

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Over the years, I've found my life changing and my faith deepening as I meet with our heavenly Father in His word. This has been especially true as I've been writing these devotionals and having to live what I write.

I long for you to be able to say the same as you read through this letter.

As I've gotten to know Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John through their letters, I'm overwhelmed by how they were changed by knowing and walking with their Lord. How much they much have longed for us to know Him as they did.

As John wrote in 1 John 2:3-6, he wants us to walk as Jesus did and believed that it was absolutely possible to do so. So how did Jesus walk? That's one secret our Father shares with us.

Blessings on your time as we take another walk with the Father,

Margie Martin

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Romans. The letter Paul wrote to the believers in Rome; believers he hadn't met yet but with whom he had long felt an affinity, probably because of his friendship in Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla. This letter to the church at Rome was probably written around A.D. 57 while Paul was in Corinth.

You've probably read through this letter before. If you're an analytical, systematic person, you've more than likely warmed to this letter because of how Paul lays out the truth of Christianity. But if you're a right-brain, creative thinker and tend to feel more and want to relate with what you read, probably this letter has been more of a challenge for you. If you stay with it, however, I promise you that you won't regret it.

So, let's get started!



New Testament World

As you spend time in this letter, please take the time to talk with our Father about what He's showing you so you're not just gathering information. As you pray, you can use the space on each page to journal your thoughts or write Him a note.

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 1:1-7

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—”

“The gospel of God.” Today we get to look at what God means by the word *gospel*, which literally means *good news*.

What news are you hearing about today? On the radio this morning, I heard about war, murder, greed, lying, child abuse, natural disasters, stealing, and anger gone wild. Rarely are good events ever reported. I long to wake up in the morning and hear about *good news* stories.

So if God’s news is *good*, then it’s His news that our hearts are longing to hear and experience. So, let’s look at what Paul wants us to know about God’s gospel, God’s good news:

- *It* was promised by the prophets who wrote the Holy Scripture years before *it* happened.
- *It* is His Son who came in human form as a descendent of King David.
- *It* is His Son, Jesus Christ, who was declared to be the Son of God because He didn’t remain human or stay dead.
- *It* promises us a new life that comes from our choice to believe as we encounter the truth of Jesus found in Scripture.
- *It* means we are called to belong to Jesus Christ.
- *It* lets us experience the love of God and the calling to be His followers as saints (chosen ones).
- *It* results in grace and peace.

What are your circumstances today? You know all about them because you’re living them, but I’d like for you to take a few minutes and write down what you’re actually going through and how you’re reacting to event and people. Be honest, now, you don’t have to share what you write with anyone.



So, how does the gospel of God, His good news, affect your life today? What difference can it make in how you process information about events and people, talk about it, and then act?

Perhaps it’s time for you to fit into, or reflect, the gospel of God. I’ve found that my first step in making this happen is to get myself into God’s truth and then respond to this truth through faith and in action. What kind of a difference would that change in your thinking and choices make for you today in *your* circumstances?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 1:8-17

“God, whom I serve with my whole heart . . .”

As I sat down to write this morning, I found myself battling over some emotional hurts caused by some relationships. So before I did anything else, I wrote down the names of those who were causing me pain and exactly what they were doing that was so hurtful. Here are *my* issues that surface this morning; do you connect with any of them?

- Others not willing to listen or change, always saying a “Yes, but . . .”
- Others dropping out of my life after being involved with each other weekly for two years
- Lack of grace from a “mature believer” who says all the right words but adapts to the world’s way of interacting with me
- Being asked to change my schedule for the benefit of others without considering what I might have planned
- A friend’s continual venting of anger without seeing her own anger as hurting those around her—and not being open to the need to change herself

Then I re-read today’s verse and realized that I wasn’t loving those I was complaining about with even half a heart. I was saying, in so many words, “If you treat me well, I’ll extend love and grace to you.” I’m so glad that God’s love doesn’t come with demands or conditions. His love woos us, changes us, and brings us together instead of creating barriers and defenses. I’m so glad for Paul’s example of serving God with a *whole* heart so I can see how it’s to be done.

Are you serving God with a whole heart as you interact with others, or are you in the habit of saying “Yes, I’ll serve you, God, but if so-and-so would change, I could love You and them so much better.” Others, in fact, *may* need to change, but that’s between them and God. We’re only responsible for ourselves. And if we do feel we need to say something to another about their hurtful behavior, we’d better get our own act together first, or we’ll produce more harm than good when we speak.

Our enemy is called “an accuser of the brethren.” (Revs. 12:10) Not only does he accuse us before our heavenly Father and to ourselves, but he also accuses brothers and sisters in the faith to us. We have a choice of believing these lies *or* humbling ourselves, seeing ourselves as God sees us, and choosing to let Jesus Christ love others through us.

Which way of responding do you want to choose? Are you serving God with a whole heart?

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Romans 1:18-2:19

Over the next few days, we'll see Paul describe three groups of people:

1. Those who live by their own standards and so end up living a life of license, doing whatever feels good whenever they want to, regardless of how their actions affect others (1:18-32)
2. Those who are critical of the first group (2:1-16) and so are self-righteous. They are so proud of themselves because they don't do what others do, that they miss seeing themselves as they are, especially with their attitudes and thought life.
3. Those who are proud to know about God's laws but don't live by them (2:17-29). They have all the external trappings of being religious and spiritual and are proud of what they look like, but their real lives don't live up to the intent of God's laws.

Which of these groups do you think you fit into?

- No *no*'s to guide how you act
- Critical of those without any *no*'s in their lives
- Proud of your own goodness

After we read through these three groups, you may be surprised at which group you actually find yourself. At that point we'll look at Paul's conclusions.

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 1:18-32

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness . . . therefore God gave them over . . . because of this God gave them over . . . furthermore since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over . . .”

When you think of the phrase *wrath of God*, what comes to mind? When I think of wrath (or anger), I think of yelling, throwing things, berating others, destruction, or revenge. But Paul says that God’s wrath is letting people experience the consequences of their actions.

What They’re Doing	What Happened
Suppress truth by what they did	→ God gave them over to sexual impurity.
Refuse to glorify God or give Him thanks.	→ They worshipped and served creatures rather than the Creator.
Claim to be wise without Him.	→ God gave them over to “unnatural relations” with same-sex partners.
Make images that look like men, birds, animals, and reptiles.	→ God gave them over to a depraved mind to do what shouldn’t be done.
Choose to forget about God.	→ They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity; full of . . .
Approve of others doing all types of horrible things.	→ They deserve death

So, God doesn’t get “mad” the way we do. His anger isn’t directed toward people but toward their choices and behavior. His anger doesn’t happen easily or quickly; He doesn’t have a short fuse. Wrath isn’t His first choice; in fact, it’s probably His last. I think God’s wrath is purposeful: He wants to get our attention so we’ll turn back to him.

Do you feel like you’re experiencing God’s wrath (as Paul describes it) when you look at your circumstances? Are you ignoring God’s truth through how you live, refusing to honor or give thanks to Him, elevating your own wisdom, or worshipping what’s been created rather than the Creator, pushing God out of your mind? If this is where you are, please let God’s wrath be purposeful in your life to turn you back to Him. This may be the best time to review the *good news* we looked at in Paul’s greeting.

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Romans 2:1-16

“Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?”

Last week I tried to write on this section, and nothing came. I read and I read and waited and waited, but God was silent. I’ve learned that when this silence happens, I’m to continue living life because it’s just not time to write yet.

Yesterday, two hours before our couples small group was to meet, we got a call from one of the women saying she and her husband weren’t coming—only because they hadn’t planned their schedule to include being with the group that evening. This call was a last straw for me, and my thoughts and words to my husband about them and others who don’t plan ahead weren’t pleasant or kind.

Then I sat down to finish a study for my women’s group and read:

*“Those who look for reasons to accuse
will undoubtedly find some.”*

(Beth Moore’s study, *Jesus the One and Only*, page 75)

Oh. I found my husband and told him how grateful I was that God had shown me my harmful attitude so quickly and that my bad attitude had stopped with us and hadn’t boiled over to anyone else.

The Lord and I talked about my attitude again this morning as we met together. Then I read this section, and especially this verse, and realized that I hadn’t been able to write the previous week because I needed to come face-to-face with my own critical and demanding spirit. My self-righteous pride had set me above others, and I now could see how that sin was just as wrong and harmful—if not more so—than others who say that an activity is important but let the urgent take its place. Does either attitude strike a chord with you?

Perhaps you need to schedule your life around what’s important rather than what’s urgent. Or perhaps, like me, you need to let God be Lord in the lives of others instead of instituting standards for them to follow.

If it’s God’s *kindness* that leads to repentance, then *kindness* also needs to be a hallmark of our lives so others can see *Him* in us instead of seeing our criticalness, pride, or unwillingness to control ourselves.

What do others see when they look at you?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 2:17-29

“God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

God taught me an application of this section years ago; here’s my story.

Early in the 1970s, the popular piece of jewelry for young Christian women was a necklace with the fish symbol. So of course I bought such a necklace and wore it proudly as I carried around my Bible and did what Christians do.

One day at the gym I met a young woman who noticed my necklace. She said that she’d been wanting to meet someone who could tell her what God thought about sex. We talked for a while and then both left for the day.

Soon after this conversation, I lost the necklace down the shower drain. I couldn’t believe how strange it was that the necklace I had worn day-in and day-out for more than a year suddenly “fell off.”

A couple of years later as I was studying Romans with some friends, the conclusion for today’s section was that a symbol of righteousness (for example, a necklace) can blaspheme God if believers don’t live what they say they believe.

I concluded from this truth and from my necklace experience that God didn’t want me (at least at that time) to wear symbols of Christianity but to live my faith instead. Since then I haven’t put fish bumper stickers on my cars, worn Christian symbols as jewelry, or carried a Bible that obviously looks like a Bible. I enjoy others’ bumper stickers and jewelry, but they haven’t been for me.

