died to the flesh. Refocus my thoughts today on what pleases you. Let me be led by your Spirit rather than by my flesh. I want to present myself to you each day for your eternal purposes and glory. I want to be your instrument to reconcile people to you through faith in Jesus.

Day 19

Commit to Obedient Living

Romans 6:15-23: *What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Every day we must present ourselves to the Lord in *complete* surrender to His Word. A slave of sin is one who obeys sin. Sin controls what they do. Sin removes their joy and destroys their relationships. A slave of righteousness is one who obeys God; God's Word and His Spirit *controls* what they do. God's Spirit flows through them. Life is infused in their relationships.

Consider a few characteristics of obedient living. First, the capacity to sin is always present, but sin's power no longer rules. As we abide in Christ from the heart, we sin less as we follow His Word. Is your heart *committed* to following God's Word regardless of the potential for personal loss?

Second, we are fully committed to pursuing personal holiness, truth, and justice for others. We won't get defensive or fight others when they point out our inconsistencies. We spend deliberate time confessing our sins to God and to one another. We *remain* approachable, teachable, and humble.

As we live in obedience to God, we don't make quick judgements. We *ask* questions, *study* the facts, and *discern* truth from error. We help the weak, minister to the broken, and give a voice to the marginalized. As we present our lives to God, He builds our character and produces fruit through our lives.

Prayer: Lord, never allow me to forget the grace I have in Christ. Your grace is surely enough. I want to follow you Lord with all of my heart. That's my desire, but that's not always my practice. Help me Lord to obey you fully so that you might use me greatly to reach the lost and make disciples.

Day 20

Released to Serve

Romans 7:1-6: *Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law; and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.*

Paul helps us understand our new life in Christ by using marriage as a comparison. God's original purpose for marriage was to *join* one man and one woman to *glorify* God through their relationship until *death* separated them. When the Law was introduced to Israel, this purpose was binding on God's people. When one spouse died, the remaining spouse was released from their marriage commitment to remarry or remain single.

Here's Paul's point. In Christ, we now belong to another. We've been *released* from trying to keep God's Law perfectly—which we could never do—to following God's Spirit as He points us to Jesus. We were *released* from one with the purpose of *serving* another. We can serve Jesus *freely*.

In Paul's comparison, we too are now free to serve Christ *without* the guilt of trying to do everything perfectly. Does that mean we ignore God's Law? That would be ridiculous. Of course not. But what it does mean is that our focus is different. Our focus is on an abiding relationship with Jesus Christ. And this ever-growing relationship will lead us to follow God's ways without carrying the weight of keeping God's Law perfectly on our shoulders.

So, what's the difference? One word: *grace*. We are free to serve Christ as a result of the grace of God. You can relax. Serve God and others as an *expression* of God's grace in your life. As you do, spiritual fruit will thrive.

Prayer: Lord, I get it. I can't focus on keeping a list of rules and serving you and your church as you desire. Let this moment serve as a reminder that I am permanently released from rules to an abiding relationship with you. And may this relationship fan the flame that leads me to serve you and your church.

Day 21

Sin Exposed

Romans 7:7-13: *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.*

Mirrors help us to see the *truth* about ourselves. Whether we like what we see or not, they don't hide the reality of our appearance. Mirrors *reveal* and *expose* what's already there. God's commandments—the standard of right and wrong—serve as a holy mirror for our sins.

Paul describes a most interesting dynamic. The more we *look* at God's commandments the more *aware* we become of our *sin*. God's Word has the power to convict us immediately as it relates to our sin. It exposes our sin by revealing God's perfect standard. And when this happens, our hearts should grieve deeply over our sin and lead us to repentance.

Do you grieve over sin's deception in your life? Are you moved with deep regret in your soul when you sin with your mouth or with your actions? When this happens, it is nothing less than God's Spirit doing a work in your heart. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to transform your heart for God.

What happens if we refuse to look into this spiritual mirror regularly? It will without question affect our attitude towards sin. We won't be broken, humbled, and crushed over our sin. Great spiritual revivals and awakenings have at least three things in common: prayer, God's Word, and repentance. Read God's Word daily and watch God revive your heart and transform your life.

Prayer: Lord, I have to admit something. I don't like my sin to be exposed. I realize the importance of the power of your Word in my walk of faith. Expose every sin of thought, word, attitude, and action. Show me the truth in each of these areas. Help me to see what you see and repent in the process. And as I do, revive my heart Lord. Fill me with your Holy Spirit.

Day 22

Internal Conflict

Romans 7:14-25: *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*

This portion of Romans should really encourage us. The great Apostle Paul is not an invincible superhero with total immunity to sin. It's quite the contrary. Paul's just like us! He has a constant battle, a relentless internal conflict taking place in his mind and body.

