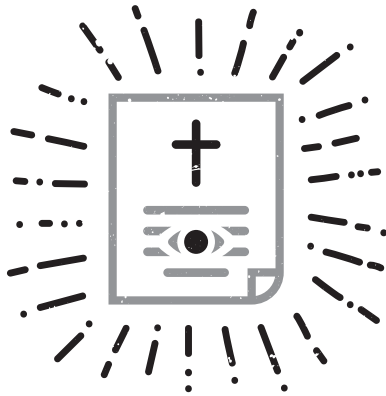


R • O • M • A • N • S
IN VIEW of the GOSPEL



BOOK IV



R · O · M · A · N · S

IN VIEW of the GOSPEL

DR. ROB GODARD

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DEDICATION

I am thankful to serve God's people who gather at Cloverdale Baptist Church. It is hard to find a family that is so thankful for the preaching of God's Word, and so longing to live it out. This being the fourth of four on a long journey through the book of Romans, I dedicate this to the Lord's family that he has called me to serve, and rejoice that you are growing in goodness, that you are filled with knowledge, and that you are able to instruct one another. Lori, Ryan, Jeff and Hannah, Ben and Graeme, I am thankful that this has been your home church for your formative years.

I praise God for being able to serve Jesus' church, and that this church longs to follow Him and be obedient to His Word even when it is a little uncomfortable! I am privileged to serve the King, and thankful for the royal family He has called me to serve. Thank you for seeking to be partners in the gospel for the glory of God!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is exciting to serve God at Cloverdale Baptist Church. I am thankful for great elders and deacons, and a staff that seeks God-glorifying excellence. Judi and Elias, well done again on pushing for this to get done. It is good to serve Jesus together in this local church!

I love Jesus' church and am honoured to serve her!

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

This book follows a sermon series that is/was delivered at Cloverdale Baptist Church for the growth of God's people into the obedience of faith. My longing is, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in the power of the gospel, that the Word of God would dwell in you richly and that this book would be a part of helping Christ be formed in you, because it points you to Jesus, through the study of His Word.

To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

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GROWTH TOWARDS GOD HAPPENS BEST IN COMMUNITY

This book is put together to help Growth Groups at Cloverdale Baptist Church effectively apply God's Word to everyday life. We want the Word of God not only to be preached, but applied, and one of the key ways of ensuring this reality is if we discuss what was shared on Sunday in a way that seeks to deepen the impact. Certainly, we can do this with families and friends, however at CBC the programmed way we seek to maximize this impact is Growth Groups.

There are three reasons that we make creation of these study books a priority at Cloverdale Baptist Church:

1. We want to prioritize the hearing and applying of God's Word.

This is essential for the authentication of who God's people are (Matthew 7:21–28), and our growth into being who God wants us to be (Psalm 138:2; James 1:22–25). It is our prayer and desire that this book helps you to focus on what God's Word is saying and that it helps to lead you into applying His Word to everyday life.

Please bring your Bible and your book to each service and, as God's Word is preached, take notes in a way that you can understand and apply from what is being taught. Please not only note the content, but also be ruthless in seeking to apply God's Word to your life, and if you are in one of our small groups, to the community you are in. We long to be hearers and doers of God's Word!

2. We value small group ministry.

It is our belief that small group ministry can produce passion in God's people (Hebrews 10:25), and serves as a protection for God's people (Hebrews 3:12–14). Sin can be deceitful, and hardened hearts can lead to despair. Small group ministry protects us from sin, and engages our hearts for devotion. We would love for all our people to be engaged in small group ministry and in that growing to love one another, and God, more and more.

We each need the love and care of others. We want to be a church that is Holy, Loving, Missional and Loyal to God's Truth, all as an overflow of our first love relationship with Jesus. We believe that small group ministry is the key to facilitating this!

3. We are looking for long term change.

It is our hope, as we interact with God's Word together, that these books will help you remember what you are learning and longing to apply. It is our desire that they become for you a tool to review and grow with in the coming years as you continue to grow in conformity to the image of our Lord Jesus (Galatians 4:19). We believe that God's Word is powerful and will not return void (Isaiah 55:11), and it is helpful for His people to have reminders of where He has equipped them for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

If you are not in a small group we encourage you to join one, and until you do, use this notebook not only for reflection, but to interact with your family and/or friends in a way that is actively seeking to apply the Bible to your life (Deuteronomy 6:1–9). May our God use this book through the power of His Spirit to bring change in His people for His glory.

CALL TO GROW DEEPER

We are on a journey. On this journey there are many paths that you can take that will yield destruction, and there is one path that will lead to joy and eternal life (Proverbs 3:5–6).

May our God use this book to help you draw nearer to Him, and in this to find His perfect and pleasing will. May He use it to show you His good pleasing and perfect will, and may you find yourself following that with great joy and tenacity. May you find the strength in Him to choose His ways, and to live life for Him.

This book includes a 31-day journey through Romans 12, and I hope that you will start it, and then work through it for 31 days straight. I hope you will read the entire chapter 12 of Romans before working through the small portions of Scripture, and I promise you, if you do, that at the end of 31 days you will be a different person than when you started!

KEY WORDS & CONCEPTS IN ROMANS ¹

Condemnation: This is a word used in Romans to show God’s right view of sinful humanity in their guilt before Him. It is what He views us as (condemned) in showing what we rightly deserve because of our sin. This is the opposite of justification.

Faith: Hebrews 11:1, 6 describes faith as being certain of what we hope for and certain of what we cannot see. It is also something that allows us to please God, while without it, it is impossible to please God. Perhaps simply understood, it is “the unqualified acceptance of and dependence on the completed work of Jesus Christ to secure God’s mercy toward believers (Swindoll)”. It is all of grace (Ephesians 2:1–10) and is essential for salvation and sanctification.

Flesh: As used in theology, it describes the identity of humans who are not saved by grace through faith and the orientation that believers battle after being saved. Those who belong to Jesus battle the flesh, the world, and the devil. The battle against the flesh is a battle against habits and patterns of thinking that are in opposition to God and are ultimately self-centred.

Glorification: This is the end of salvation. It will be the reality that all who die in Christ receive—most fully when Jesus returns for His church. This will include an absolute freedom from sin and its consequences and a beauty in conformity to Christ in incorruptible perfect bodies that will last for all eternity in the presence of God.

Gospel: The word gospel simply means “*good news*”. When Christians use this term, they mean the good news about Jesus Christ.

This includes the holiness of God and His demand for perfection, the fallenness of humans and their sin that falls short of God’s glory, the wonder of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and the call to respond to this grace by faith in Jesus alone.

The gospel is, broadly speaking, the entire Bible, but, simply, it is focused on Jesus and the cross.

¹ Idea taken from Swindoll, Charles: *Coming To Terms With Sin*. IFL

A good summary of the gospel from 9 Marks is:

1. *God*. God is the creator of all things (Gen. 1:1). He is perfectly holy, worthy of all worship, and will punish sin (1 John 1:5, Rev. 4:11, Rom. 2:5–8).
2. *Man*. All people, though created good, have become sinful by nature (Gen. 1:26–28, Ps. 51:5, Rom. 3:23). From birth, all people are alienated from God, hostile to God, and subject to the wrath of God (Eph. 2:1–3).
3. *Christ*. Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully man, lived a sinless life, died on the cross to bear God’s wrath in the place of all who would believe in him, and rose from the grave in order to give his people eternal life (John 1:1, 1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 7:26, Rom. 3:21–26, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Cor. 15:20–22).
4. *Response*. God calls everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and trust in Christ in order to be saved (Mark 1:15, Acts 20:21, Rom. 10:9–10).

(Some of this material has been adapted from *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* by Mark Dever, p. 43) <https://www.9marks.org/answer/what-gospel/>

Grace: God’s unmerited favour given to sinners who deserve His wrath yet from Him receive good. Being saved by grace includes the reality that there is nothing in humans that could earn or cause them to deserve being saved, but God who is rich in grace chooses in that grace to save those who deserve wrath. Sometimes an acrostic for this has been used: “*God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense*”. It is good but leaves out the undeserved nature of this. Instead of receiving God’s wrath and judgment, which all humans deserve, those who experience saving grace receive His love and blessing. Salvation is *all of grace*.