What symbols of righteousness can you think of that can cause nonbelievers to blaspheme God because of how believers live? Do your symbols agree with your lifestyle? Are you living what you say you believe so others can get a true picture of God?

Need to make some changes that involve more than getting rid of the symbols?



By the way, the woman I met at the gym resolved her issues with God, and she and I have been good friends for over 30 years.

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 3:1-8

“First of all, they [the Jews] have been entrusted with the words of God.”

Entrusted with the very words of God—words of hope, comfort, encouragement, correction, life—*His* words. Words that come with love, understanding, power, and wisdom. What an amazing privilege.

Have you ever experienced being entrusted with something valuable?

I used to work for an organization that helps expanding ministries become successful. My responsibility was in administration. As I worked with the ministry leaders in QuickBooks, time management, and HR issues, I tried to remember that I was representing our investors and donors who believed in these ministries and who were financially committed to helping them grow. I'd been entrusted with a vision that I took seriously. I wasn't just representing myself.

Paul is saying in this section that the Jews (and now we Christians) have been entrusted with the words of God. But all too often they (and we) speak them but don't live them. In fact, all too often we speak words that are just the opposite of what God says. For example, we're told in Scripture to do our jobs as though we're working for the Lord (Ephesians 6:5-8), but instead we fuss and fume about how people treat *us*, gossip about what's going on in the office, and bemoan or gloat over our salaries (or our spouse's salary or job).

Since we represent God, what happens to His reputation when we don't live what we say we believe? Do our actions actually negate God's faithfulness or demean His character? Thank goodness the answer is No!

But what if the Jews (and we) were to live up to the honor God has given us? What if we treated others as we wished to be treated? What if we walked by faith instead of in fear or self-reliance? What if we followed God's path for us (Ephesians 2:10) instead of carving out our own?

God has given us a great honor by being willing to be involved in our lives and by choosing to be associated with us. How about joining me today in looking for ways to express this trust by how we treat people and by how we respond to circumstances. Ready?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 3:9-20

"We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin."

Now that we've looked at the three groups of people from Paul's (and God's) perspective, and before we look at Paul's conclusions, how about turning back to the introduction to these three groups of people on page 16 where you assessed yourself. Do you still agree with your assessment?

Now on to Paul's conclusions about these three groups of people:

- None of us live up to God's standards.
- Therefore, all of us are "under sin."
- We're all equally in need of Christ's work on the cross.

Years ago I worked at a missionary organization, Overseas Crusades, where we had a poster in our break room that pictured a cross on a level piece of land. The caption read "The Ground Is Level at the Foot of the Cross." Every day that I saw this poster, I was reminded that no matter what status, background, or education we have in this world, all of us have equal need of Jesus Christ. No one can say, "I'm not as bad as _____" or "I'm too far gone for Jesus to want me." The truth is the same for all of us; therefore, comparing ourselves to others is a waste of time and effort.

If we're all in such a bad state, what hope do we have? What about those who lived before Jesus Christ came to earth? What about those who haven't heard about him yet? I think our hope comes from the character of God Himself because He *wants* to be known. In chapter 1 Paul writes:

... since what may be known about God is plain to them [those who suppress the truth by their wickedness], because God has made plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his external power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (vs. 19-20)

That's our hope—God Himself: His caring, love, power, consistency, dependability, knowledge, creativity, beauty, variety, and availability.

What would you add to this list? What is your hope based on these days? Are you living today with the knowledge of your need of Jesus?

The most important question may be: Is hope a *maybe* thing for you, or is it based on the never-changing facts of the cross and the resurrection?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 3:21-34

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets [the Old Testament] testify.”

I think I just realized why I love studying the Old Testament: it's like a huge arrow pointing to Jesus Christ and His act of pure love for us. The more we understand the truths in the Law and the Prophets, as well as the rest of the books, the more we know about Jesus.

Let's imagine that we're Gentiles living in first century Rome and we've become followers of Jesus Christ. We know about the religiousness of the Jewish people, that they believe they're God's chosen people, but from our point of view their way of living is too demanding for us, no matter how much we may be drawn to their God. We've had our own gods, of course, the Roman and the Greek gods. And while the gods we've known are bigger than life, we've found them to be capricious, impersonal, and immoral. So what are we left with: our Roman gods that we're afraid of angering, or the Jewish God who looks good but seems distant, impossible to know, and too perfect?

Then along comes this letter from this man named Paul in which he states that we can have what we've been longing for: a clean standing before a God we respect, value, honor; a God who loves us; and a God we want to know. This *clean standing* doesn't depend on us and how we act or don't act, how we feel or don't feel, and how we think or don't think.

This clean, or right, standing before God is called *righteousness*, and Paul says it's from God, apart from the Law (what we do or don't do), its pictured in the Old Testament, and it comes by faith in Jesus Christ. This righteousness is how God sees us because of what Jesus did for us. We're clean (forgiven of sin), complete (nothing missing), and right (wrong turns made right) before Him.

Where are you in this story? Are you like the Jews who are trying to earn God's favor by what they do but keep missing the mark? Are you like the Roman Gentiles who are doing whatever they want but sense that something's missing? Or have you discovered the wonderful gift of right standing before the God of creation because of your faith in Jesus Christ?

Look at how you treat others, how you talk to your kids or parents, how you think about yourself and others when you're in conflict with them. These relationships reveal where you really are in this story.

Come to the cross again and thank Jesus for what He did there for you. He is the righteousness of God made known to us and made available to us through the Holy Spirit.

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 4:1-16

“What does this Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’”

Paul sees significance in Abraham being credited as righteous before he was circumcised. So my questions are: where in Abraham’s life did he receive this credit, what did Abraham’s belief look like, and how did Abraham get to this point in his life? Let’s look at the interactions between God and Abram (his born-with name) up to the point that God calls him righteous. (Genesis 15:16)

<u>God</u>	<u>Abraham</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tells Abram to leave and go to a new land.• Appears to Abram and gives him the land for his offspring.• Reaffirms His promises to Abram.• Promises Abram a son as an heir.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leaves his home.• Builds an altar for worship.• Leaves for Egypt because of a famine.• Afraid of his own life, passes off his wife as his sister and gets caught.• Returns to the altar, and calls on the Lord.• Gives Lot the first choice of land.• Walks the land, moves his tent to a new area, and builds a new altar.• Rescues Lot, but chooses not to profit from this action.• Believes the Lord, and God credited it to him as righteousness.

So what do we see in Abraham’s story that is true for us?

1. God initiates.
2. God promises what we already want deep in our hearts.
3. God gets us ready for what He has for us before He fulfills His promises.
4. God maintains a relationship with us throughout the process.
5. God waits for a response from us.
6. God restores us when we blow it; we just have to go back to where we were and start from there.
7. Belief is an internal response to what God tells us is true.
8. God knows when we’re really serious.
9. God honors our choices, and actions follow choices.

Where do you see yourself in this process: needing to respond to God, growing during the wait, needing to go back to where you left your walk with God, or ready to believe? What a great place to be!

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 4:16-25

“He is our Father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.”

When you think of God, what picture do you see: a kindly old gentleman, Santa Claus, a dad on the rampage, an absentee father? The father figure in your growing up years will probably be the backdrop for your mental picture of God; therefore, it's important to know the grid you use to see your heavenly Father. Even if your dad was the best dad around, he pales in comparison to the God that Abraham knew.

Paul tells us that Abraham had learned that God was so powerful that He could give life to the dead and He could call “into being that which was not.” (NASB) So what kind of difference did this belief make to Abraham personally?

1. He had confidence in God's promise for a son, even though his reality contradicted the promise:
 - His body was as good as dead since he was almost 100.
 - Sarah was almost as old as he was.
2. He didn't waver in his thinking about God's promise.
3. As his faith grew, he gave glory to God because he was fully persuaded that God had the power to do what He had promised.

What about your faith? Which of these words or phrases describe your walk with the Father?

confidence	wavering through unbelief
strengthened in faith	giving glory to God
fully persuaded of God's power	

Paul says that if we believe in the God of Abraham who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, we will be declared righteous and raised to a new quality of life that results in our being justified (*just as if we never sinned*).

One of the principles we looked at yesterday was that actions follow choices. Take a look at how you are talking and responding:

- Do your actions of faith resemble Abraham's?
- What choices do your actions point to?
- Do your actions show that you believe that God sees you justified because of His Son, just-as-if-you've-never-sinned?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 5:1-11

“... we have ...”

As I looked at this section, I noticed a number of *we have*'s. Let's chart what *we have* in Jesus Christ and what Paul says we're to do in response.

<u>We Have</u>	<u>What We're To Do</u>
• Been justified through faith	• Rejoice in the hope of the glory of God
• Peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ	• Rejoice in our sufferings because of what they produce
• Gained access by faith into the grace in which we stand	• Rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ
• Been justified by His blood	• Rejoice
• Been saved from God's wrath through Him	• Rejoice
• Been reconciled through God	• Rejoice
• Been saved through his life	• Rejoice
• Received reconciliation	• Rejoice

Today is an election day, and two very different men are hoping to be declared president tonight. Many voters are anxious, worried, and concerned. Since these emotions overwhelm us daily, what help can we get from today's passage?

I think our chart helps us remember the big picture instead of just the details. God loves us and has done everything necessary for us to be able to relate to Him. He offers us a new standing (identity), peace (lack of internal turmoil), grace (His resources), a loving relationship (worth), and no barriers between Himself and us (acceptance). The kicker, though, is that this offering is only available by believing in His Son, Jesus Christ. Faith means we have to give up control and let Jesus be in charge.

If you're like me, you *believe* that what I've just said is true, but at times you still *feel* anxious, worried, and fearful. So our question is, what are we to do when we know truth but don't feel it?

May I suggest that perhaps we don't really *know* truth way down deep in our souls, that we only acknowledge it in our minds? Instead, like Abraham in chapter 4, we need to *internally* agree with God about what He says is important, and then we need to *verbally* respond by rejoicing: in the hope of the glory of God in what He's doing through the hard times, in the hope that comes through proven character, and in God Himself.

Our choice?