Paul's chief desire was to glorify God by preaching the Gospel and making disciples of all nations. Paul lived a godly life. He debated with religious scholars and taught the people. Paul wrote most of the New Testament. With his mind, Paul served Christ, but an opposing law, his flesh, did *not* agree.

Although Paul sinned less after knowing Christ, he *still* sinned. And when he wasn't sinning, he was fighting the relentless desire to sin in his mind which originated in his flesh. Paul was serving God with his mind and fighting the flesh simultaneously. Sound familiar?

Like Paul, it's important for us to acknowledge this battle. *Identifying* sin and taking every sinful thought *captive* as it enters our minds is critical. What does not align with God's Word does *not* belong in our thinking. Remove any thought that conflicts with God's Word. The mind is the battlefield.

Prayer: Father, don't allow me to casually entertain sinful thoughts. Help me to filter every thought against the standard of your holy Word. I recognize that I'm in a spiritual battle. Since my mind is the battlefield, protect my mind and heart from sinful attacks. Stop me from entertaining any kind of media that would feed my flesh, weaken my mind or lead me to sin.

Day 23

Life in the Spirit

Romans 8:1-11: *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

Since the law of sin and death—which is the result of sin—condemned us, the law of the Spirit of life—which is the result of Christ’s redeeming work on the cross—now frees us from condemnation. Jesus conquered sin’s power and penalty *through* his death, burial, and resurrection. And one day, all believers will experience freedom of sin’s presence.

In Christ, God’s perfect standard of righteousness is fulfilled. As we walk in the Spirit, we give *evidence* to the fulfillment of Christ’s finished work. Paul makes a sharp distinction between life in the flesh and life in the Spirit. If we live according to the Spirit, our minds will be *set* on what pleases God. We’re responsible for setting our minds on the Spirit.

Notice what we can expect as a result of this action. First, we focus and think about things that matter to God. Second, we don’t submit to our fleshly desires. Third, we experience real life through the Spirit. Fourth, peace is evident in our lives. Fifth, we please God. It all starts with *directing* our mind and thoughts upward—to what God wants—rather than downward—to what our flesh desires. Sixth, we willingly submit to God’s commandments.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the life I have in Christ which allows me to live according to your Spirit. Direct my mind and my thoughts towards you. Your Son finished the work of redemption. I am now free to live in a way that pleases you. There’s no more guilt and no more condemnation. Thank you!

Day 24

Children and Heirs of God

Romans 8:12-17: So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Paul deals with our fleshly desires aggressively—“put to death”—rather than casually. There’s such a strong *contrast* between life in the Spirit and life in the flesh. If we live in the Spirit, we’re dead to our flesh. This means no consideration, no flirting with our carnal desires, no participation. If you’re in Christ, stop playing spiritual games. “Put to death” is a *command*.

Paul’s very forceful here for a reason. We can’t live in the Spirit if our fleshly desires have *not* died. If we’re still feeding these desires, we remain in bondage. We can’t do both so we must choose. Choose life in the Spirit.

You’re so much more than someone who used to be captive to sin. In Christ, you are a *child* of the Living God. You are royalty! God is your Father. You’ve been adopted by God through Christ into God’s eternal family. You have direct and unlimited access to speak with your Father, your Daddy.

The Spirit testifies and declares that we belong to God. Since you’re the child of the King, you no longer have to worry about your needs. You no longer need to stress about your future. There’s no reason for you to focus on what’s temporal when God has given you eternal life through Christ.

And finally, we are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” as we endure suffering for the sake of Jesus. God appoints a spiritual inheritance for His children. In some amazing way, we will *share* in Christ’s eternal glory. So, let’s bury what is dead—our flesh—and let’s *focus* on what *matters*—life in Christ. Live hopeful as God’s eternal child. Let the Spirit lead your life moment-by-moment.

Prayer: Father, I’m amazed of all that I have received in Christ. It is truly beyond words. Help me to continue my daily dependence on your Spirit. I don’t want to feed my fleshly desires, but sometimes I do. Give me the right attitude—so I can put to death my flesh—and live as a child of the King.

Day 25

The Hope of Redemption

Romans 8:18-25: *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Present-day suffering often feels unbearable. Living with chronic pain, persevering through a disease, losing a loved one, and working through a painful divorce can all affect our spiritual perspective. Sin's destructive power and reach has multiplied since Adam's sin. Sin brings *pain* and *suffering*. Even God's creation endures suffering as a result of the consequences of sin.

Paul leads us to make a striking comparison between our present suffering and our eternal glory in Christ. Creation waits for the redemption of our bodies and so do we. Aren't you tired of dealing with sin's influence in the lives of your co-workers, friends, neighbors, and family? YES! But you're also tired of sin's influence in your life as well.