Justification: This is a precious word that some have defined as “the declared reality for Christians that we are righteous—just as if I had never sinned”, and that is helpful, but awesomely it is more. It includes “just as if I had always obeyed”. Swindoll helpfully defines it like this, “God’s declaration or pronouncement that sinners, upon believing in Christ, are righteous because of Christ—even though still in a sinning state.” Those who believe are declared righteous.

Propitiation: This is the satisfaction of God's wrath against sin through the shed blood of Jesus on the cross. For Christians it is the reality that God's wrath, rightly being poured out against sin and sinners, has been satisfied on their behalf by Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Regeneration: This word refers to rebirth, or being born again. Humans are born in sin, and are dead in their trespasses and sin. Spiritual birth results in regeneration and changes who the believer is. Christ is formed in their hearts, and they are made partakers in the divine nature (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Sanctification: The basic meaning of "*sanctify*" is to be set apart. As this word is used, it is the pursuit of becoming who we are, or the pursuit of holiness. It is the process by which Christians move towards practical holiness. It is the growth process towards being like Jesus (Romans 8:29). God's Spirit works in His followers to will and to act as they discipline their lives for holiness.

Sin: Sin is anything that falls short of God's glory. It means to have missed the mark, and humans are sinful by nature, nurture, and choice. The condition under which sin places humans is called slavery, and freedom can only be found in Christ. It is a transgression of God's holy law and includes action and passivity. It places humans under God's righteous holy judgment as those born in sin who are slaves to sin and continue to sin.

Sovereignty: What does it mean that God is sovereign? It means that God is *all powerful, all knowing, and all wise* and is working everything out in conformity to the purpose of His Will (Ephesians 1:11). He is over all things and is the *Sovereign Ruler*.

OVERVIEW

Perhaps no other letter in the history of the world has had such a tremendous impact as the book of Romans.

John MacArthur states, "Most, if not all, of the great revivals and reformations in the history of the church have been directly related to the book of Romans [...] It's commonly agreed that the Epistle to the Romans is one of the greatest Christian writings. Its power has been demonstrated again and again at critical points in the history of the church."

As I long for revival in my own life and in this church, Romans is one of the most powerful places to go to produce it in us.

Romans is written somewhere between 56–58 AD; Paul is in Corinth on his third missionary journey and longing to be a part of what is going on in the Roman church. The book is about life change as an overflow of experiencing the gospel (1:5, 16–17). It draws us closer to God so we can without shame draw others in the same direction.

It is not a systematic theology, and yet the theology in the book of Romans is overwhelmingly rich, with each part adding to the whole and leaving every Spirit-filled believer overwhelmed with God's love. Romans is a book that changes the world by changing people. So, as we prayerfully engage in this journey together, may we offer ourselves afresh to God, to the impact of His gospel and the glory of the message of this letter.

Oh that we would be revived in our passion and first love for God as we experience His love!

Study I

A HISTORY LESSON THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR HISTORY

Romans 11:1-29

Time in God's Word is always essential if our desire is to be Word saturated. Read the text, and then read it again. Try to do this every time you approach a Scripture you are seeking to understand and apply so that it is what drives your application.

This text teaches that God has a plan, and is working out that plan in conformity with the purpose of His will. The acceptance of Gentiles and change within Israel is a part of that plan. His plan has not failed, and will never fail even if we on earth get confused as to how it is playing out.

Romans 9–11 have formed a unit that displays the Sovereignty of God, even when things are confusing like the rejection of God by the nation of Israel, and the opening of the gospel message from God to all who will believe among the Gentiles. God has a plan for Israel, and a part of this plan includes the church age where we now find ourselves. God has not forgotten Israel, and she will be restored as a people devoted to Him as His chosen people.

Rarely do Christians in Canada ask the question about the rejection of Israel and yet the Bible spends significant time on it, so we should as well. It is a reminder to us of the sovereignty of God and His love for His chosen people that never fails.

From these chapters of Scripture, we discover that God is truly sovereign and is working out all things to the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose. We rejoice in the reality that we are a part of this plan and know that He wants what is best for us. As we respond to Him in humble submission and praise, He will guide us!

He always keeps His promises, and He does not change! We can trust Him always and forever!

Sermon Notes | *Message available at cloverdalebaptist.ca*



A HISTORY LESSON THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR HISTORY

Romans 11:1-29

- What from this text can I apply to my life today?

- What are a few things that I learned that I can share with someone else in my sphere of influence?

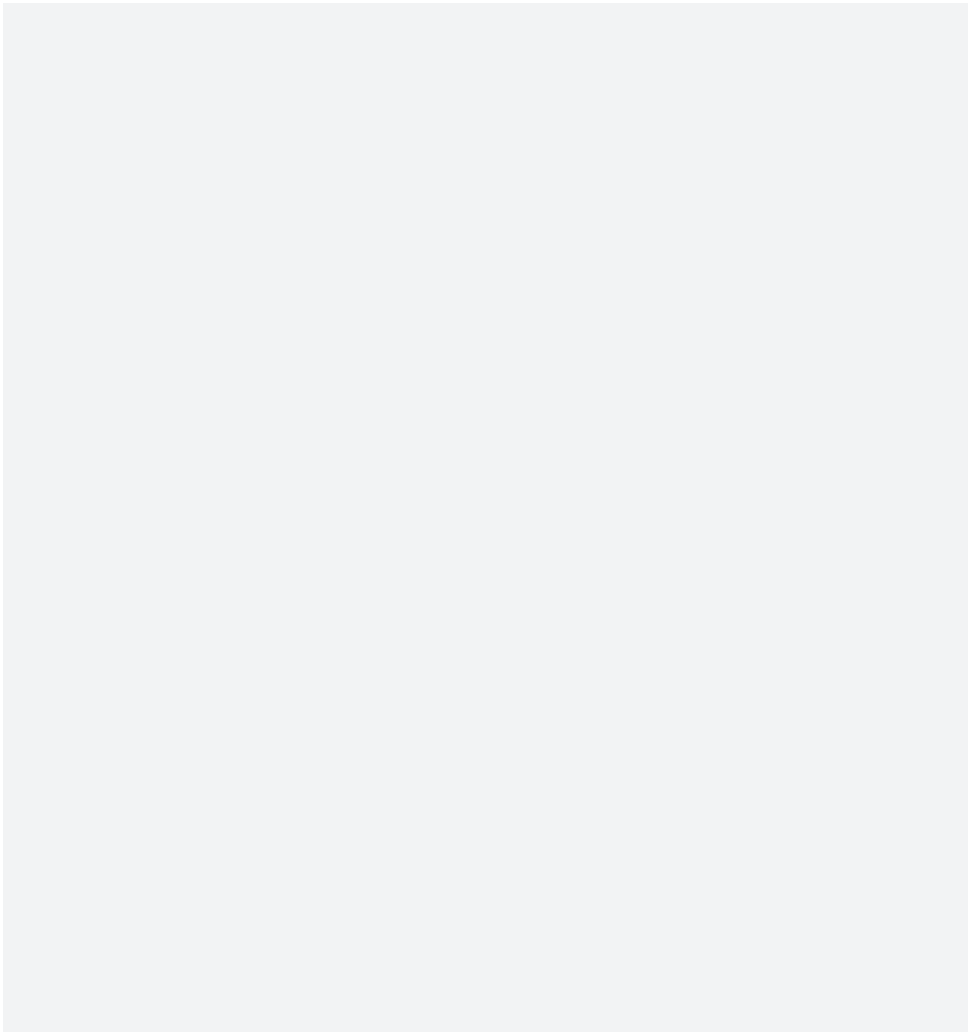
- Romans 11:22 talks about the kindness and severity of God, what do these words mean to you in terms of your relationship with God, and how do they help you to know Him better?
- What does it mean to not, “presume on the goodness of God”? How can you make sure you don’t do this?
- Why is the study of history so important to the way we live our lives now?
- What lessons can we learn as followers of God from the nation of Israel, as outlined in this text?

 MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

ROMANS 11:33

Meditate



Study II

FROM HEAD TO HEART TO HANDS

Romans 11:30–36

This is the end of a section of Scripture that shows us a burst of praise, and is probably the end of the doctrinal delight that Romans has given us. Doxology always follows theology that is God-centred. Romans becomes intensely applied in community from chapter 12 on, but before Paul moves the follower of Jesus there, he can't contain his praise. There must be times in our lives when we realize how majestic the God of the Bible is that we burst into praise! If there is not we need to grow deeper in our understanding of the glorious truths of the greatness of God! These verses are responding to what has been displayed in the book of Romans to this point, and they display a heart filled with truth overflowing to praise!