God and what He says is true

OR

our circumstances and feelings

Which choice are you going to look at and stand on today?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 5:12-21

“much more . . . much more . . . all the more”

These phrases caught my attention because they point to the contrast between Adam and Jesus. Let's look at what Paul wants us to know:

Adam	Jesus
Sin entered the world through the choice of one man	Grace was made available through the death of one man
Death came to all men through sin	Eternal life was made available to all men
Because of one man's trespass, many die	God's gifts of grace and life overflow to the many
One sin resulted in judgment and brought condemnation to all	Righteousness is made available to all through one man
One man's choice allowed death to reign	We can reign in life because of what Jesus did
One trespass resulted in condemnation for all men	One act of obedience makes righteousness available to those who believe
Sin increased through the law	Grace increases all the more
Sin reigned in death	Grace reigns through righteousness to bring eternal life

I'm in Reno with my husband, Barney, for a conference, and we're staying at a casino hotel. Gambling is pretty low on our list because of a tenant who gambled away the rent money instead of providing for his family. It's sad to see so many people throwing away their money. One man at the conference who lives here said he used to gamble away what would equate to a monthly car payment. Everything's available in the hotel, so guests never need to leave. The beautiful chandelier lights are dimmed, so attention is drawn to the bright lights on the slot machines. Drinks flow, and cigarette smoke is everywhere. No one smiles. Sin and death reign.

But we met a couple at the conference who are seeking God's truth and life. So just like in today's section where Jesus came right into the middle of sin and death to bring hope, grace, justification, and righteousness, God showed up in Reno, and eternal friendships were formed.

Are sin and death encircling you? Do you feel overwhelmed? Remember, God is with you right where you are. Ask Him to let you see life through His eyes so you can see Him and what He's doing in your circumstances and in the lives of those around you. What can you lose?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 5:12-21

“sin, reign, trespass, grace, condemnation, justification, righteousness, eternal life”

You're right, we're still in yesterday's passage, but the meaning behind some of today's words may elude you. So before we continue in Chapter 6 (a division added by editors for our ease of reading), let's look at some definitions. While I'm not a Bible scholar, over the years I've heard these explanations that make sense to me:

Sin: missing the mark; *not* doing what we're supposed to do, *not* being what we're supposed to be

Reign: in charge; like a king; above everything else; no opposition

Trespass: stepping over the line; doing what we're *not* supposed to do

Grace: **God's resources at Christ's expense**; all of God's love, power, forgiveness, wisdom, kindness, consistency, dependability, _____ (fill in the blank) made available to us because Jesus died on the cross to deal with our sin natures so the Holy Spirit could reside in us.

Condemnation: sentenced to death without any recourse; at the Coliseum when a slave won a battle, Nero would either give a thumbs up to let him live or a thumbs down to sentence (condemn) him to death.

Justification: *just as if we haven't sinned*; because Jesus paid the price on the cross and the Holy Spirit lives in us, God sees us the way He originally saw Adam and Eve in the garden. They didn't have to cover up their weaknesses and insecurities in front of Him or each other; they were free and open with each other, unashamed, because of how they saw themselves.

Righteousness: Right character, right standing, right behavior, nothing standing in the way of a perfect relationship with the Father

Eternal life: a quality of life that starts when we begin a relationship with Jesus and continues on into glory; knowing God and His Son, Jesus Christ; not knowing *about* Him but really *knowing* Him, inside and out. (John 17:3)

Now try rereading today's section and include these definitions.



Don't yesterday's words of "*much more . . . much more . . . all the more*" make you appreciate all the more what Christ has done for you? How about telling Him what you're thinking and feeling?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 6:1-14

“Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness.”

This section has so much in it about our own life and death, as well as Christ's life, death, and life. I'm wondering if you're asking the question, what difference does this information makes? It's great truth, but what are we to do with it? If these are your questions, I understand them, because they were mine years ago when I first read these verses.

But these questions are why I love the practicality of today's verse. Paul is telling us that the parts of our body—our eyes (how we see people, circumstances, and events), our ears (how we hear and interpret what others say), our brain (how we think and choose), our hands (how we touch and interact with others), our feet (how we walk through life)—are tools, or instruments, that can be used for selfishness or for righteousness. The choice is ours. We decide who's going to be in charge: sin or God.

You probably don't *feel* like you have a choice, but you really do if you're in Christ, if you've told Him that you accept what He did for you on the cross (He's your Savior) and therefore He has the right to be in charge of your life (He's your Lord). Your feelings aren't what count; they only follow your choices like a train's railroad cars follow the engine.

So what are we to do? Let me share what I learned to do a number of years ago. I was struggling with giving into sin in how I was thinking about a hurtful situation. While I wanted to rise above my emotions and soar with Jesus, I was in the depths and going lower. So, every day for at least a month, I read and prayed through these verses.

Paul taught me through these words to offer the parts of my body to God as a tool (an instrument) that He could use for the sake of righteousness. If you'd like to join me in how I still pray, here's some wording to get you going.

Lord, I offer You my eyes so I'll see others as You see them.
 my mouth so I'll speak to others as You speak.
 my ears so I'll hear others as You hear them.
 my feet so I walk where You want me to go.
 my mind, so I'll think Your thoughts.

Have you thought of other parts of your body that you want to offer to God as instruments of righteousness? Lord, I offer You my

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 6:15-23

“But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you whole-heartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.”

I'm remembering the morning after I became a Christian. I was at an over-night retreat, and the previous evening my friend, Linda Broesamle, had asked Jesus to come into my heart because I was crying too hard to speak. All I could say was *okay*, and that one word spoke volumes.

Anyway, the next morning I realized that everything I had been hearing about Jesus from this group of people was so different from what I had learned as a child that I consciously chose to forget all that I had learned. I was so scared of the path I was going down that I decided to whole-heartedly obey whatever Jesus had to say to me. I resolved that if He could give me the peace, love, direction, and foundation that I needed, He was worth following.

God, in His amazing wisdom, placed me in a wonderful Bible-teaching church so I could always see in my Bible where our pastors were getting their ideas as they preached. My first Sunday in church, our main teacher, Ray Stedman, even made the book of Leviticus come alive and be relevant.

How do you accept the teaching you receive? Paul says that it's been *entrusted* to you; so how do you handle this trust? Are you still a slave to sin and your previous way of living, or are you sold out to following God no matter what? Do you say you're a Christian but find yourself being angry, critical, lazy, or intent on your own way? When I observe these behaviors in myself, I realize that I'm slipping back to my old way of living instead of going forward. And that slipping scares me because I know that direction all too well.

Do the words *righteousness*, *set free*, *holiness*, and *eternal life* describe you and how you're living? If not, do you *want* them to?

If you're tired of the *form* of Christian life you've been living, maybe it's time to learn from the believers in Rome. If you're ready to change how you walk your faith, go back to yesterday's section, and pray through, again and again, your commitment to have the members of your body be instruments of righteousness.

Offering the parts of my body as instruments of righteousness—part by part—is how I started and how I continue to walk, and I highly recommend it to you.

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 7:1-6

“But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.”

(Note: This section is about divorce and remarriage. If you’re divorced and your former spouse is still living, please remember the other places in the New Testament that Jesus and Paul discuss this difficult issue. In this particular passage, Paul is illustrating a point, not stating doctrine.)

So now we’re in Christ. We’re no longer bound to the law and so *have to* sin and experience death that comes in the form of anger, resentment, obsessions, depression, greed, selfishness, pride, isolation, and being argumentative. Paul says that we used to live “in the old way of the written code”: *do this and live*. We have now been released from following the law so we can “serve in the new way of the Spirit.” Notice the word difference?

Do versus serve in the Spirit.

What does this *servicing in the Spirit* look like? These actions can be as varied as the number of people involved, but I think the motives behind serving this way are the same as Jesus’ motives: love of God and others, humility, selflessness, truth, compassion, kindness, hope, and faith.

Take a moment and look at how you’ve been interacting with others. *Are you doing or serving in the Spirit?* If you’re honest, your attitudes and motives will give you your answer.

If you find you need to change some behavior but don’t *feel* the right way, perhaps this idea will help: I’ve found that while I can’t change my motives, I can choose to *do* what’s right (even if it’s just to put a smile on my face) while asking God to change my motives.

This suggestion may sound simplistic to you because of the difficult situation you’re in. I’ve found, though, that as I start to put this truth into practice in small areas, the larger situations don’t seem so overwhelming. For example, do you find it hard to walk into a particular group of people because of shyness or feelings of isolation? You might try looking at each person individually and smile kindly and warmly when you greet each one. Or do you have to deal with an angry son or daughter when you get home tonight? Ask God to let you see this young one as He does, even with all the pain and anger that can be swirling around inside you. Choose to care more about this young one than about how you’re being treated.

As sailors know, you can’t steer a boat that’s not moving.

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 7:7-13

“But sin, seizing the opportunity . . . produced in me . . . sprang to life . . . seizing the opportunity . . . deceived me . . . put me to death . . . produced death in me . . . utterly sinful.”

Have you always thought (as I have) that sin is something we *do*? Yes, we do *sin* (miss the mark by not doing what we’re suppose to do) and *transgress* (step over the line by doing what we’re not suppose to do). But this passage gives us a whole new slant on sin: it has a life of its own, it’s an entity we have to deal with, and it doesn’t care a bit about you and me. In fact, it wants to destroy us. Therefore, our struggle against sin is real, and this struggle is called a battle.

I’ve always enjoyed war and cowboy movies. I’d rather go to action flicks than see chick flicks (luckily, I had three sons). I like the strategy of battle and the conflict between good and evil—as long as the good guys win in the end. Losing a battle is okay as long as the war is won.

Maybe my enjoyment of movies with battles is why I was drawn to the phases we’re looking at in this section. We have an enemy, but we also have an ally who has already won the war. So the question is, who are we going to align ourselves with?

Our enemy knows how to get to us; his tactics may not be original, but they are personal, and they are effective. All too often, though, we forget how to fight our spiritual battles. We forget the truth that Paul gives us in 2 Corinthians 10 and in Ephesians 6.