Like Paul—and every believer—you live with spiritual *tension*, and it never goes away for very long. One day, you will be set free from this tension. God will give you an eternal body and sin's influence will only remain in your past. This frustrating tension will one day disappear when our bodies are redeemed.

This is our hope and your hope as well. You can admit the tension exists. My encouragement is for you to share the suffering you're enduring with at least one trusted believer. Remember, we walk by faith TOGETHER. We hope *better* together than by ourselves. Your spiritual vitality depends on it.

Paul's final encouragement is to "wait for it with patience." Eternity is much *longer* than your suffering. So together, let's strengthen one another in hope.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the eternal hope that we have in Christ. I know at times I focus too much on my problems and personal suffering. Forgive me for only thinking of today's conflicts and forgetting about your promises. Lead me to share my biggest struggle today with someone mature and trustworthy.

Day 26

The Spirit Intercedes For Us

Romans 8:26-30: *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

We could probably spend one week digesting this rich passage. It reminds us of those times in prayer when our words *stop*. We're highly angry or broken about a situation. There are no answers; the solution is nowhere in sight. We watch the few words we do speak to make sure we're being respectful to the Lord, but the frustration in our tone is obvious. And at times, all we can pray is three short words, "Help me Lord."

There's good news in all of this. God *knows* our pain and frustration before the words leave our lips. And when we can't communicate them, the Spirit takes over and tells the Father what we want to say, but can't at the moment. The Spirit *intercedes* for us according to God's will. He completes our prayers.

Here is the confidence that we have in Christ. Since we love God, we can *trust* that He will make all things—even the most excruciating trials—work together for *good* according to His purposes. We can be confident in God's ability to do His work *through* our lives in spite of what may be happening *to* us.

Notice how all of this ties together in God's glorious plan. God chose us before we were born and called us into His purposes by first justifying us by grace through faith in Christ. He did this to make us conform to the image of Jesus. He continues this work even today in our lives. And in the future, God will raise us up with Jesus to share in the eternal glory.

Therefore, approach God's throne with *confidence*. Even if you're not a "prayer warrior"—whatever that may mean—the Spirit will pray to the Father on your behalf. Do your part—pray—and let the Spirit do His.

Prayer: Father, there are times when my life comes crashing down and my words to you are only but a few. Help me to pray anyways and depend on your Spirit to fill-in-the-blanks. You know my mind and you know my heart. Help me Lord to take on your yoke and release my burdens to your throne.

Day 27

God Is For Us

Romans 8:31-39: *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Have you noticed the progression in chapter eight? Paul encourages us to *depend* on the Spirit when we're weak. He reminds us *focus* on what pleases God as we put our fleshly desires to *death*. He recognizes our times of suffering while reminding us of the eternal *hope* we have in Christ.

These all come together in one statement: *God is for us!* And if God is for us, that's all that matters. Jesus stands in the gap for us. The Spirit interprets our prayers to the Father and the Son intercedes for us to the Father. Father, Son, and Spirit are all actively at *work* in your spiritual maturity.

God's grace will sustain you as you walk by faith together with other believers. God's Spirit moves God's people to minister to one another. God will provide for you. He knows what's ahead. The Lord will be your *shield*.

The last section of this passage is an exhaustive look at the *impossibility* of anyone or anything separating us from God's love in Christ Jesus. Nothing can separate or break this bond of eternal love. Paul was absolutely certain of this.

In Christ, we are more than *conquerors*. Because of Christ, sin's power and penalty are no longer directing us—God's directing us now. We can now live with great confidence—not in our own power and wisdom—but in God's love and power. Let's move forward spiritually with God's people. As we do, we will find rest in the eternal security of God's love.

Prayer: Father, nothing can compare to your limitless love for us. You have graciously given Christ to justify us and make us yours. I won't fully understand this right now, but I can trust that you will keep your Word. You never break a promise and you always come through for your people. Your love is amazing!

Day 28

Children of the Promise

Romans 9:1-8: *I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.*

How much do you anguish in constant prayer for the spiritually lost? If you’re like me, not merely enough. It’s very convicting to read about Paul’s “great sorrow” and “unceasing anguish” over his kinsmen. Paul was even *willing* to be removed from Christ if that led to their salvation.

Paul recognized the rich heritage of his people. After all, God chose them to be a light to the nations. Israel received the covenants, learned to walk with God, witnessed great deliverances, and so much more.

God was *faithful*, but Israel was *not*. God pursued Israel, but Israel pursued other gods. God was patient and gracious, but the people still rebelled against Him. Israel worked to please God—and in the process—rejected God and His Anointed One—Jesus.

Paul concludes this painful topic by reminding his audience that we are not God’s children through *physical* heritage—regardless of tribe, nation, or tongue—we become God’s children through *faith* in God’s promised Messiah—Jesus.