Mercy that we receive from God when experienced causes the receiver to give thanks, the river to overflow the banks in ceaseless praise! God is rich in mercy, and this allows us to approach Him with boldness. It has often been said that mercy is the reality that we don't get what we deserve, and grace that we get what we don't deserve, and that is helpful. However, there is some overlap, and the mercy that is being referred to here is the gospel message of grace that brings forgiveness and freedom, reconciliation and radical obedience.

To understand and respond to the richness of grace the follower of God must see the depravity of their own sin, and what He has done to reconcile us to Himself, and when that is seen, the experience is glorious and life-changing. The key to a heart filled with authentic God-centred praise is to know who He is and what He has done, experiencing His mercy and knowing His goodness, love, grace, mercy, power, knowledge, and we could go on. To have a biblical view of life is to have a high view of God and His gospel.

Charles Spurgeon stated, "To whom be glory forever" This should be the single desire of the Christian. This is the overflow of all who truly understand Romans 1–11, of all who have delighted in the greatness of God's sovereignty and the tenderness of His love. Oh that we would see it, savour it, and surrender to the experience of overwhelming joy and praise!



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FROM HEAD TO HEART TO HANDS

Romans 11:30-36

- What from this text can I apply to my life today?

- What are a few things that I learned that I can share with someone else in my sphere of influence?



Bible Study Questions

Romans 11:30–36

- Make sure to read this text at least three times before you interact with the questions for application
- What is praise?
- When have you overflowed in a time of praise to God that was overwhelming and touched your heart and mind and emotions?
- How can you grow to be more and more one who lives a life that glorifies God?
- What does it mean to glorify God?
- As you remember back to your reading of the first chapters of Romans, what in those chapters causes your heart to sing?
- Read Luke 18:9–14

- What made the difference between God's response to the tax collector and to the Pharisee?
- How can we learn to be more like the tax collector?
- As you read again verses 30–36, what attributes of God come to mind?
- How can you use this text to get to know God better?
- What does it mean that God does not owe anyone anything? Practically, what does this mean for you?
- What are some practical ways that you can get to know God better so that your life is more and more marked with praise?

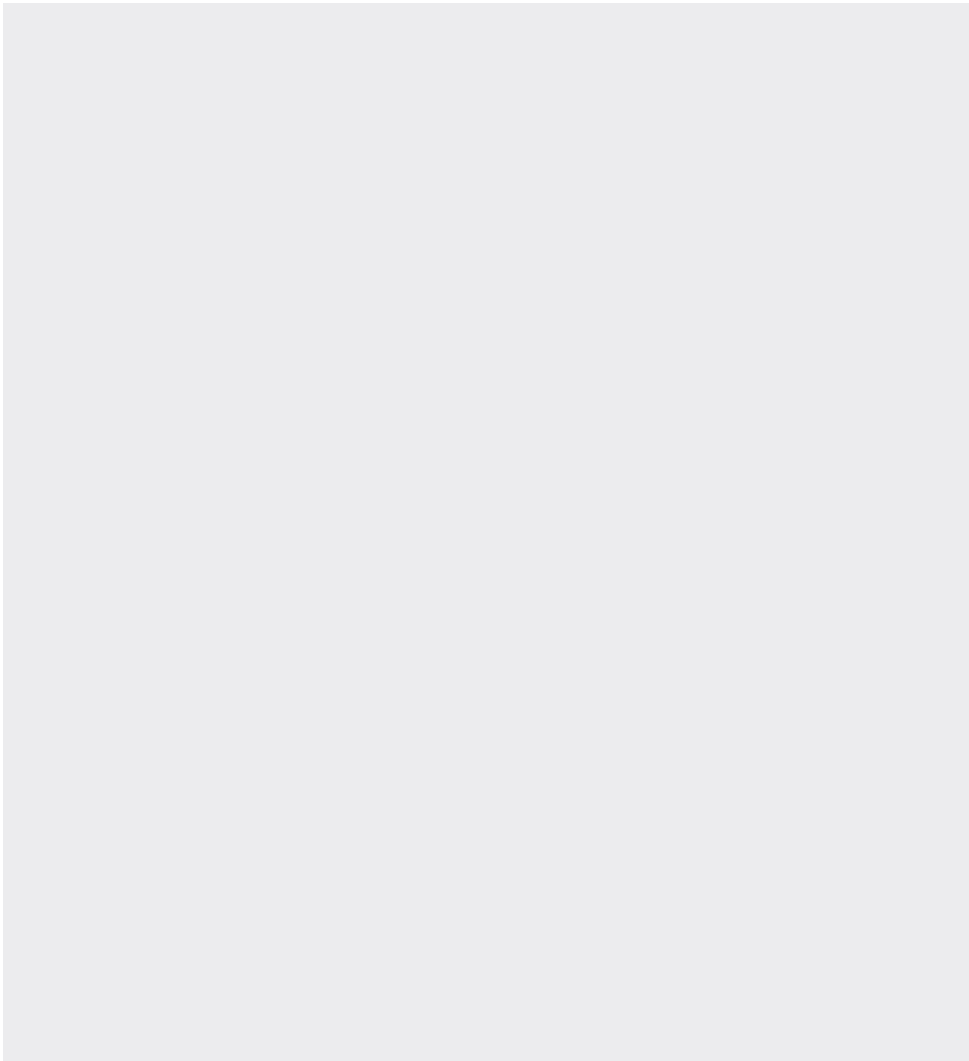
To God be the glory

☰ MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has
given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"

ROMANS 11:34-35

Meditate



Study III

FROM HEAD TO HEART TO FEET

Romans 12:1–2

Romans 12:1–2 are some of the most famous verses in the entire Bible. What have these verses meant to you in your spiritual walk with God? For me they are verses that I repeatedly come back to, as a guide to my spiritual temperature and motivation for service. They are life transforming if understood correctly, and constantly challenge me and correct me. They cannot be read in isolation from the rest of the book, but if you understand all that has gone on in Romans 1–11, and experienced His mercy, you will respond with open hands and fully devoted life. The goal of the follower of God is to live a life of worship, and this text gives the motive for this life, and the radical nature of this life when lived for God's glory. When one truly experiences grace and mercy, then the life one lives will be of full devotion. Having the right motive is essential for long term radical commitment to God.

Therefore: all that has gone on in the text to this point. In view of God's mercy, in view of His grace and gospel, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice: all in, all that I am and all that I have. This is your spiritual/logical act of worship: This makes sense in light of who God is and what God has done, to offer Him all that we have and are and will be. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world: there is a way the world thinks that we need cleansing from. It focuses on self and is marked by fleshly desires, and leads to destruction. But be transformed by the renewing of your minds: take the time to intake God's Word with passion and particularity. Allow God's Word to wash the worldly way of thinking out and replace it with God's thoughts. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is: he is not trying to hide this from you, He wants you to be someone who knows His will and does it.

The entire devotional is written to help apply these verses practically in your life, pray that you would understand them, experience them, and live them! *Stop*. No, really, *stop*. This is a big deal. This is life changing. Have you experienced the gospel? Are you *all in*? Romans 12:1–2 help us understand what true worship is, help us live lives of full devotion to God, and show us the pathway to a life that knows God's will.

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FROM HEAD TO HEART TO FEET

Romans 12:1-2



Bible Study Questions

Romans 12:1-2

- Discuss what the therefore in this text is pointing to.
- Take the time to discuss the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, and how it paints a beautiful and intense picture for us from this text.
- Have you made this once for all commitment of all in devotion?
 - > If yes, discuss what caused you to make this commitment, tell your story.
 - > If no, why not? What is holding you back from making this commitment now?
- Why is there a need for once for all commitments, as well as daily commitments?
- How does Luke 9:23 help point us in the direction of both of these?
- What are some ways you can daily offer your life to God, to be relationally all in?
- Why is having a Biblical definition of worship so helpful?