Battles fought God’s way are hard to fight but are winnable. One of Eve’s downfalls came from having a *discussion* with the serpent instead of going to the Father (who created her, knew her, and loved her) and asking for His help.

What battles are you facing today? People aren’t the problem; Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 that the real conflict comes from sin working through us and through the rest of humanity. This conflict is what causes our grief.

Are you going to give into the enemy by fighting skirmishes on your own and believing the lies, or are you going to depend on Christ’s life in you and stand firm? The two questions we need to ask ourselves are:

Who do we want to win?

How are we going to fight?

How are you going to answer these questions?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 7:14-25

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature . . . Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."

If you've read through any of Paul's letters, you've probably wondered how he changed:

From This

- Angry, driven, legalistic Jew
- Hunted down and killed followers of Jesus Christ

To This

- The apostle and pastor we see in his letters

I think the answer comes from the struggle he describes in this section. By having the Holy Spirit open his eyes, he saw himself as he really was, in stark contrast to his Lord and Savior, and he was horrified. Everything that he thought was worthy of praise and commendation, he now saw as garbage. (Philippians 3:7)

Have you gotten to this point of seeing yourself in comparison to Jesus? If so, humility and compassion are trademarks of your character. If not, then like most of us, you often compare yourself to others, always thinking about yourself (either positively or negatively), experiencing conflict in relationships, angry, or depressed.

But Paul didn't *stay* at this point of seeing himself as he was. He learned that in Christ he was a whole new person who *couldn't* sin as long as he was depending on the Holy Spirit living within him. He no longer *had* to sin; he was now a slave to God's law of love.

I think that seeing ourselves as God sees us is one of the hardest things we have to do as Christians. We're so used to looking at our faults or our accomplishments that we forget to take the truth of the cross and the resurrection into how we think and live. For example, if we don't evaluate our self-talk, we'll keep thinking the way we did before we came to Christ. If we don't learn truth way down deep in our souls, we'll never experience the life Jesus died for us to live.

Take a look at your thoughts, words, and actions from the past couple of days: whose slave do they show you to be—God's or sin's? If you live by Paul's example, your character is becoming like Christ's. I can't think of anything better; can you?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 8:1-11

“. . . but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”

“*What the Spirit desires.*” What does the Spirit desire? Since the Son was willing to come “in the likeness of sinful men to be a sin offering,” what does *He* want for us? As I’ve been selling my first devotional, I’ve signed many of them with the words “May your walk with the Father be all that He wants it to be.” What does the Father desire for us?

As these questions have been reverberating in my mind, I’ve been realizing that all too often my thoughts about my life with the Father have centered around what *I* want my life to look like. So I’m with you today as we struggle with wanting what the Spirit desires.

Tears are forming in my eyes as I fear what in my comfortable life He’d want me to give up and what He’d want me to start doing for the sake of His kingdom. And because my thoughts have been on myself, I’m realizing that my view of God is skewed. He’s become a harsh taskmaster instead of a loving Father. Do you identify with this way of thinking? How easily these thoughts surface when we don’t let God define Himself to us!

Big changes aside, what does the Spirit desire for you and for me *today*? I think He wants us to:

- Live in freedom, not bondage.
- Love more instead of having to be right.
- Humble ourselves instead of insisting on being the center of attention.
- Look to Him instead of plowing ahead with our own plans.

When you’re ready to ask God what He wants for you, remember that Jesus made available to us a relationship with a living, *loving* God who continually reaches out to us for our best. Whatever we want to hold onto pales in comparison to what He wants for us.

Ready to join me in asking Him what He desires for us?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 8:12-17

“ . . . those who are led by the Spirit of God . . . ”

In the first part of Romans 8, we looked at setting our minds on what the Spirit desires. In today's section, Paul gives us the image of *being led* by the Spirit of God. Before this leading can happen, though, Paul writes that we must have such a love relationship with God that we know Him as Father. We can't enjoy the blessings of God without taking the time and energy to have a close, family-like relationship with Him.

So, how does the Spirit want us to live? Let's look at what Paul tells us will happen when we walk this way:

- We'll put to death the misdeeds of the body so we can live.
- We won't be slaves to fear because we're sons [daughters].
- We can call God, *Father*, because our spirits know, way down deep and without a doubt, that we're His children.
- We will know that we are heirs of God and coheirs with Christ; if we share in Christ's sufferings, we'll also share in His glory.

I picture a dad and a young son (or daughter) walking along a path, hand-in-hand. The dad is about a half step ahead of his child, setting the pace and going in his pre-determined direction. The child only cares that he's with his dad; where they're going isn't as important as just being together. Is this your view of walking with the Father?

But what can stop us from having and enjoying this quality of relationship? Do any of these lifestyles describe you?

- Enmeshed in sinful patterns of thinking and behavior that produce death instead of life
- Enslaved by fear while longing for freedom
- Feeling isolated instead of knowing you're part of a family
- Being overwhelmed and needing hope

Then the Spirit is ready to work in you to produce life, freedom, belonging, and perspective. It's time to quiet yourself so you can listen. He's ready to bring you the healing words of hope and lead you into the life Jesus died for.

What is He saying to you right now?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 8:18-25

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Now what happened yesterday makes sense. On Thursdays at work we gather for prayer. One man shared his story of a brain tumor that almost killed him. At the end of his story, he played the song by Tim McGraw about his father who had gone through cancer, "Live Like You Are Dying."

I found myself choking back the sobs, remembering how my own mom had died from a brain tumor ten years ago. Between his story and the song, I re-lived the horrors of learning about the malignant tumor and then watching her for a full year endure the results of chemotherapy and radiation. Every time after a visit, I'd call my husband from the airport, crying over what mom and dad were going through. I grieved so much that last year of her life that when she died, no tears were left. I hadn't missed her until yesterday. These memories are the downside of this experience.

The upside was that when mom came out of the initial surgery, she knew Jesus. While her mental ability was like that of a child, she knew her Lord. Instead of just knowing about Him intellectually, overnight she became an evangelist in her retirement complex. For the last year of her life, she and I had the loving relationship that I had longed for; we knew Jesus together.

During that year of cancer, the idea of heaven and what happens after we die crowded into my thinking, and I read, studied, and thought about it often. During that time I concluded with Paul that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." My hope of what *will be* helped me cope with *what was*.

Are you suffering through something today, this month? Have you considered what God has for you or for another on the other side? Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5:1-12 have helped me tremendously. You're probably finding your own passages of hope. But if not, ask the Father to personally comfort and encourage you through His word. He so wants to meet with us.

I'd love to hear what you've heard from the Father. Please email me through our website www.WalksWithTheFather.com.

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 8:26-27

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.”

After reading this sentence, here are my questions: “What is *my* weakness; how else (*in the same way*) has the Spirit helped *me*?” My answer to the first part of the question is *prayer*. The answer to the second question is as follows:

Paul says that we don’t know how we ought to pray or what we ought to pray for. Is this true for you? Have you heard yourself, as I have, telling God what He should do and then realized that you’re asking for a life of comfort and ease without any problems or issues—and no chances to see God work. As I read this section, I realized that sufferings, frustration, bondage, decay, and groaning as in childbirth are parts of life that can’t be avoided and are times for getting to know God better.

So what should we do in these difficult times—give in and complain to anyone who will listen? Paul suggests that we should:

- Humble ourselves, acknowledging that we don’t know how to pray or how to proceed.
- Believe that “the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans [not words] that words cannot express.”
- Be comforted by the knowledge that God knows our hearts and that the Spirit talks to the Father on our behalf in accordance with God’s will.

This truth has helped me so much over the years when I’ve felt that I didn’t know what to ask for, when I didn’t know how to act, and when I felt that my words weren’t “spiritual” enough for God to hear me. Realizing that God already knows my heart, I can just say “*Help!*” That one word speaks volumes to my heavenly Father.

What do you need today? Do you need to humble yourself and stop telling God what to do? Do you need to stop avoiding hard times and “*walk* [not run] through the valley of _____?” (Psalm 123)

Do you need to cry, “*Help!*” and believe that the Father hears your heart? Do you have a friend who needs to know this truth as well?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 8:28-39

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

If you’ve been a follower of Jesus for a while, this section has probably been one of your favorites in Scripture. What I’d like to look at today are the “all things” that Paul is referring to. Paul says that in this world we can expect:

- False charges and accusations.
- Condemnation that can go so far that it results in physical death.
- Trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness (poverty?), danger, execution.

Paul also says that while we’re in this world, we can count on:

- Being conformed to the image of God’s Son.
- Being called, justified, and glorified.
- Never being separated from the love of God through death, demonic activity, present or future events, other powers, height or depth, or anything else that’s been created.

What are you going through today; what is the world throwing at you? Paul wants us to look at our circumstances realistically, but he doesn’t want us to *stay* looking at them. Like Abraham in Romans 4, Paul wants us to believe that the same God who raised His own Son from death to a whole new quality of life can redeem our situations.

What are you going to look at today: your circumstances or God who is working through them for His glory and your benefit? What’s more powerful: your circumstances or God’s ability to bring light out of darkness, life out of death, and something into being that’s never been?

Take some time to tell your Father (and yourself) what you believe. Speaking and writing truth helps cement it in our hearts.

Father, I believe _____

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 9:1-18

“ . . . in order that God’s purpose in election might stand; not by works but by him who calls . . . It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or efforts, but on God’s mercy.”

I’m excited about reading through Romans 9-16 with you because these chapters are fairly unfamiliar for me. While I’ve read them a number of times, I’ve never looked at them closely, so now’s the time.

I don’t know where you stand on the issue of predestination (or election) versus free will. It can be a divisive issue. I’ve come to the conclusion that I believe in at the same time, just like I believe in two sides of a coin. We need both the truth of predestination and the truth of free will to understand the heart of God. He chooses, and we choose. He responds, and we respond. He’s not a dictator, and we’re not pawns. He’s God, and He’s given us the right to become His children.