In Christ Jesus, we are children of promise. What does that mean? All of the spiritual riches God planned for His children we already have them in Christ. God’s plan was to call out a people who would *hear* His voice and *respond* to Him by *grace* through *faith* in *Christ*. So, if you have started following Jesus, congratulations! You’re already in God’s eternal family.

Prayer: Father, you made it possible by your grace and through your Son to add me to your spiritual family. I’m a child of promise in Christ. You have grafted me into your family tree. What more can I ask for? You have been generous and merciful beyond what my words could ever describe.

Day 29

God's Sovereign Mercy and Wrath

Romans 9:14-24: *What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?*

God's sovereignty is far beyond our capacity to fully understand. His ability to select, guide, and direct people and events is extraordinary. God *owns* it all and He *directs* it all. He does not need our permission to speak or act. God overrides His creation and disrupts things as He wills.

God has mercy and compassion on some and on others, He does not. How do you explain this? This is perplexing indeed. He raises up people—the popular and the unpopular, the rich and the poor—to display His power and proclaim His name to the nations. Again, God's in charge; He directs it all.

God is the *Potter* and we—His creation—are the *clay*. God has complete control over all of His creation. Nothing catches him by surprise. God acts and does what He wills when He wants to do it. Since we don't completely understand all of this, we don't necessarily like it all. That's not God's problem. It's ours. God has the right, the authority, and the power to do His will. Period!

Before you think God is just power-hungry, notice how He “endures with much patience” for those without Christ to repent. What's amazing is that He already knows those who will reject Christ and face judgment.

Prayer: Father, your sovereignty is complex and above my understanding. I'm thankful you chose me as a vessel of mercy. I pray for my friends and family today that still reject your Son. Please have mercy on them.

Day 30

Salvation For All

Romans 10:1-13: Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Do people invest countless hours in finding solutions to problems only to discover that these solutions don't work? Yes. And does this happen in the spiritual world? Absolutely. Paul's love for Israel is faced with a hard reality. Israel was ignorant of God's righteousness—which is amazing to consider with their history—because they worked hard to establish their *own*.

As a result, Israel did not submit to God's plan of salvation for all. They focused their energy on keeping the law perfectly, but failed miserably. It was an impossible goal. Only Christ *fulfilled* the law to perfection. Since Jesus is the righteousness of God—and the salvation for all people—He is the One we're to believe in.

Our salvation is by *grace* through *faith* in Jesus Christ. If we believe in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord, we are saved from God's wrath and declared righteous—justified—by God.

God's salvation has *always* been by *faith*. When we call upon the Lord, God pours out His spiritual riches in Christ to us. Stop trying to work or perform to please God. If you don't know Jesus as Savior, *stop*—confess Jesus as Lord as you believe in your heart. If you know Jesus, *tell* one person today about Him.

Prayer: Father, give me boldness as I talk about your salvation to others. Lead me today to someone who is working to gain your favor. Help me to explain your path to salvation by grace through faith in Jesus.

Day 31

Go and Speak

Romans 10:14-21: *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for “Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, “I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.” Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, “I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.” But of Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”*

Israel was given many opportunities to repent and turn wholeheartedly to the God of Israel. They had Moses, the Prophets, the Law, and more. Unfortunately, many did *not* repent. The Prophet Isaiah described God's patient endurance. Sadly, the people chose an idolatrous path instead.

What did God do after a long time had passed? God revealed His purposes to those who were not Jews—that's *us*. And like Israel, the revelation of God's salvation has a purpose. We're to *accept* God's salvation, *live* in God's ways, and *tell* others about His great salvation. Paul asks a series of good questions. Let's summarize them.

How will people *call* on God for salvation if they have not *believed*?

How can they *believe* in someone of whom they have never *heard*?

How will they *hear* without someone *preaching* to them?

How will someone *preach* the good news to them unless they are *sent*?

Why are these questions so important? Paul tells us plainly. “*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*” Now we return to our responsibility. As believers, we're *ambassadors* for Christ where we live, work, and play (2 Corinthians 5:20). We're the ones *sent* to these places to tell others about the good news of Jesus. It's not somebody else's job, it's our job and our privilege. Today, with these things in mind, go and speak.

Prayer: Father, through your wisdom, you have placed people around me who are spiritually lost. I am the one you chose to tell others about Jesus. Use my personality, gifts, influence, and skills to go and speak to others today.

Day 32

Grafted Into Christ By Faith

Romans 11:11-24: So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

God's salvation started with Israel. Throughout history—and even through today—a *faithful* group from Israel have believed in God's promised Messiah. Paul recognizes God's wisdom in Israel's rejection which led to the salvation of the Gentiles (non-Jews). If Israel's sin led to our *salvation*, how much more—when Jesus returns—will Israel's *repentance* and faith in Jesus, lead to immeasurable *blessings* for the world.