- Discuss what your definition of worship is? How can you develop it and make it more and more Biblical?
- What should drive us to worship God according to this text? Take the time for more than a one-word answer here.
- Why is the worship that God demands so radical?
- What are you doing in your life to make sure that your intake of God's Word is healthy and you are not following the pattern of this world?
- The promise found at the end of verse 2 of knowing God's will is essential to followers of God. From this verse, what is the pattern to follow if we want to know God's will?
- How does communion remind us of this first love devotion, and all defining commitment we have made to Jesus?

Today, in the view of God's grace and the glory of the Gospel, I commit to live my life as a sacrifice for Him. I am all in, and want to have my life driven and defined by my relationship with God! This means I will spend time in God's Word so that my heart and mind are washed and the way of the world is cleaned out of me.

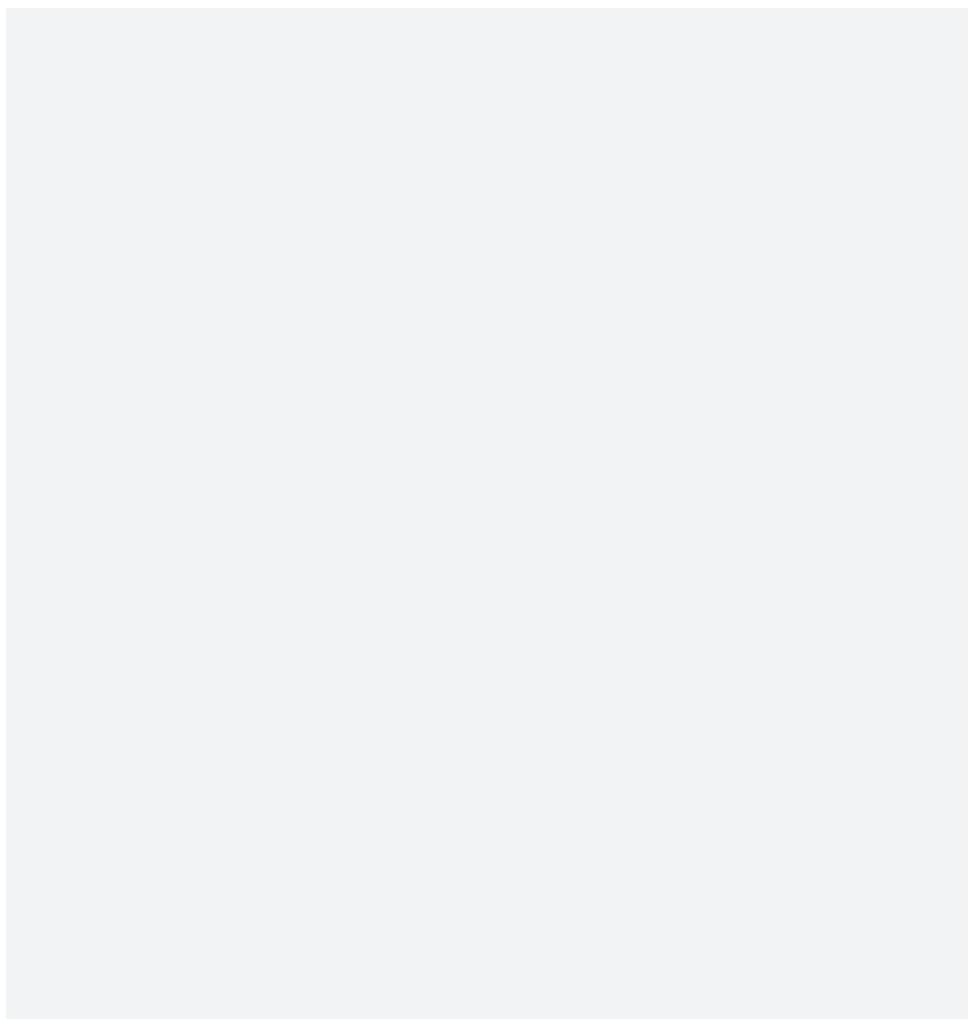
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☰ MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

**For from him and through him and to him
are all things. To him be glory forever.
Amen.**

ROMANS 11:36

Meditate



Study IV

FROM HEAD TO HEART: TRUE COMMUNITY

Romans 12:1–8

Being a living sacrifice is always the pathway to obedience and a fulfilled life. Romans 12 not only rejoices in the first 11 chapters of Romans and builds a life of worship from there, it also overflows a life of community in the local church. The local church is the place that God has chosen to work out His purpose as a representative of His body, and as His showplace to the world of who He is. Because of the priority and passion in which Jesus builds the local church, it is also a focal point of attack from the demonic realm and the flesh. It is not easy to find a perfect church (impossible) and if you did find one, and join it, the minute you arrived it would lose its perfection.

Romans 12:1–8 addresses this pursuit of God glorifying unity and service in a local church by showing what needs to happen to live together with one another for God’s glory. It is impossible to pursue relationships the way God wants us to, unless we are fully devoted to him as living sacrifices, if we are, then we will become those who live together in a way that glorifies His name.

The key to full devotion to Jesus and a love for the local church is to follow the process outlined in these 8 verses. We have already covered basking in the gospel and being fully devoted to Jesus as a living sacrifice, but don’t move too quickly on from those two, for if they are not in place the rest of your pursuit will be wasted efforts that lead to depression or the destruction of legalism, and almost always disunity, which God hates. In fact, in Matthew 18 Jesus explains through story that the way to being someone who can live with grace towards others, is to have richly experienced grace yourself. When you have experienced the love and grace of God through the gospel you became enabled and encouraged to offer that to your community of faith. Romans 12:3 talks about being humble before God and one another.

Don’t get hyper about yourself! Humility is, as C.S. Lewis so aptly put, “not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking about yourself less”. Those who are fully devoted to Jesus put others ahead of themselves, and in that are able to live together for God’s glory. In the flesh this is not easy, in fact, *impossible*. But! There is hope

if you experience Jesus' love and see His grace. As F.B. Meyer stated, "the only hope for a decreasing self, is an increasing Christ." The Christian life is to be one of exclusive devotion to God, and exciting community for God. To do this means that the follower of God chooses His ways, and the good of others, as defined by God, over their own. This yields a life of service, a life of significance, and a life of selflessness. The pathway to a healthy church begins with God, and it grows from there through a gospel experience to impact others. Take a moment to not only reflect on this text as a mirror, but also to reflect on your life in light of it.

Follow the ever-deepening progression of an experience of God's grace, yielding a living sacrifice commitment, overflowing into a Word saturated mind, that produces a life lived in community for the glory of God and the good of others. Where are you in this progression? Remember your success in getting to the end of this unifying, God-glorifying road is a proper experience of the gospel. Live your life as an overflow of your experience of God and His glorious gospel, and do this in community in a way that displays that you have chosen to be His servant by serving others.

Sermon Notes | *Message available at cloverdalebaptist.ca*



FROM HEAD TO HEART: TRUE COMMUNITY

Romans 12:1-8

- What from this text can I apply to my life today?

- What are a few things that I learned that I can share with someone else in my sphere of influence?



Bible Study Questions

Romans 12:1–8

- Why is an experience of the gospel (understood in a doctrinally sound manner) so important to Paul and the Holy Spirit in Romans?
- If you are not radically committed to Jesus, what impact would this have on your local church involvement?
- Why do you think God placed His fully devoted followers in community?
- In your own words, define humility, and discuss why it is so important in a church.
- Read Proverbs 6:16–19.
- In the Hebrew way of writing things, special attention is being called to the last one of the items that God hates, which is towards the person who brings division. Why do you think God hates this so much?
 - > What do you think usually causes division?
 - > How can you be someone who creates unity in your local church?

- What are your spiritual gifts?

- How have you used them in the last year to build up God's local church?

- What would you like to do to be serving His family this coming year?

- How can you show the value of the local church (your local church) in the use of your time, treasures and talents?

- If you struggle loving the people God has placed around you, start with a renewed passion to experience God's love, for it is only as an overflow of His grace, that gospel communities can flourish.

Today, in the view of God's grace and the glory of the Gospel, I commit to live my life as a sacrifice for Him. I am all in, and want to have my life driven and defined by my relationship with God! I realize this means a commitment to community, so I will choose in humility to help produce unity, to serve with gifts I have been given, and to be a blessing to those in my church family.