This section, though, speaks to me more about the *godness* of God. Yes, He’s loving, kind, and compassionate, and often we need to experience this wonderful side of Him. But He’s also the creator, the one in charge, the one who has a plan that will unfold no matter what we do. He is God.

Because His character is pure love, He is wholly trustworthy. Our struggle with God’s godness is that we see Him through our own filter of experiences with ourselves and others. And we certainly wouldn’t want ourselves or our friends (or enemies) to have the power that God does, because all of us would use it selfishly.

So when God chose Isaac and not Ishmael (Abraham’s sons), Jacob and not Esau (Isaac’s sons), and didn’t choose Pharaoh, He did so because He had the *right* to do so and the *character* to do so justly. And as today’s verses state, God’s choosing comes out of His *mercy*.

Do you struggle with God’s choices for you, those you love, or what’s happened in the past? All of us struggle with these issues. But in your struggling, are you viewing God as you would another human being? Have you brought Him down to a human level of limited knowledge, foresight, and goodness? Perhaps it’s time to review God’s character with Him? You might try listing the ABCs and then ask God to give you an attribute of Himself, writing the words next to each letter.

Is it time to stop ignoring God or arguing with Him? Do you need to let God be God?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 9:19-29

“... *only the remnant will be saved.*”

The other day a friend told me about attending a church where the pastor refused to teach on these middle chapters of Romans because they were too controversial. I can understand his fears, but I also believe that God has some amazing secrets in these chapters that He's longing to share with us. So let's go!

First, I want to remind us that Paul had in mind the Jewish *nation* as he wrote these words (really as he dictated them to a scribe). Second, I want to remind us of what Peter says in 2 Peter 3:9 that God doesn't want anyone to perish but all to come to repentance. John reminds us in John 3:16 that Jesus came to the whole world. But He did come through the Jewish nation.

My conclusion from this section? God *wants* to be known, and He wants us to know that not everyone will come to faith (probably because we're such prideful people and want to be self-sufficient, not depending on anyone).

But a remnant of people *will* know Him because they're willing to admit that they need a Savior, they've come to the end of themselves and realized that they don't have what it takes to live the way they really want to, and they're certainly not good enough to make it into Heaven on their own (since perfection is required).

What will this remnant discover? Paul says God will make known to them His mercy; they'll know of His power, share in His glory, be called God's people, experience being God's loved ones, and be called the sons (and daughters) of the living God.

I trust you're part of this remnant. If you're not sure of your standing with God and the words of the previous paragraph are tugging at your heart, talk to Jesus and settle the issue of who's in charge.

On the other hand, if you know that you *are* part of the remnant, remember that as you talk with others who don't know Jesus personally, you may be the instrument God uses to bring them into the kingdom. They may *look* like they've been prepared for destruction, but you probably looked like that to someone else before you became a child of God—I know I did.

Who's sitting next to you now? Are you thinking of and treating this person like God's son or daughter would think and act? Are *you* thinking and acting like God's son or daughter would think and act?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 9:30-33

“. . . but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it [a righteousness that is by faith]. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were works.”

Have you ever heard yourself saying (or just thinking), “This isn’t fair, Lord? These people don’t follow You and they aren’t involved in what You’re doing in others’ lives, but You bring them a spouse (if your single), children (if your childless), wealth (if your struggling with finances), or challenging jobs (if your feeling under used and not valued).”

This was my attitude yesterday, and I was miserable, angry, and resentful. How do you feel when you start down this road with its potholes and detours, demands and expectations?

I knew my answer was going to come when I sat down with the Lord for today’s writing, so finally I sat down. In my own reading I was in Matthew 18, and its word for me was “humble yourself; be as needy as a child with me.” Then I read today’s verses and realized that my attitude was the same as Paul’s brothers, the Jews: I was pursuing a life based on my own efforts, and I was expecting God to reward me with the fruits of this world.

Having to choose between the good things of this world and the best things of God’s world is such a struggle, isn’t it? That’s not to say that the good of this world is bad; it isn’t. But if we think that we deserve this good because of what we’ve done rather than enjoying the good gifts our heavenly Father *chooses* to give, we’re in trouble. In fact, Paul says in these verses that if we insist on getting what we want because we deserve it, we’ll experience what the Israelites experienced: stumbling, falling, and being put to shame.

What is your attitude toward what you want and don’t have? Have you found out yet (again?) that the satisfaction of this world fades quickly and you again find yourself longing for what you don’t have?

Perhaps God is letting you experience this tension in your life (as He did in mine) so you’ll:

Meet with Him as you read His Word and pray.

Have your hurtful attitudes be exposed to truth.

Walk with Him in His journey for you.

Which road are you going to take?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 10:1-13

“Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: ‘The man who does these things will live by them.’ But the righteousness that is by faith says ‘ . . . The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming.”

As a new Christian in my early 20’s, over and over and in so many different ways, the truth we were taught was that our life in Christ was based on His living in us through the Holy Spirit. No longer did we have to live according to a written standard to earn God’s love, acceptance, and favor. No longer was our standing with Him based on our own efforts.

Instead, the One who had perfectly fulfilled the requirements of the law lives in us, which means that God’s love, acceptance, and favor toward us are secure if Jesus lives in us. From now on, we *want* to live according to His standards, and we have the power to do so because the power of the resurrection resides within us. All we have to do is step out in faith, acting as though this truth is real—because it is—and we’ll experience the power necessary to live the way God wants us to.

So, what attitudes do you think are confronted by this truth? I think it’s our pride and self-sufficiency. When you read in the previous day’s section that God wants us to be as humble and needy as a child, how did you react? Our society says we need to make it on our own efforts, look out for ourselves, and get all the toys we can; but then Paul says we’re to live by faith. How do you react to this dichotomy?

If you have a sense of quietness and at-easiness that reflects humility and dependence, you’re doing great! If not, perhaps you need to spend some time with Jesus on *His* terms, listening *to* Him and looking *at* Him.

Choosing to believe God rather than the lies of this world and then living on this belief is called dying to yourself and living to God.

What describes your thoughts, choices, and actions? Which type of righteousness do you find yourself pursuing: yours and the world’s version or God’s?

Are you quiet in your spirit and at-ease with yourself? Are others calmed by being around you and free to share who they are with you? Your answers to these questions are good indications of who’s in charge.

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 10:14-21

“As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.’”

As I write, Christmas is five days away, and this verse is one that is often beautifully sung at this time of year referring to Jesus coming to earth. My head and heart are full of the good news of Jesus Christ, from listening to carols on the radio, reading cards from friends, and experiencing the beauty and joy of Christmas at church through the singing and the sermons.

But as I read this verse a third and fourth time, I started realizing that *the feet* Paul is referring to belong to Christ’s followers—us, you and me—not Jesus Himself.

I think Paul is saying that God calls beautiful those who walk into the lives of nonbelievers, young Christians, and struggling believers and then walk along with them as they learn for themselves about God’s good news.

What does this good news look like? In Isaiah 52:7 (where this verse is from), Isaiah says it involves proclaiming *peace* (no more conflict with God), *brings good tidings* (news we want to hear), *proclaims salvation* (being freed from our sins), and says *“Your God reigns!”* (lets God be God). Is this the good news you’re living and bringing to others?

We had dinner the other night with some friends. One of the other guests was telling the group, which included two nonbelievers, how Christ had changed him—and it was wonderful news. Later in the evening, he started talking negatively about his ex-wife.

My first thought was, “How are these nonbelievers reacting to his unresolved anger after what he’s said about being a believer?” Then I wondered, “How do nonbelievers and young believers respond when I talk about others in a negative or angry way?”

Perhaps you find yourself sharing good news in a good way but not much happens. Remember that Paul always preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. A few Jews believed, but most didn’t. We all start out being disobedient and obstinate people. Count on God to change their hearts while you lovingly persevere.

But perhaps you have an area in your life that’s in conflict with what you’re saying about God. If we talk about humility and love, but others see selfishness and anger, how can they see Jesus in us? Do you have such an area?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 11:1-10

"I [God] have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed their knee to Baal."

Have you ever felt like you're the only one who is closely following God, who wants to talk about what God's doing, who's dying to self and choosing to do what's right, who's listening when everyone else is talking rather than caring enough to listen? I can identify with this type of thinking; in fact, I heard myself saying just these words to my husband this morning.

(Note: The complaint to God that Paul's referring to came from Elijah (the details are in 1 Kings 18-19). If you don't know Old Testament history, Elijah is one of the main men in Israel's history. In fact, when God wanted to encourage Jesus as He was on His way to Jerusalem to be crucified, He sent Moses (representing The Law) and Elijah (representing the prophets) to meet with Him (Luke 9:28-36) Elijah was one of two men who didn't have to experience death when he left this world to join God in heaven. (2 Kings 2))

Now back to Elijah's very human complaint. I think it's important for us to listen to ourselves as we think, complain, evaluate, and talk. I think it's important for us to determine the attitudes that surface in our thoughts and words, what our tone of voice says about us and how we think about others, and how our mannerisms affect others. But we shouldn't stop here. We also need to hear what God has to say about our thoughts, words, tone of voice, and mannerisms.

What did God say to Elijah about his feeling that he was the only one who was following God and that God wasn't appreciating all that Elijah was doing for Him? Basically, God said that Elijah didn't know what he was talking about, that He had been and was actively working to fulfill what He was doing—not just what Elijah was seeing from his limited (earthly) perspective.

What are your complaints today? What do they say about your perspective of God; what you think He's doing (or not doing); and how you think about yourself, your circumstances, and those around you?

What is God saying to you in response? He's brought me up short today; how about you?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 11:11-24

“Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God; sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness.”

Israel's Choices	Led to	Gentiles' Opportunities
Went too far in rejecting God's gift	→	Opportunity to experience salvation
Transgression (did what they weren't suppose to)	→	Riches for the world
Their loss	→	Riches for the Gentiles
Their rejection	→	Reconciliation of the world
Some branches broken off	→	Grafted in and sharing the live root's nourishing sap
Experience God's sternness	→	Experience God's kindness

Probably you are a Gentile (non-Jew) like I am, but have you ever thought of how much we owe the nation of Israel? In these three chapters, I've been struck by how much God loves this nation, how He longs for these people to love Him, and the length He'll go to get their attention.