What should our attitude be towards all of this? Are we better than Israel? Certainly not. We stand by grace alone through faith alone in Christ. We need to maintain a healthy *fear* of God lest we think we *deserve* to be God's people.

God has showered us with His kindness. The alternative to His kindness is judgement. So, let's walk *humbly* before our God. This does not mean we think less of ourselves, but we should think of ourselves less and more about others. People need God's kindness. God *chose* you, yes you, to *deliver* His kindness in Christ to others. This is why you were grafted into God's salvation.

Prayer: Father, your kindness is both encouraging and humbling. Thank you for my spiritual adoption into your family. You are merciful! Lead me to continue in your kindness as I share how gracious you are with others.

Day 33

Spiritual Worship

Romans 12:1-8: *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

Spiritual worship can mean many different things to many people. Paul connects *true* worship with sacrifice and holiness. The obvious imagery here is an altar of worship. During “*burnt offerings*,” when animals were sacrificed to God in worship, the animal’s body was totally consumed by the fire. Likewise, we’re to surrender *every* part of our lives—body, mind, and spirit—in a way that *pleases* God. Nothing should be left out.

We surrender to God’s will as we allow God’s Word to transform our thinking. A mind *focused* on God’s ways will *follow* God’s plans. This means that we don’t focus on the way of the culture. We test everything as we filter all of life through God’s holy Word. God gives us a mind to *think* and *test* what is good and what is not. Let’s use our minds to discern His will.

The Lord gives all of us “*a measure of faith*.” Your function in God’s church is very important. You have a unique blend of gifts to use to glorify God and build up His church. What should you do about these gifts? First, *discover* your gifts. Second, “*use them*” and practice by serving others.

Whatever gifts God has given you, use them to advance His kingdom. Your life is a spiritual act of worship. Don’t try to get off of God’s altar. Don’t give God your leftover time, talents, and treasure. Give your *best* to God *first*.

Prayer: Lord, you placed me in your spiritual family to build up your people and reach the lost. Today, I place my life on your altar. All of me belongs to you. Show me how to worship you wholeheartedly, using all of the resources you’ve provided to point people to Jesus.

Day 34

Marks of a Believer

Romans 12:9-21: *Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

What characteristics mark the life of a follower of Jesus? Although there are many, let's explore a few here. Genuine love is the starting point. More than any other characteristic, this one is the foundation for all the rest. It's the “Why?” behind our worship and our ministry to others.

If our love is *genuine*, our service to the Lord and His church will be *active*. This is our second mark. Love compels us to use our gifts to serve others. Third, believers talk with their Father in constant prayer. Your relationship with God is *relational*. God delights in our prayers. When we pray, it shows our dependency on the Lord. When we don't, it communicates dependence on self.

Fourth, we will be generous with God and with His church. Love is *both* sacrificial and generous. If we're stingy with God—and believe that we own what we have—there's a problem. Generosity for the kingdom is not optional. Remember, your *heart* is found where you *place* your *treasures* (Matthew 6:21).

Fifth is humility. This may be a rare jewel in our culture, but it is the norm for the believer. Humility means we apologize first. It leads us to consider the needs of others before our own. It moves us to pursue peace in broken relationships and “*overcome evil with good*.” Do those who know you best, regularly see these distinguishing marks in your life?

Prayer: Father, don't allow me to be lazy or passive as I follow you. Let me honor you as I interact with others. Show me how to shine your light brighter as I work for your glory. Increase my desire to talk with you. And for those who seek to harm me, show me how to love them through humble acts of service.

Day 35

Appointed By God

Romans 13:1-7: *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.*

God places people in authority and removes them as He wills. Our lives should be marked by a respectful and humble posture towards our leaders, including government leaders. Rome was *not* led by perfect leaders—much like our government today—and yet, Paul challenged the church to live as *excellent* citizens.

How could Paul make such a challenge? Since all authority originates with God and He is the One who appoints every governing authority, God has a *purpose* for every leadership appointment. We have the freedom to vote, but God has the authority to appoint who He wants in leadership.

Notice how these leaders are described by Paul: Governing authorities, Rulers, God's Servants, Servants of God, Avengers, Authorities, and Ministers of God. Think about your attitude recently when conversations about leaders surface. Does your attitude and your speech reflect godliness or worldliness? Are you praying or criticizing, serving or slandering?

Paul challenges us to “*do what is good*” with respect to these leaders by “*paying to all what is owed*.” But how? Follow their leadership—“*be in subjection*”—unless their leadership violates the Bible. Pay what you owe, meaning taxes and any outstanding money. Be respectful to these leaders in public settings and in private conversations with others. Show honor to those in leadership positions.