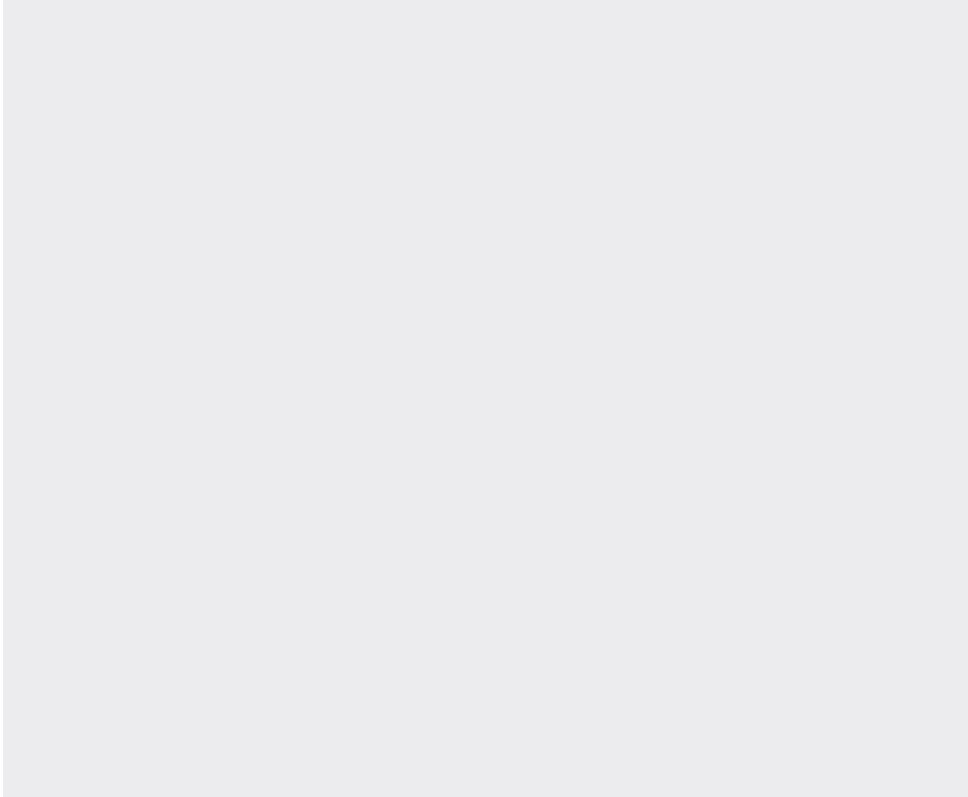
Signed: _____

☰ MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

ROMANS 12:1-2

Meditate



Study V

GENUINE LOVE: AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY

Romans 12:9–14

To be a part of a healthy community of faith changes how we live. It becomes a place of service and support, a place of worship and winning people to Jesus.

To be a genuine follower of Jesus is to live in authentic fellowship. This passage carries on the theme of being in a local church, but it expands it in terms of responsibilities. Like a shotgun with a purpose for each pellet, these verses scatter our responsibilities in a way that is focused and full. The call to follow Jesus is a call to love (John 13:34–35). It displays the authenticity of our experience of His grace (1 John 3:14), and the maturity of our discipleship.

Let us release the pellets out of the shell, and may they hit the mark of our heart so that our feet enter into a walk of genuine love:

- We are to love in a way that is authentic!
- We are to hate what is evil!
- We are to hold fast to what is good!
- We are to be in a constant competition with other believers to out honour one another!
- We are to never be slothful in zeal!
- We are to be fervent in spirit, to live with passion!
- We are to serve the Lord (that one maybe sums up all of the rest)!
- We are to rejoice in hope!
- We are to be patient in tribulation!
- We are to be constant in prayer!
- We are to help people in our church family who are needy!
- We are to show hospitality (literally to love strangers)!
- We are to bless those who persecute us!

The shotgun pellets continue, but that is for our next study, stop...*Selah* (the Psalms word for stop and think through what we just covered). It can almost feel a little overwhelming, so how can we slow down enough through this passage to let each pellet make a mark on the way we live our lives in community? The answer shifts our focus back to the start of Romans 12, and really through that

start to the rest of the book of Romans. The way to love genuinely, which really is what this passage is all about, is to not only understand the content of what that means (the pellets from the Romans 12 shotgun), but also the overall call to above all love one another (1 Peter 4:8). This call comes from Jesus, who has modelled it, caused us through His salvation call to experience it, and now to live in light of it (Ephesians 3:14–21). It is an amazing love that we experience from God, an all-in devotion that we give to God, and a lavish love that we express to others.

No wonder Romans took 12 chapters to introduce us to this God and His love before showing us what this demands from us. Look back over that list (more to come next week), and seek to evaluate the genuineness of your love from that list.

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GENUINE LOVE: AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY

Romans 12:9–14

- What from this text can I apply to my life today?

- What are a few things that I learned that I can share with someone else in my sphere of influence?



Bible Study Questions

Romans 12:9-14

- This is one of the texts in the Bible, and there are many, that you might read and agree with quickly. For it is a call for you to change, to love, to live in such a way that your cup is filled by God and overflows to impact others. This passage calls for a genuine love, and in the context of Romans 12, this means that there must be a "love" that is not genuine. What do you think this non-authentic love looks like?

- Why is the foundation of who God is, and an experience of His gospel so important to being those who can love the way He wants us to (1 John 4:19)?

- What are some practical ways that you can hate what is evil? What does this actually even mean?

- In our world that is full of misunderstanding and confusion when it comes to love, how can we as, those who have experienced God's love, express it in a way that people see and experience brotherly affection?

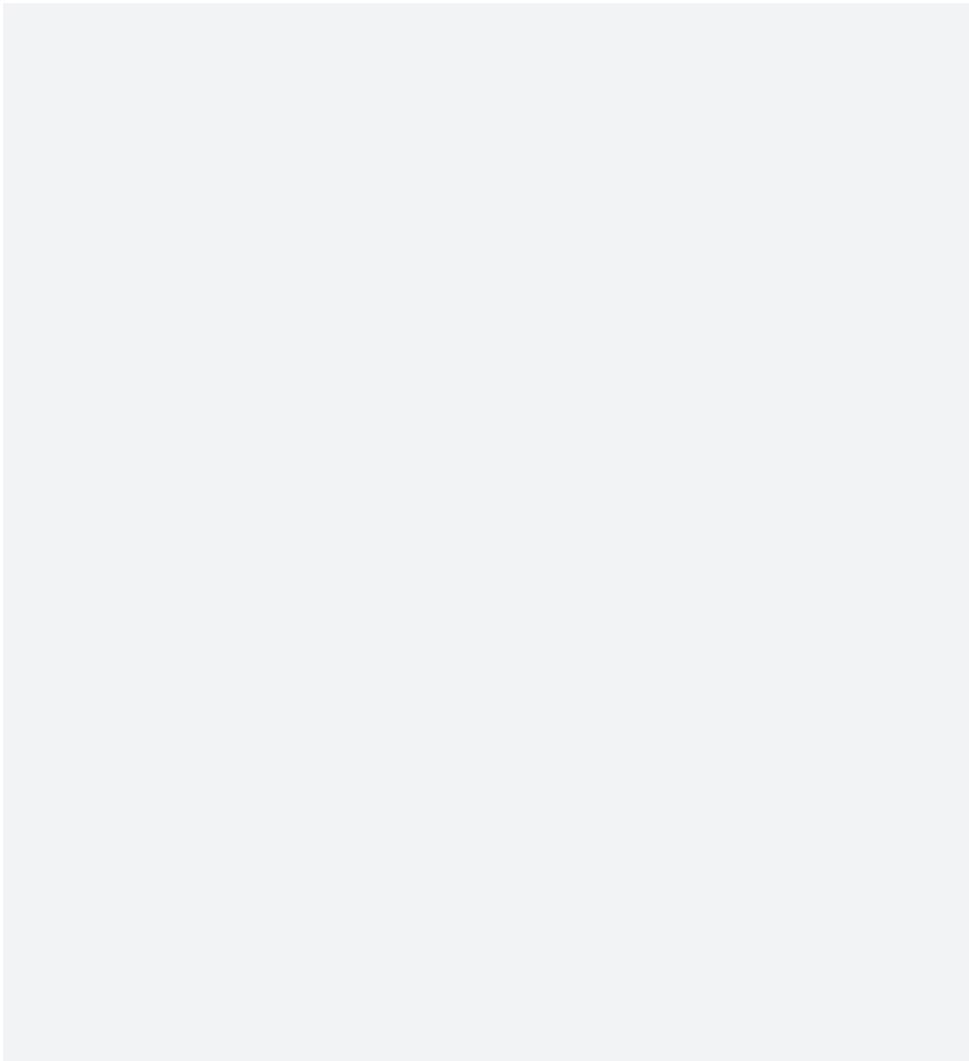
- Go over the list of things we are to do to show genuine love, and seek to do two things with them: understand what they mean and how to pursue them in your life in a practical manner. If each person who belongs to Jesus pursues love in this manner, we will change the world!
 - We are to love in a way that is authentic!
 - We are to hate what is evil!
 - We are to hold fast to what is good!
 - We are to be in a constant competition with other believers to out honour one another!
 - We are to never be slothful in zeal!
 - We are to be fervent in spirit, to live with passion!
 - We are to serve the Lord (that one maybe sums up all of the rest)!
 - We are to rejoice in hope!
 - We are to be patient in tribulation!
 - We are to be constant in prayer!
 - We are to help people in our church family who are needy!
 - We are to show hospitality (literally to love strangers)!