While I'm sad about their situation since their choice not to believe is such a serious one to God, I'm so grateful for the opportunity to know Him that came about because of their choices. Paul is saying to all of us who are Gentiles, don't take lightly God's offer of life with Him.

Unbelief had serious consequences for Israel. Perhaps you're beginning to experience God's sternness through your circumstances. This sternness may be a wake-up call that you don't want to sleep through.

(Note: Some may say that this truth about Israel undermines the security of our salvation through Jesus Christ. That theological question is way beyond me. What I do know is that this is only one passage on the subject, and Paul is talking here about a classification of people, a nation, not about individuals. When determining theology, it's important to look at the *entire* body of Scripture and what it says about God's heart rather than base truth on one verse.)

I believe that as we walk by faith, seek Him, live life depending on the Holy Spirit inside us, we'll continue to know the Father's kindness, love, presence, and life.

But, if you're playing around with unbelief and beginning to reject His gift, is this really the direction you want to go in, how you really want to live? Choices do have consequences.

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 11: 25-32

“Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of [Israel’s] disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you.”

Did you notice that the word *mercy* was used three times in this one sentence? Repetition signifies importance in Scripture, so God’s mercy is an important concept for us to know about. In fact, mercy is crucial to our walk of faith, because without experiencing it, we become puffed up with our own importance (conceited) and develop hard hearts just as the nation of Israel did.

Take a few moments with me and think about where you’d be now if God hadn’t reached out to you. If you became a believer at an early age, you may need to think of what you’re like now when you’re not submitting yourself to Christ.



What were your issues back then: pride, arrogance, surface thinking, criticalness, concentrating on yourself, anger, depression? Remember all of the times you tried to turn over a new leaf, all your New Year’s resolutions, all the deals you made with yourself? But none of them worked, did they?

But God, in His amazing mercy, reached out to you, and you responded with a “Yes!” He didn’t give you what you deserved; instead He gave you Himself through His Son. That’s mercy—*not getting* what we deserve.

Today is Christmas Eve for me, and I’ve been wanting a fresh look at Jesus’ birthday celebration. Now I have it: *God’s mercy extended to us*. My hope is that you and I receive His gift every moment of every day, that we remember where we’ve come from, and that we’re so grateful for the gift of His Son that we choose to replace:

pride	<i>with</i>	humility
arrogance	<i>with</i>	kindness
hardness	<i>with</i>	graciousness
selfishness	<i>with</i>	love

Are you in need of mercy today? It’s available right now. God is ready and willing if you are. And are you extending mercy to those around you? As we have freely received, we should freely give.

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 11:25-32

“As far as the gospel is concerned, they [Israel] are enemies on your account, but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs.”

Yes, we’re still in the same section because I was struck by this verse, and it’s been running around in my head all Christmas weekend. Let’s explore it. What resonated for me were these two ideas:

1. Israel is loved *on account of* the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
2. God’s mercy on this disobedient and heart-wandering people is based not on them but because of His relationships *with the patriarchs*.

How He must have loved these men! I always knew that He chose them, reached out to them, matured them, caused them to make healthy choices, and cared for them in their old age. But I had never associated *love* on God’s part in His relationships with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Silly me.

Then I started thinking about this idea in terms of my own life and wondered if I had ever loved someone who didn’t love me back *on account of* someone I did love.

My mind raced back to the early years of our marriage when I was a new mom to three boys entering adolescence who wouldn’t always listen to me or follow my instructions. I remember the multitudes of times I chose to speak kindly to them *on account of* my love for their father.

Often these days I find I have to choose to love those around me *on account of* my love for God instead of being critical, harsh, or selfish toward them because of their behavior.

As you choose how to interact with those around you today, what is the basis of that choice? Is it based:

on what you should do

OR

on account of God’s love for you?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 11:33-36

“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”

What a perfect ending to these three chapters in Romans that are about the nation of Israel! So many times while reading these versus, I’ve thought, “What *is* Paul talking about? Does he *really* mean . . . ?” What a review of history we’ve had. Our conclusion has to be that God is not like we are: He thinks so much deeper and with so much more understanding than we could ever imagine. Please take time to read the Isaiah 40 passage that our verse references, and notice the quote marks that help us see Isaiah’s questions and God’s answers.

Like me, I bet you often wonder what God is up to. Perhaps in your current circumstances you think that He couldn’t possibly know what’s really going on, or that if He really knew and if He really cared, He’d _____? (Fill in your blank.)

Are you facing some conflict, disappointment, or confusing situation today? How does the God we’ve been looking at affect how you’re viewing your life today? Let me give you an example of how this thinking affects me right now.

As of this writing, we’ve been selling my first devotional, *Walking With the Father*, for seven weeks. The process from writing to editing to self-publishing to initial selling to friends has gone smoothly.

Now we’re ready for the marketing step of “What next?” Some amazing contacts have come along, but nothing has materialized that would prompt us to print a large number of books. So, what next? We’ve found that our attempts to *make* something happen have achieved nothing but a sense of pushing too hard. It’s easy to get impatient, anxious, and frustrated because we can’t see the future. So what do we do?

Well, we’ve started asking God to show us His marketing plan for the book, and we’re continuing to do what’s in front of us. We’re:

1. Making even more edits based on inputs from some readers.
2. Talking to others as God gives opportunities.
3. Waiting for God to reveal what He wants, for “. . . *from Him and in Him and to Him are all things.*” (vs. 36)

What are you facing today? What wonderful things you’re going to get to learn about God and yourself as you’re living *with* this situation! “*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*”

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 12:1-2

“Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.”

God’s will. Do you know what His will is for you? Paul says that it’s good, pleasing, and perfect and that you can test it and approve of it. This means that God is willing to make His decisions open for evaluation. Now, I’m not sure I’m so confident of all my decisions that I’d open them up to such evaluation, but this testing that Paul’s talking about does come at the *end* of a paragraph, not at the beginning, so we’d better take a close look at what has to happen *before* He’ll listen seriously to *our* evaluations.

I remember early in my Christian life how I longed to know God’s will, especially as it pertained to job choices, living arrangements, boy friends, and ministry involvements. At that time all of the sermons at my church were being printed so we could read them whenever we needed to (now they’re all on the website www.pbc.org). I read every sermon I could find that referenced God’s will in the title or summary description, because I had no idea where I should be going in life.

What do *you* wonder about concerning God’s will for you? What questions would your list include? Now would be a good time to make such a list so you can see what’s really on your heart.



What I learned from reading these sermons years ago is Paul’s six-step process as described in this section. Today we’ll look at the first three steps:

1. *Be absolutely grateful*, everyday, for the opportunity God has given you to know Him.
2. Let *how you live* be as a holy sacrifice in response to His mercy (remember, in a sacrifice something always has to die and be burned up).
3. *Stop conforming* to how the world operates (which means we need to observe and identify the world’s way of operating).

What a challenge these three steps bring to our lives: always being grateful for a relationship with the God who created the universe and us, a lifestyle of giving up, and a lifestyle of living opposite to what’s around us.

Do you want to know and live *God’s will* so much that you’re willing to live this way? Is *His will* really good, pleasing, and perfect? Then perhaps the effort is worth the hard work. What do you think?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 12:1-2

“Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.”

God’s will

Now that you’ve working through the first three steps, you’re almost ready to test and approve the value of God’s will for you. So, let’s look at the last three steps:

4. *Keep on renewing* your mind by learning and applying God’s truth (such as you are doing by working through this devotional).
5. While you’re doing step 4, you’ll *be transformed* by the resurrection power of our risen Lord and through the Holy Spirit who’s living in you.
6. **Then** you can *test God’s will*, because you’ll be living it. You’ll *approve* of it because you’ll find that it is good, pleasing, and perfect.

Finally, we get to the results of yesterday’s hard work! All of the effort *is* worth it. We find that God’s will *is* good, pleasing, and perfect.

But what about the list you made yesterday? Does God care about where we work and what we do, where we go to school, who we marry or if we marry, where our kids go to preschool or if we have kids, and where we live?

Absolutely! He cares because He loves us and is involved in every detail of our lives, because He is a perfect Father. But more importantly, He cares that we walk *with Him* through this life and have lives that reflect His character within us. Because what He’s up to in this world is far more significant than anything we think is important. Isn’t it amazing to think that we can be involved in what the Creator of the universe finds important? Think of what He might want to create through you.

So, what is God’s will for you today?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 12:3-8

“For the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”

One of the real challenges for me in marriage has been learning how to take seriously someone else’s thinking about my decisions. Because of being single until I was almost 40, I had learned to make decisions by myself and then act on them. However, presenting an already-made decision to my husband didn’t work for him; he cared so much about me that he wanted to be involved at the beginning of my thinking. I also found out early on that my husband thinks differently than I do—he’s a big picture, big idea thinker, and I’m an in-the-box implementer.

So, what have I learned over the years from this challenge (and potential conflict in marriage) that fits in with today’s verse?

1. My thinking isn’t the best thinking, it’s just my thinking.
2. When I look at life through another person’s eyes, I get to see life in a whole new way.
3. The humility I’ve had to learn in the process has been critical for my own spiritual growth.

Listening to my husband doesn’t mean that I have stopped thinking or deciding, not at all, but when my husband does give me input, I now want to hear him *quickly*, because I’ve learned over the years that his input is for my best. Also, through experience, I’ve become confident that my husband really listens to me and always takes my interests and opinions to heart when he gives his input. I’ve learned to then take his input to the Father, asking Him what He thinks, and He has always confirmed what my husband has said. Is this easy? *No!* Is it worth it? *Yes!*

Who do you need to be listening to, humbling yourself in the process? Who has God put in your life to give you His input? If you’re married, certainly it’s your spouse. As I’m getting older, I’m realizing that I need to listen more to my sons just as our parents had to listen to us. If you’re single, perhaps you need to seek out a parent or an older, or at least wiser, brother or sister in the Lord. For all of us, it’s listening to God’s word, and it’s listening to Him speak through our spiritual teachers, our community of friends, our bosses (and teachers), and our co-workers. How are your listening skills?