Prayer: Father, you are the One who appoints every authority. I may not trust every leader, but I can trust you. I can trust your selection and rest in your sovereignty. Stop my mouth from disrespectful attitudes and sinful slandering. Let me pay what is due and be a good example for others to follow.

Day 36

The Debt of Love

Romans 13:8-10: *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

Paul gets very practical in these final chapters of Romans. He's already provided a thorough understanding of God's Law. He's pointed out our spiritual limitations. The law is a holy mirror. It shows us the reality of our sin. There is none righteous before God (Romans 3:10). All of us have sinned (Romans 3:23). We all fall short of God's holy standard. We're all guilty of sin. Paul makes these points exceptionally clear.

If we can't keep the law perfectly, what satisfies the law? Here's how it works. Our *faith in Christ* satisfies God's wrath against our sins and our love for our neighbors, satisfies God's Law. Jesus perfectly fulfilled God's law by loving his neighbor and justified us by his blood on the cross at Calvary.

We won't love others without making mistakes along the way, but we can learn to love our neighbors with Christ's sacrificial love. This leads us to ask, "*Who then is my neighbor?*" What a great question. Jesus broadens our definition beyond those that only live near us. Your neighbor is anyone you *see* who has a *need* that you can *meet*. Read Luke 10:25-37 when you can for the full story.

Who have you seen recently that has a real need in their life? Did you ignore the need, walk pass the need, or stop and take care of the need? If you kept moving—and did not take care of the need—there's a debt of love remaining on your account. You still owe them a debt of love. Stop shutting down love in your heart. Go back and help them.

This debt of love applies to believers in church and those you see outside the church walls. Notice the two negative points. First, have *no* outstanding debts except to love each other. Second, do no wrong to your neighbor. Live with a *godly* conscience that is clear from these things. If things are not right with one of your neighbors, do everything possible to restore the relationship. This is what love does. It's not easy, but it is your responsibility.

Prayer: Father, forgive me for ignoring others when I see their needs before me. Give me a greater heart of compassion and mercy. Don't allow me to stop loving people because I'm "too busy" to help. Change my attitude Lord today.

Day 37

Walk Properly

Romans 13:11-14: *Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

Before we came to know Jesus as Savior, we were *asleep* in spiritual darkness. Like our world today, Rome was a dark place. Paul called out the Roman believers to wake up from spiritual sleep. He knew the real temptations they constantly faced. But Paul was very direct. There's no time to *flirt* with darkness. Everyday matters; every moment matters. In Christ, sin is *behind* us and Christ is *before* us. Therefore, leave all darkness in the past.

Living in darkness refers to living in sin. We're to "cast off" sin. This means to forcefully move it *away* from you, to throw it off; throw it away. When you take out the trash, you deliberately drop the bag in an outside container. You purposely move this trash away from your kitchen and replace the old bag with a new one.

We're to *deliberately* remove all darkness from our lives—sexual immorality, excessive drinking, unrestrained behavior, fighting, selfish arguments, envy—right away, without delay. Do any of these attitudes or behaviors remain active in your life today? If so, repent and stop practicing these things.

Notice the positive command, "*put on the armor of light.*" In Christ, we have spiritual armor to *put on* for the battles we face (Ephesians 6:10-20). The imagery is powerful: *throw away* the works of darkness and *put on* God's armor of light. There's spiritual protection as we do what God's Word tells us to do.

How will you know if you're walking properly? For starters, no darkness will mark your life. Sin no longer enslaves you. Avoiding temptation is instinctive. You no longer *joke* about sin, *flirt* with sin nor *enjoy* sinful behaviors. You have increasing *hatred* for how sin destroys people's lives. Lastly, you walk in the light—the daytime—by the truth of God's Word and the power of His Spirit.

Prayer: Lord, I know the darkness is attractive, but it no longer rules my heart. What do I still need to "throw off" today? I don't want to deceive myself for one minute. Show me Lord where I'm still sleeping and wake me up please.

Day 38

Welcome the Weak

Romans 14:1-9: *As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day as better than another; while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*

Opinions have often served as the *starting* point for conflict. We all have strong opinions about events, people, climate, politics, culture, etc. In our country, people get very passionate about making their opinion *heard* through social media or direct confrontations with others. We have to be wise with our words and loving with our actions.

Paul essentially says that *people* matter *more* than opinions. Whatever a believer has decided—to eat or not to eat, to observe days or not to observe days, or any other non-essential issue—let them be *fully* convinced in their own mind. And if that's not how we particularly see things, we must love them and welcome them with *grace*.

Don't criticize or judge someone because they don't agree with your opinion. You've been wrong before and you'll be wrong again. Don't be spiritually immature. *Grow up* and love your fellow believer.

Paul tells us, whatever we do or don't do, we should always honor the Lord. This is the heart of the matter. We *should* be able to eat, talk, worship, pray, laugh, and celebrate with believers who don't agree 100% with us on non-essential matters of the faith. We should trust God's Spirit to work all things together for good and for God's eternal purposes.