☰ MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

**Love one another with brotherly affection.
Outdo one another in showing honor.**

ROMANS 12:10

Meditate



Study VI

TRUE COMMUNITY: AUTHENTIC LOVE

Romans 12:15–21

There was a man who was walking down the street, and he passed a used book store. In the window he saw a book with this title, *How to Hug*. He was taken by the title and, being of somewhat romantic nature, went in to buy the book. Unfortunately, it wasn't very good reading material for when he got home he discovered that it was the third volume of an encyclopedia and covered the subjects "how" through "hug". In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the question "how to hug?" is a good one. How should we hug one another. In fact I would stretch this as someone who has been in ministry for over 30 years, in the church we need to learn how to love one another effectively. So often in the midst of the business of life, the battle with the flesh the devil and the world and the bombastic people around us, living a life of love is difficult!

One of the key ways of responding to the richness of God's love is to become imitators of God, and live lives of love. In fact, Ephesians 5:1–2 tells us that as imitators of God (which is our key goal) we will live lives of love. So how do we do this? Especially with other people who can sometimes be a little prickly? The key to living a life of love is to be loved. Loved by God! Experience the gospel! One of the ways that you can know the depth of your experience of God's love, is your self sacrificial love for others. When we understand how important this is, it is helpful to see what it looks like. The simple answer is that it looks like Jesus. But that simple answer is not as practical as it could be, or at least the practical part of that is a tiny step away, so Romans 12 gives us a clear picture of what this mature Christian pursuit of community will be displaying.

Last week, we focused on the first 12 of these, so with those in mind, and hopefully now in our lives, let us look at the last few.

- Bless those who persecute you.
- Don't curse those who persecute you.
- Rejoice with those who rejoice.
- Weep with those who weep.
- Live in harmony with one another.
- Do not be proud.

- Associate with the lowly.
- Never be wise in your own sight.
- Repay no one evil for evil.
- Do what is honourable in the sight of all.
- Live peaceably with all (if you can).
- Never avenge yourself.
- Trust God.
- Feed your enemy.
- And to sum it all up: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
Selah.

You might say, “Pastor, I thought you said this would be simple and practical, but that list is difficult and overwhelming.” Perhaps, but it is a shotgun of pellets filled with the how-to of love, and one that hits the heart of what God wants. So now, pick the ones that the Holy Spirit hit your heart with and start there, and as you find victory and growth in those pellets, the next ones will come. This is a never-ending growth pursuit, until the return of the King, so get moving, and keep the gospel in mind!

Now you know *how to hug*.

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TRUE COMMUNITY: AUTHENTIC LOVE

Romans 12:15–21

- What from this text can I apply to my life today?

- What are a few things that I learned that I can share with someone else in my sphere of influence?



Bible Study Questions

Romans 12:15–21

- One of the most important pursuits we are to be a part of as Christians is community, and this is to be found most intimately in the local church where genuine love is on display. As you review the shotgun pellets from the second barrel, how does it help you understand the priority, and pathway that Jesus has for Christian community?

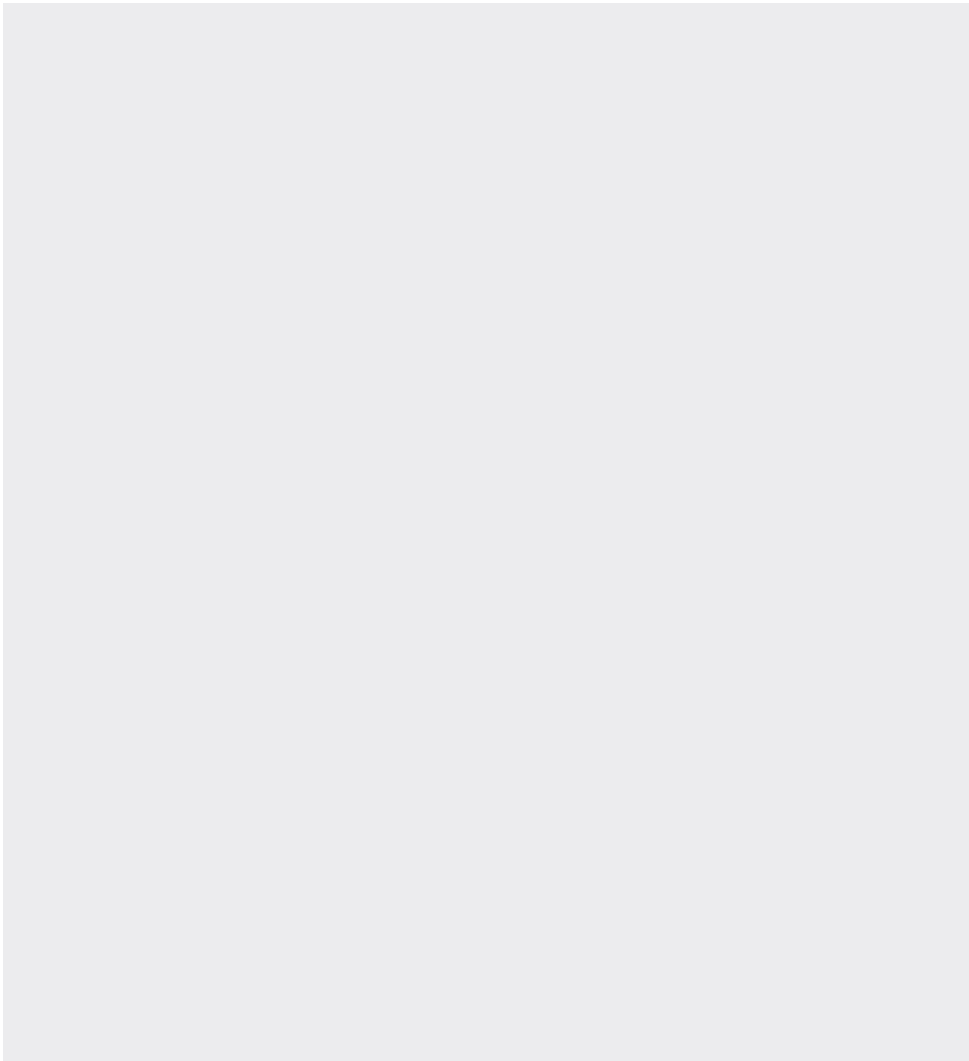
- Discuss in detail what each of these mean, and how you can pursue them:
 - Bless those who persecute you.
 - Don't curse those who persecute you.
 - Rejoice with those who rejoice.
 - Weep with those who weep.
 - Live in harmony with one another.
 - Do not be proud.
 - Associate with the lowly.
 - Never be wise in your own sight.
 - Repay no one evil for evil.
 - Do what is honourable in the sight of all.
 - Live peaceably with all (if you can).
 - Never avenge yourself.
 - Trust God.
 - Feed your enemy.
 - And to sum it all up: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

☰ MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

**Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil;
hold fast to what is good.**

ROMANS 12:9

Meditate



Study VII

HOW TO BE A GREAT CITIZEN IN A FALLEN WORLD

Romans 13:1-7

Have you ever imagined how your life would be different if you were in a different era of history? In my youth I wanted to be a soldier, and so in my dreams would often find myself as a Spartan fighting against thousands, or a Roman soldier fighting against the mongrel hordes, or a Canadian soldier rescuing others from the trenches, or finding those who needed saving and being that hero.