On the other hand, when you give input to others, is your input for *their* best interest and does it please God, or does it just make you feel good about yourself? Which of these questions do you want to consider?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 12:9-21

“Do not repay evil for evil.”

How do you respond to someone else’s anger or selfishness? Probably just like I do. Paul, however, sets a new standard for us based on what we’ve learned in this letter.

What I’ve observed about myself and others is that all too often we live with a veneer of Christianity. But veneer is just a coating around the original, and often inferior, wood.

One of our sons told us about a TV show named “Dog, the Bounty Hunter.” These bounty hunters are believers, and as they drive the bail jumpers that they’ve just caught to jail, they reach out to them with the hope of Jesus Christ. We watched the show a few times and have been amazed that a family of believers would be shown on TV! We were delighted that Dog and his family have themselves been saved, that they are taking their faith into their work—a profession that most of us would never touch with a 10-foot pole, and that lives are being changed.

My next comments are meant to be observations and not criticism, so please bear with me. I couldn’t help but notice that this family’s language, anger, appearance, and lack of modesty are similar to those they were chasing. I wondered if they were letting Jesus into these areas of their lives. I wondered if their words of salvation would have more impact if they opened up these areas to being redeemed. On the other hand, maybe they are right on course for where they need to be in their walk with the Father and that He hasn’t addressed these areas yet. But perhaps they have a veneer of Christianity that covers over the areas they don’t want to change. And then I wondered, do I do this?

What does the “wood” of your life look like? Does attractive veneer cover up inferior wood, or is your inner life like beautiful hardwoods that have strength and substance and beauty on their own?

How you respond to others’ anger and selfishness reflects the “type of wood” your life is like. If what you see is veneer, hooray! You’re seeing what God wants to replace with His real “wood.” What to do? The *first* step is to see yourself as you really are and realize you don’t want to stay that way. The *second* step is to ask Him to go to work. The *third* step is to let Him live through you.

We walk step by step, but it takes us actually putting one foot in front of the other, over and over. Do you have a new way to walk ahead of you?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 13:1-7

“Everyone must submit themselves to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.”

Are you ready for the can of worms that this verse can open up? I’m certainly asking God for His wisdom and understanding as we look at it, because of these questions:

1. What about the child who is abused by caregivers?
2. What about the woman (or man) who is beaten by a spouse?
3. What about a government that condones abortion?
4. What about nations that systematically keep people in poverty and degradation while the rulers live lavishly?

At church today we looked at Proverbs 3:5, and our pastor concluded his message with this statement: “Trust in the Lord when life doesn’t make sense, and trust in the Lord until it makes sense.” This view of God is that He knows what’s best and what will *really* make us content, fulfilled, and loved. He is trustworthy, especially when life isn’t.

Yesterday, though, I read in Matthew 10:16 that when Jesus sent out His disciples, He told them to be shrewd and innocent. So what conclusions do we make from these verses in Proverbs and Matthew as we look at today’s verse? Here’s what I’ve come up with:

- Yes, *we’re* to submit to governing authorities as established by God—they are allowed and established for a limited period of time and for a purpose. When God wants to deal with lawless leaders, He will.
- Yes, *we’re* to be shrewd in how we live, meaning “prudent, sensible, practically wise in relationships with others.”
- *We’re* also to be innocent, meaning “without any mixture of deceit, without any defiling material.” Innocent without being naïve.

Which set of these questions fits you today: Is God asking you to submit to authorities in your life as you submit to Him? Is humility a character trait He wants to deepen in you? In what area are you sensing that He wants you to trust Him?

OR

Do you need to be wiser and more mature in your thinking and decision-making? This could mean leaving a dangerous situation. Does He want you to walk into a larger issue around you and right some wrongs? Do you need to have a purer inner life that reflects your Lord?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 13:8-14

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowmen has fulfilled the law.”

Do you have any outstanding debts, or does anyone owe you any money? If so, have you ever thought about how repaying debts is one way to love others?

From time to time we've loaned money to our sons for emergencies or big purchases (such as a car needed for transportation). What's been interesting to me over the years is how we've responded emotionally (especially me) when they have or haven't paid back the money according to the agreed-upon schedule.

If they've missed a payment date by more than a few days or hassled us about repaying the debt, I've felt:

Unloved
A lack of respect
Like a fool for trusting their word

But when they've been diligent in repaying us, I've felt:

Honored
Valued
Trusted
Loved
Willing to go out of my way for them

If we respond this way about debts between family members, imagine how nonbelievers feel when we choose to repay our debts on time or before they're due? Imagine the doors that can open for the sake of the kingdom when we choose to love rather than create tension by not paying our debts or not paying them on time.

Do you have some financial obligations you need to repay before their due dates? Do you have any *other* debts or obligations you need to take care of, something you've committed to do but haven't done? Personally, I have some thank-you notes I've been putting off writing. What do you need to do?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 14:1-4

“Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.”

In my version of the NIV, the editors have included this note: *“According to Paul, a weaker brother is a new believer who needs many rules and regulations.”* I understand this definition of *weaker brothers* because as a new Christian everything I was learning was so new to me that I needed standards of behavior so I would know what holiness looked like. I think my need of standards is what Paul saw in these believers who were young in their faith. Can you identify with them?

Food was a big issue to the first century Christians because they lived in a society that sacrificed food to idols. Perhaps the issue in *your* corner of the world is drinking, smoking, or getting tattoos; perhaps it's what TV shows are watched, or not watched; perhaps it's the type and volume of music being listened to. Whatever issues we have to deal with as young Christians, Paul seems to be saying that they shouldn't *remain* issues, and they should *never* become issues between believers.

Do you find yourself getting upset over how *other* believers act or live? I think we all do, especially if we care for them, but sometimes our caring can turn to criticism. Let's look at how Paul's words can help us through this potential conflict:

1. If we've been Christians for a while and are still living by rules and regulations, focusing on such externals as what is eaten or worn, it's time we grow up and start looking at our *own* attitudes and thought life, and then choose to walk by faith and not by externals.
2. If God accepts a person whose faith is weak, why wouldn't we? Who are we to be critical of someone God loves?
3. We're all answerable to Jesus Christ—not to each other.
4. God is thoroughly capable of bringing a weaker brother (or sister) to adult faith, “for the Lord is able to make him stand.” Do we want to be part of God's process of others growing up in faith, or do we think we're in charge and setting the standards?

As you read these principles, has someone or something come to mind that shows you that you're still living by rules and regulations, focusing on externals? Or have you seen an area in your own life in which you need to start walking by faith instead of struggling over what really doesn't matter? Is it time for a change in perspective?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 14:5-12

“If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”

Do you feel tied into God? Do you sense that you’re connected to Him and that what He wants is making a difference in your life? Or do you feel like you’re just “out there,” not connected to anything or anyone?

I think what Paul is talking about in this section is that with all of the hundreds of decisions we make each day, we should make each decision with the understanding that whether we’re living or we die, we belong to, are tied to, are connected to God. Is this how *you* make decisions?

An image that comes to mind is from shows with characters on a spaceship. A problem happens outside of the ship, and one of the heroes has to put on special gear to go outside to fix it. While outside the ship he (or she) has to be connected to an air supply to stay alive. If the line fails or if the equipment runs out of air, he dies.

I think this is the same idea Paul is describing. We are absolutely dependent on the right amount of air—God’s life in us through the Holy Spirit—to do what’s right in front of us.

How do you react to the idea that we need to be connected to God for everything that comes our way? Do you recognize this need for Him, or do you take Him for granted and do whatever comes along, assuming you have what it takes? How can you determine which way you’re thinking?

I think one of the best indicators is a sense of humility. While we can talk about being humble, what often comes across to others is arrogance and self-importance. Or, we may be able to *verbalize* our need of humility, but then *choose* to stay needy because we don’t believe the truth of who God is in our lives.

What do your actions and words say about what you believe? What would those close to you say about your walk of faith?

What one thing can you do differently—starting today—that will keep you aware of your belonging to and depending on God’s life in you through the Holy Spirit? Think about your career, relationships, free time.

What would be the benefit of thinking this way?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 14:13-18

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Have you noticed from this chapter how Paul is concerned about believers who set their own standards of behavior for others? These standards are based on externals such as eating, drinking, and celebrating certain sacred days. In our generation we could add style of clothing, smoking, what movies and TV shows are watched, which style of music is listened to, how money is spent, and what activities are done on Sunday afternoons.

Paul, however, is more concerned with the critical spirit of those who are setting the standards of behavior because they're actually putting stumbling blocks in the way of the other believers.

Where are you in this description? Are you making others conform to what you think is right but what isn't a directive in Scripture? Or are you struggling with how to conform to those around you so you can feel accepted—instead of pursuing a relationship with Jesus? Either position is miserable; either we're self-righteous, demanding, and full of pride, or we're tossed around like a small boat on a stormy lake, trying to figure out what to do. But Paul gives us a third way to live:

1. *“Who are you to judge someone else's servant [or be judged by another]? To his own master he stands or falls.”* (vs. 14:4)
2. *“Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”* [The Lord's approval is what we should be seeking.] (vs. 14:8)
3. *“For we all will stand before God's judgment seat [believers will have to account for their own actions and behaviors].* (vs. 14:10)
4. *“Because anyone who serves Christ in this way [by pursuing **righteousness** (behavior that reflects the character of God), **peace** (seeking agreement with others rather than concentrating on our differences) and **joy** in the Holy Spirit (responding to the Holy Spirit instead of reacting to our circumstances)] is pleasing to God and approved by men.* (vs. 14:18)

What are you focusing on these days: are you always looking at others (and being critical), OR are you keeping your eyes on Jesus, seeking to please Him as you interact with others? Paul promises us that if we live God's way, we'll be *“pleasing to God and approved by men.”* Are you feeling His pleasure?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 14:19-23

“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”

Oh my, what a standard! Do we dare look at our lives and then evaluate whether:

- Our words and actions create *peace* between us and others or edginess, tension, and self-protectiveness?
- We *edify*, or build up, others and ourselves with our words and actions, such as we would build a house—with clear purpose, use of good design principles, appropriate to the needs, and creatively?