Prayer: Lord, I don't want to act like a spiritual child when it comes to my opinions. Give me the wisdom to walk away from conflicts and love others, even when I don't agree with them. Use me Lord to build unity not division.

Day 39

Remove Stumbling Blocks

Romans 14:10-23: *Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*

Paul continues his letter by reminding the believers in Rome that we will all give an *account* to God for our lives. For this reason, we must remove every stumbling block to avoid making others fall down spiritually. We can, if we're not careful, discourage and hurt others in the faith if our opinions are *more* important than loving people.

We must decide *never* to allow non-essential matters and opinions to stop the spiritual growth of others. When we intentionally do things that offend, we practice *selfishness*, remove *love* from the equation, and *sin* against God.

If we're not walking in love, we're walking by the desires of our flesh.

God's kingdom—righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit—is above our opinions and preferences. What should we pursue instead? First, pursue *love*. Love prefers others rather than ridicules or makes demands. Second, “pursue what makes for *peace* and mutual upbuilding.”

You don't have to *agree* with every opinion, but you are commanded to pursue *peace* and *unity* with every believer. Honor God with your beliefs and love others enough to remove every stumbling block.

Prayer: Lord, I don't want to make anyone fall spiritually because of my opinions or preferences. Teach me Lord to always pursue peace, love, and unity. Show me Lord how to build up and strengthen others in their faith.

Day 40

Build Up Your Neighbor

Romans 15:1-7: *We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

What is the evidence of your spiritual maturity? Although there may be many, preferring *others* first is certainly one of them. Do you prefer others? Selfishness *takes*, but love always *builds*, *sacrifices*, and *gives*. The person who is truly spiritual, pleases God by being *responsible* for others. They look for ways to develop others and build up their faith.

Jesus gives us the supreme example here. Jesus came *not* to live comfortably, but to *give* His life for the ransom of many. By seeking to please the Father, Jesus finished His work. The results of His sacrifice brought redemption, transformation, joy, peace, and eternal hope.

What's the "Why?" behind building up our neighbor? The answer is for us to live in godly harmony, unity, and with one voice, glorify our Father. Don't reject your brother for whom Christ died for. Don't discourage their desire to honor God in different ways. You may be surprised to learn a *new* level of devotion that you have yet to experience. *Encourage* them in Christ's love and *accept* them as God's spiritual family.

As the stronger believer, always look out for those who are *weaker* in their faith. Ask the Lord to give you words infused with His life-giving Spirit. Encourage others in their desire to honor God through sacrifice, abstinence or celebration. If this is important to them, encourage them. Love them through these things. Be *gracious* and *kind* as you build them up.

Prayer: Father, I know I can be quick to judge how others seek to honor you. Forgive me. I'm truly sorry. Help me to learn from the devotion of others. Use me to build new bridges of godliness, hope, and encouragement.

Day 41

Abound in Hope

Romans 15:8-13: *For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him." And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

Hope is powerful. Jesus descended from heaven and humbled himself in the form of a man to bring hope to a lost world. Jesus suffered on a cross where he shed his blood. He received our punishment for sin to give us an eternal hope in his name. Jesus fulfilled God's promises to Israel and opened the door for the salvation of the nations.

The Prophets celebrate our hope in the Anointed One—the Promised Messiah and King of Kings—for the glory of God. In Christ, we have a new song in our hearts. We can praise God for making us His sons through Christ. We can praise God for His immeasurable mercy and grace. Jesus is our eternal hope. Jesus is our glorious Lord and Jesus is our risen Savior.

What is this hope designed to change in our lives today? This hope should change our perspective. We're here on earth for a short while. Jesus will return. We should center our lives on pleasing our Lord. This hope should infuse great joy in our hearts. No matter what happens in our lives, we have a living hope. God is our hope. God is our joy and God is our peace.

The hope of Christ should give us real peace. We don't have to live anxious lives. We can trust God as our Provider. We can rest in God as our Protector. We can follow God as our Shepherd. We can believe God and trust His Word.

If God has commanded us to “rejoice” in the hope of Christ, what's stopping you today from praising God and celebrating? God's Spirit is ready to reignite your hope. Don't allow today's trouble to derail your hope.

Prayer: Lord, I have to admit. I often allow things around me to derail my hope. This world is temporary and so are my challenges. Your kingdom is forever, and your kingdom will rule the nations. Keep my hope aligned in you.

Day 42

Instruct and Admonish One Another

Romans 15:14-21: *I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."*

Paul was convinced that the Roman believers were *ready* to continue the work of proclaiming Christ and making disciples. This letter served as part of God's *sanctifying* work—to make them more like Christ—to *prepare* them for healthy Gospel-centered ministry. As Paul begins to close his letter, he identifies three areas for them to continue practicing.