As a Christian soldier, try to imagine yourself in different eras, especially for the sake of this study, in Rome, when the book of Romans is written. You are in a small minority of misunderstood followers of Jesus. Some are accusing you of being cannibals, while others just see you as Jews who are confused. Nero, the all-powerful (from an earthly perspective) ruler of Rome sees you as an opportunity to recreate the great city of Rome, so after burning the city, falsely accuses you and your brothers and sisters of this crime. Then, in horrific brutality, he persecutes the church, to the horrific point of burning Christians as a grotesque candle light for the streets.

How should you respond to the government at a time like this as a fully devoted, all in, loving community member of Jesus' church? You don't have to wonder, because Romans 13:1-7 is written to you, and to all who follow Jesus from that point forward in terms of how to be a good citizen of earth and heaven, even in unfair, horrific situations. The Christian is called to be in the world, but not of the world, which means that often they will find themselves as outsiders in the power plays of the cultures where they find themselves.

So this text, which calls for followers of Jesus to submit to authorities who can sometimes be so deadly, is a shock. I am thankful that Paul (inspired by the Holy Spirit) helps us to know why we can do this even when it feels so difficult (and in our day, sometimes it does). We know that God is sovereign over all rulers,

including those in a democracy, so we can rest in His power and involvement in all of life. Daniel 4:34–35, 37 remind us that He is over all kings, and no one can stop His plan! God is in control, even when it feels like the world is wobbly! We can trust in Him as our very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1–3). If we know the God of the Bible (Isaiah 40 is so helpful in this), we can submit to those in authority over us, because God is over them! There are times to disobey the government and humbly accept the consequences (thank you Daniel, Jochebed and the disciples), but only when God’s Word and God’s ways are being trampled.

As Christians we have been called to live our lives with joy before our God who is in control, and obey Him always, which means to obey our government, which serves at His behest, instituted by Him. So really, the bottom line for obeying Romans 13:1–7, and not railing against God and the government you have over you right now, is to trust God, to know who He is and what He has done, and to rest in Him. In that rest that leads to radical obedience we will discover that Christians make the best citizens, even when they are mistreated and maligned.

I am glad that we are at the place we are at in history as Christian soldiers, but if we were not, I hope, with those who received the letter of Romans, that we would obey, confident in God, and radical in submission to Him and His Word. I am glad we live in Canada with its freedoms and privileges, but if this changes, let us submit to God and His Word, and find ourselves living like Daniel, not like Demas.



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HOW TO BE A GREAT CITIZEN IN A FALLEN WORLD

Romans 13:1-7

- What from this text can I apply to my life today?

- What are a few things that I learned that I can share with someone else in my sphere of influence?

- What does it mean that God is sovereign?
- How does this help you to obey your government, especially when they are not protecting Christians?
- How can you grow in your understanding and faith in the sovereignty of God no matter what is going on around you?
- How does John 19:11 help us to not only see the power behind Jesus' response, but a confidence behind ours?
- How does the story of John Bunyan help in knowing when to obey, disobey, and respond to the consequences of that disobedience?
- Is there an area in your life that you need to change today, to conform to what the government is asking you to do, and in obedience to Romans 13?

 MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

ROMANS 13:1

Meditate



Study VIII

A DEBT TO LOVE

Romans 13:8-14

Lest we lose sight of love, Paul now returns to this essential subject of full devotion to Jesus. It is hard to imagine after the shotgun of Romans 12 that there is anything to add to this subject that has already filled our life change inbox with things that need attention, but here he goes. Love! Love! Love! Above all, love one another deeply. You will know who authentic Christians are, and aren't by their love for one another. As Jesus has loved you, so you must love one another.

The Christian life is to be lived in community, and this is not easy. So Paul returns to the subject of love and addresses it in the context of debt. Christians are not to be in debt, except we are to owe love to one another. We are to pay off our debts and get out of debt and I suppose the culture dragging the Christian into debt means that people like Dave Ramsey are important. However, other than as an opening illustration, the point Paul is making is not that we get out of debt (although according to Paul we should). Rather, the point is that we have a debt to love one another that should never grow old. Who is this debt to? Well, in the text we are studying, the debt is owed to other believers, although it really expands to whoever Jesus describes as a neighbour, and that is really anyone in our sphere of influence.

So, love is to so shape our lives that the key question we ask ourselves whenever we are around other people, is how can I pay my debt of love to this person, how can I show them the love of Jesus through my behaviour? If we understood this concept of debt that Paul is introducing to us, we would become more and more a people known for our love for one another and the world. The text refers to the law and then the summary of the law, and Paul would certainly have known of Jesus' teaching on this and be affirming it (Matthew 22:36-40). It is interesting that verse 11 moves from love to holiness, and links the two with an awakening to the reality that Jesus return is soon. In the spiritual battle, love and holiness form the two pillars of a life lived to the glory of God.

What will be the difference between the genuine lover of God and others? According to Romans 13, a trust in God's sovereignty, a debt of love to be

continually paid, and a passionate pursuit of holiness that is relational and radical. This is the kind of life that will matter for eternity, and will show others how great God and His gospel are. Will you choose a life of total commitment that displays itself in trust, love and holiness? For it is in this life you will find hope, satisfaction and purpose.

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A DEBT TO LOVE

Romans 13:8-14

- What from this text can I apply to my life today?

- What are a few things that I learned that I can share with someone else in my sphere of influence?



Bible Study Questions

Romans 13:8-14

- Why is love so important to God?
- What is your current level of financial debt?
- Is it okay for a Christian to be in debt for a house? Car? Couches? Other?
- What does it mean to owe love to someone?
- How can you not only understand this debt, but be someone who is constantly paying it?
- How does love fulfill the law according to Romans 13?
- Why does the text tell these people to “wake up”?
- What does this even mean in terms of love and holiness?

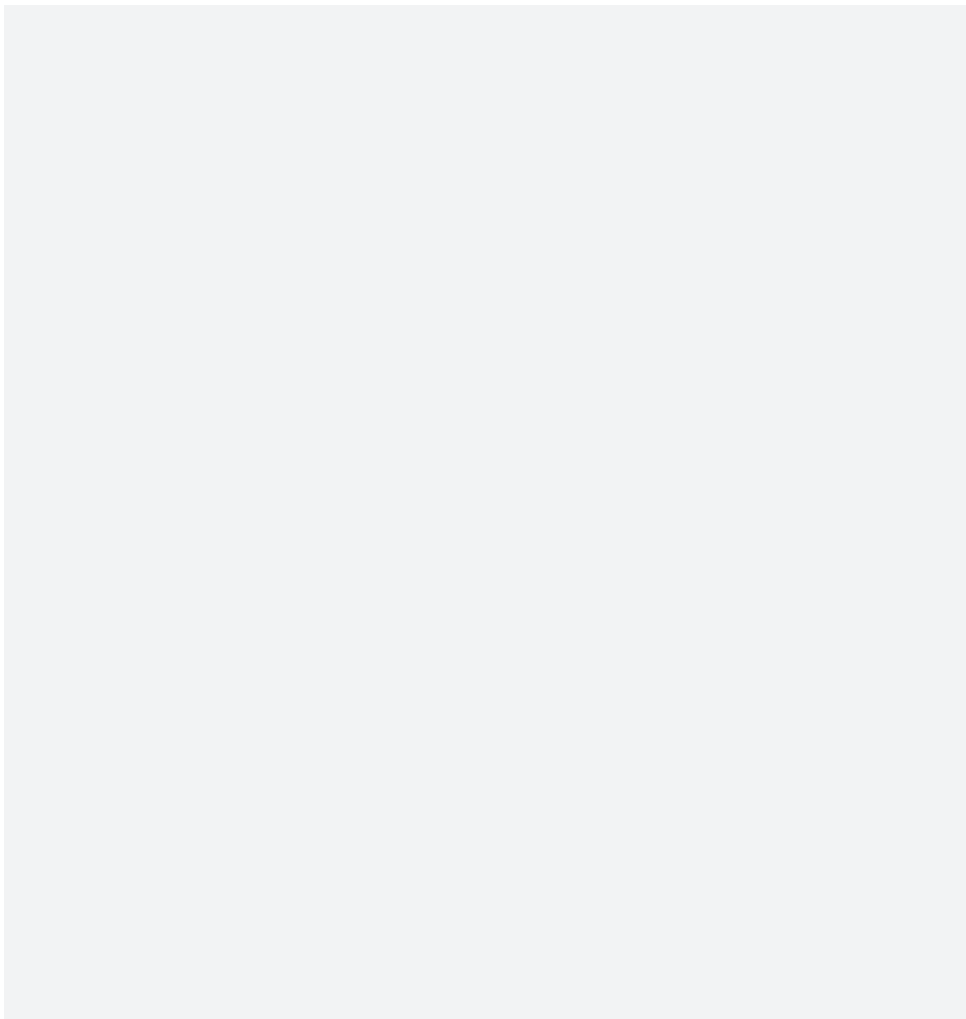
- What is the armour of light?
- What are the deeds of darkness that Paul is saying these Christians should get rid of?
- How can you "make no provision for the flesh"?
- How do love and holiness mix?
- What does it mean to "put on the Lord Jesus"?
- How can you make sure you are doing this in your life?
- Romans has transitioned from a book about doctrine, Israel and the gospel to a book that is immensely practical and overwhelming in its number of targets and their personal application. How can you keep the doctrine in mind and the gospel central as you seek to obey these commands in community?