Let’s look at some of the actions and attitudes these believers in Rome were exhibiting as they interacted with each other in opposite ways from what Paul wanted for them. Their examples may help us see ourselves:

1. Rejected those whose faith is weak
2. Passed judgment on disputable matters
3. Judged others
4. Looked down on others while seeing themselves as superior
5. Put stumbling blocks in the way of others
6. Flouted their freedoms before those who weren’t yet free in that area
7. Made eating and drinking the most important part of the kingdom of God.
8. Destroyed the work of God for the sake of food
9. Let everyone know how they felt about what everyone else was doing.

Can you see yourself in any of these *don’ts*? I think the last one is where God is working with me. It’s hard for me to keep my mouth shut about others’ issues. Over and over I see that I need to own up to my own criticalness and lack of humility instead of “evaluating” another person.

Which of these attitudes and actions is God pointing out to you? How can you put today’s truth into action by creatively leading yourself and others into peace and by building up yourself and others in the faith?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 15:1-4

“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scripture we might have hope.”

I've realized that what I see and what I listen to determine what I do. Have you observed this principle as well?

Today my husband and I went out for breakfast before beginning the day's activities. While waiting for our food, the Scripture passage we read stressed the importance of servant leadership instead of lording it over others as the Gentiles do.

Two women were sitting behind us, and the one whose voice carried (loudly) was telling the other woman (who worked for her) how she should handle employees who weren't doing their jobs the way she thought they should. The supervisor's management style was the same as the Gentiles' that we had just read about. She expressed such criticalness, impatience, and self-importance that I was glad I didn't work for her. But where did she get her management style? You're right, she got it from what she's seen and heard on TV and in the movies and from the human nature we all inherited from Adam and Eve. I couldn't help but think that if she were to spend time in Scripture:

- She would have learned the value of patience and the encouragement that comes from seeing how God loved His people throughout the Old Testament.
- She would then have had hope for those who reported to her and would seek to work with them in a way that would convey value and honor.
- She would serve them as she led her group and resolve conflict instead of creating it
- She would recognize how much God loved *her* and sought *her* out to have a redemptive relationship with *her*.
- Then she would realize that how she talked about her employees would produce a sense of hope and a love for others, even for those who couldn't help but hear her in a restaurant.

Are you learning from your times in Scripture? Are the lives of those who lived so long ago changing you so that you're willing to hang in there when you're in difficult situations? Are you letting God encourage you through Scripture, or are you letting what's going on in the world get you down? Do you see hope or anger reflected in how you speak and act? Which of these questions do you need to respond to?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 15:5-13

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus . . .”

Isn't it interesting that in yesterday's paragraph and in today's section that Paul refers to endurance and encouragement. If he uses the same words twice, we must really need them. How about you: do you need endurance today? Do you need encouragement? Are you feeling like giving up or giving in? Perhaps today is just for you.

So how do we get endurance and encouragement to keep on going when the going gets rough? Paul says that we get them from God and through the Scripture.

I think that as we're in Scriptures, choosing to believe what is said and then acting in obedience to the commands (and suggestions), God will be producing in us a stick-to-it character (endurance) instead of being someone who blames and runs. God will encourage us so that we'll want to continue in this way of walking. Our part is to stay in the situation (as long as it's not illegal or immoral), and do what's right.

I had an example of this challenge this week. Even with the best of intentions (I thought), I had offended a sister in the faith. Even though I thought I was 90% blameless, I had to admit to the 10% of what I had done wrong.

I wrote a note of apology and sent it by snail mail so it would mean more. In the note I owned up to what I had done and stayed away from any butts or explanations—I just apologized for what I had done wrong and asked for forgiveness.

This morning I received an email response from her. The relationship is restored and is probably even stronger than before. Because I took seriously the charge to keep peace with those around me, God encouraged both of our hearts and brought glory to Himself. Our enemy didn't win, and I'm so glad.

Do you have a story that needs a happy ending? What do you need to do as an act of obedience?
“May the God who gives . . .”

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 15:14-22

“Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.”

Do your spiritual gifts and passions focus on telling others about the good news of Jesus Christ? If so, you probably were drawn to the verse about preaching the gospel *where Christ was not known*.

However, if you focus on believers growing in their faith (like I do), you probably were drawn to Paul's goal of leading the Gentiles (non-Jewish believers) to obey God by what *he's said and done*. But for all of us, Paul's example is that our goal should be to glory in Christ Jesus as we serve God.

So I began thinking, “What would we look like if we gloried in what we did rather than in Jesus?” How would you answer this question? What have you seen in other believers that just drives you crazy? Here are some ideas:

Those who love *evangelism* (telling others about Jesus) would:

1. Look at people as conquests and notches on a belt rather than as individuals.
2. Assume everyone needs to be converted instead of listening and finding out if they are already believers.
3. Be critical of those who don't reach out to nonbelievers as easily as they do.
4. Be more concerned with conversion than with spiritual growth.

Those who love *discipleship* (helping others grow in Christ) would:

1. Ignore (or be afraid of) those on the fringe of society.
2. See young believers as projects rather than as brothers or sisters.
3. Believe that what they have to offer is more important than what they can (or need to) learn.
4. Be more intent on talking than on listening.

See yourself in either list? I sure do. Since honesty comes before growth, which of these examples tugs at your heart?



Tomorrow we'll look at what would help us bring glory (honor, value, brilliance) to Jesus instead of concentrating on ourselves.

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 15:14-22

“Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.”

Now that we’ve been honest with ourselves, which is so hard to do, how do we begin to bring glory to Jesus Christ and serve God instead of concentrating on ourselves? These thoughts help me:

1. Someone coming to faith is *such* a miracle that the action is completely beyond any human ability. This choice happens so deep in our being that only God can reach that level.
2. The choice to walk by faith and become like Jesus is so personal, intimate, and life changing that our human ability can never achieve spiritual maturity in ourselves or in others.
3. As we read in Romans 13:4, *“The Lord is able to make him stand.”*
 - As you’re involved with others, who gets the credit— out loud and silently in your heart?
 - If you’re not involved with others, what are you waiting for?
 - If you just don’t care about other people, ask God to give you His heart toward them.
 - If you’re frustrated because nothing seems to happen when you talk with and live around nonbelievers, remember that their choices are not your responsibility. Just be sure that in your own life that you’re keeping short accounts with the Lord.
4. God may choose to work through us to reach others, but ultimately it’s His work that touches others and not ours. We can be available and respond as He leads, but He does the work.

Which of these thoughts helps you the most? How about turning that thought (or all of them) into a prayer as you talk with God?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 15:23-33

"I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ."

Here's the plan that Paul had created for himself:

1. Go to Jerusalem to deliver the contribution to the poor from the Gentile believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
2. Head for Spain—new territory for the gospel of Christ
3. Stop off in Rome for some R&R (rest and refreshment)

Sounds like a great plan, doesn't it? Too bad his life didn't go this way. Do you have a plan for your future? I bet it includes fun, challenges, and great times with people. Now here's what actually happened to Paul:

- He went to Jerusalem as planned but was arrested on trumped-up charges based on jealousy.
- He went to Rome in chains.
- He almost died along the way.
- He was under house arrest for a couple of years before being released, only to be re-arrested and then executed.

Part of his plan worked out—he made it to Rome—but the process was totally opposite from what he had planned. Has this happened to you too? What do you make of your schedule changes? How have you processed what *life* has thrown at you?

One of the lessons I've been learning is to look at circumstances from a new point of view: God's. So let's look at Paul's experiences from this new point of view (because we know what ultimately happened to him).

- God intended for Paul to be an apostle for the Gentiles.
- God had Paul go to where no one else had been yet. (vs. 20)
- While Paul concentrated on his own generation, God was concerned about Gentiles for the next 2000-3000 years.
- God settled Paul down for a couple of years in a fairly comfortable situation (under house arrest), and Paul had time to write many of his letters that we value today.

Has God "messed up" your plans over the years? Are you bitter and disillusioned because of what He's done? Does Paul's example help you want to wait for God and trust Him to work out what He wants to happen?

Or is God showing you what He's been doing though the years that far surpass what you could have planned? How could this new perspective improve your walk with Him? How about telling Him so?

Walking With the Father Through Romans

Romans 16:1-27

“I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.”

We're at the end of this letter—congratulations for finishing! I'm proud of you for completing this journey.

So why today's verse? I'm intrigued with Tertius, the believer who was Paul's scribe in Corinth. I wonder what he learned from this project, how the process changed him, and what his conclusions were after spending this much time with Paul. Some possibilities from this last chapter are:

1. Paul begins (1:1) and ends (16:2-27) with Jesus Christ and His good news.
2. Paul cares about truth.
3. Paul cares about people.
4. Paul cares about individual people.
5. Paul works *with* a team, and he values what they do for him and for the kingdom.
6. Paul's extended family members are part of the faith.
7. Paul sees some members in the faith as fellow workers, a few as brothers and sisters, and one as a mother.

Tertius has come to care so much for these believers in Rome that he couldn't help but add his greeting to Paul's.

What have *you* come to learn (way down deep) from this letter? What changes has the Father been making in your heart and mind?



I've seen a couple of things about myself as I've worked through Romans: a tendency to care more about truth than people, and how easily I can think that what I say or do is more important than the person I'm actually with. I think Paul started out this way as a believer, but the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, so changed him that he became an example for us of submission, humility, and balance, character qualities I long for.

How about you: are you balanced, or do you lean toward an extreme? Are you a feeler or a doer? Are you drawn toward mental activity (thinking) or warm fuzzes (emotions)? Are submission and humility character qualities that others see in you? Let's pray for each other that we would allow God to make us like His Son, Jesus Christ, and His saint, Paul.