First, Paul wants them to continue being "*full of goodness*." Paul wants them to overflow with what is good through the Spirit's power. This starts in the *mind* (Philippians 4:8), moves to the *heart* (Galatians 5:22-23), speaks from the *heart* (Matthew 12:34), and works with our *hands* (Ephesians 4:38).

Being "*filled with all knowledge*" is the second. This includes the knowledge of salvation through faith in Christ. It also refers to what has been learned in this letter. Paul expects them to *study* and *practice* these truths. He expects them to have a *rich* understanding of God's Word.

Third, Paul wants them to continue being "*able to instruct one another*." This means to warn, admonish, and encourage one another. We all need someone to warn us when we begin to *drift* from God. How do you respond to spiritual correction? When we don't listen, we need to be admonished with greater urgency. How is this encouraging? Well, it gets us back in God's will for our lives. This is essential for our faithfulness to Christ.

Prayer: Father, thank you for your power to walk in the light. You give me brothers and sisters in Christ to keep me moving in your direction. Give me ears to hear and a humble heart to listen when I'm being corrected.

Day 43

Striving Together in Prayer

Romans 15:22-33: *This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

Stategy is important and so is planning. We should do these things. But praying together is *more* important than both of these combined. Paul was a master strategist. He was an incredible thinker. He made plans and envisioned God's work among the Gentiles. Paul, however, was a man deeply *committed* to prayer as he prepared to do God's work.

What did Paul want from these believers in preparation for his travels? He wanted them to "*strive together*" with him in prayer. Paul wanted their *help* and their spiritual *participation*. There's something very important here to point out. We're not supposed to live our faith in isolation, but together with others.

Paul was far away, but he wanted these believers to *partner* with him in prayer. He could not wait to see them and bless them with his ministry. But Paul knew what was ahead. He recognized the dangers and challenges ahead. For this reason, Paul asked for them to join him in *fervent* prayer.

Think through the desires that God has placed in your heart to serve Him. Who have you asked to "*strive together*" with you in prayer? If you want more clarity concerning God's will, don't approach this alone, get God's people praying *with* you and *for* you each step of the way.

Prayer: Father, thank you for reminding me how interdependent I am with your people. Forgive me when I've tried to do things without the spiritual support of your people. Show me your will through my church family.

Day 44

Fellow Workers in Christ

Romans 16:1-16: *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.*

What we see here in this closing chapter is expressed in the title of this devotional: *Walking Through Romans*. The way Paul describes these saints is both *personal* and practical, *loving* and *strategic*. He *celebrates* those who are single and married couples as they serve Christ. Paul *blesses* families and *acknowledges* sacred gatherings in house churches.

Paul uses encouraging words—such as servants, fellow workers, beloved, my kinsmen, workers in the Lord, those in the Lord, chosen in the Lord, fellow prisoners, approved in Christ, mothers, brothers, and saints—to describe their love and service to the Lord. Would any of these characteristics describe *your* love and service to Christ?

God designed the church to *work* together as we *walk* together by faith. You have a unique, but essential contribution to the body of Christ—the church—by advancing God’s redeeming work through your life. But you *can’t* do this alone; you *won’t* do this alone. This divine mission is to be carried out in the context of your local church *family*.

Prayer: Father, forgive me for thinking that I can follow you by myself. Show me how to love you and serve you better through my church family. Help me to be a productive member, one that encourages your people to move by faith.

Day 45

Watch Out and Be Wise

Romans 16:17-27: *I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you. Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

Ministry is hard work. Do you agree? We have to be loving and gracious, but we also have to be wise and sharp. Paul ends his powerful letter with a strong *warning*. He wants his beloved friends to “watch out” and “avoid” those who plant seeds of relational division. He wants them to pay attention to those who create barriers to God’s Word from moving forward.

It may be hard to believe, but people—who serve their own appetites—will enter local churches with the intention to *disrupt* God’s work. They may enter with a big smile, join a small group quickly or even write a generous check. But on the inside, they want power, authority, and influence.

These people want to be in *charge* of budgets and people *more* than they want to *serve* and *wash* feet. They’re *divisive* in their conversations, *flattering* in their compliments to new believers, and *critical* to church leadership.

Paul makes it very clear in previous chapters. We’re to *admonish* and *warn* such people. And if they continue, we’re to altogether *avoid* them. We’re to *protect* the love and unity of the church at all costs. Let’s speak with grace and truth as we ask God for wisdom to guide all that we say and do for His glory and kingdom. Watch out and be wise!

Prayer: Lord, I want to be a promoter of love and unity in your church. Give me a discerning mind and heart when those who want to hurt your church are before me. Give me the courage to speak the truth in love by your Spirit.