☰ MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

ROMANS 13:8

Meditate



Study IX

WELCOME THE WEAK

Romans 14:1-14

They say that if you want a revival the key to pursuing that is to draw a circle around yourself and pray that God would revive your own heart! I think that the key to unity, and overflowing love in the body of Jesus is the same. If each of us draws a circle around ourselves and commits to pursuing unity in the mind of Christ, we will discover quickly that unity is attainable. When we sit back and blame others, take advantage of our freedoms, or make ourselves the center of the universe rather than God and serving His children, division is soon to follow.

Romans 14 is a passage of how to handle issues that potentially could bring division. What we often discuss as debatable issues, or what is maybe more spiritually entitled, opportunity issues. These are issues where the Bible is not clear and where there are legitimate disagreements on how to respond to them. When the iron curtain fell with a resounding clash, the church of Russia was able to finally display its life. In the first meetings with the American counterparts it was soon discovered that both were unspiritual, or at least in these opportunity issues they were missing each other. The Americans thought the Russians were toying with filthy liquor far too much, and good Christians don't drink, and the Russians thought their American brothers and sisters, well sisters, were far too painted up with make-up to be truly obedient. I will not give my opinion on either, other than to say I am glad that there were mature people in both countries who let love win. So, today, as you study Romans 14, draw a circle around yourself and commit to do the following three things, and you will be a person who discovers unity surrounding your life.

- Step 1: Submit fully to Jesus as your Master, and follow Him and His pattern for you in faith.
- Step 2: Sacrificially love those around you more than you love yourself.
- Step 3: Serve people and choose their best, even at personal cost, and you will discover joy.

The last two steps, really are the same, but a preacher needs three to make it work well and truly be worth his title, so three we have. If you live according to

Romans 14, and step into this three step circle you will discover unity and joy, and you will be right in the middle of both. There is way to much division and destruction among Christians today, and one of the main reasons this is so, is people are trying to place everyone but themselves in the unity circle, and personally choosing their own freedoms or convictions over that of others. So, stop living in the flesh, start living in the Spirit, and discover a freedom that far surpasses anything you were doing and convictions filled with love at the core that lead to the building up of others for God and His glory.

Take out your pen, make the circle big enough to fit your entire life in it, and begin today to live afresh for His glory!

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WELCOME THE WEAK

Romans 14:1-14

- What from this text can I apply to my life today?

- What are a few things that I learned that I can share with someone else in my sphere of influence?



Bible Study Questions

Romans 14:1–14

- Why do you think there is so much conflict in churches in Canada?

- Have you been a part of churches that have had divisions?

- How could this passage (and the other ones we have looked at) helped in these divisive times?

- What does Romans 14 teach the strong?

- Do you see yourself as strong or weak?

- Why is submission to the Lordship of Jesus in faith essential when dealing with divisive issues?

- Do you struggle with being selfish in the use of your freedoms, or condemning in the view of others' fences?

- How can you learn from this passage to be a part of the love culture that Jesus wants in His church?

- Are you willing to draw a circle around yourself and take the three steps?
Discuss what each of these means, and how you can follow them.
 - Step 1: Submit fully to Jesus as your Master, and follow Him and His pattern for you in faith.
 - Step 2: Sacrificially love those around you more than you love yourself.
 - Step 3: Serve people and chose their best, even at personal cost, and you will discover joy.

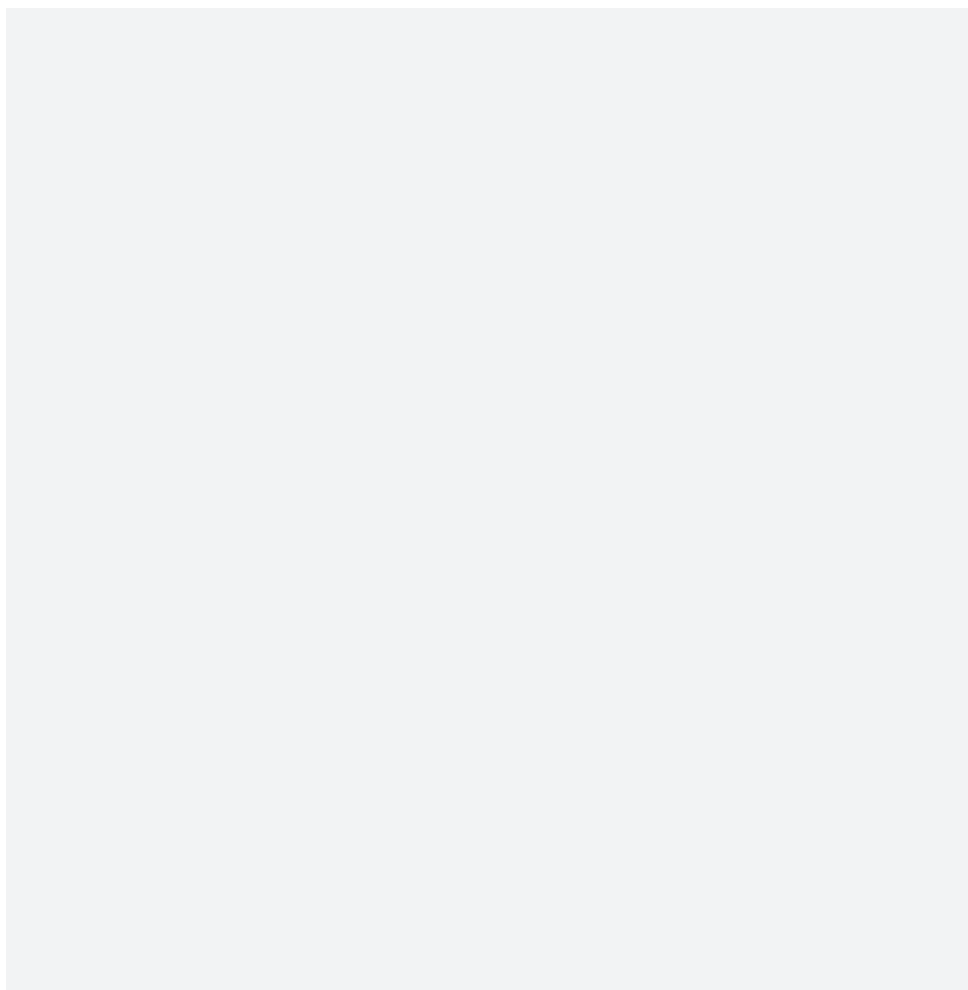
- How can you hold one another accountable for a life that is obedient to Romans 14?

☰ MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

ROMANS 14:4

Meditate



Study X

FOLLOWING KING JESUS TOGETHER

Romans 14:11–23

When is it okay to judge someone? Matthew 7 is one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible, and it shouts, Judge not! And yet, we are told to help one another, to carry one another's burdens, to test the spirits, and to note that savage wolves will sometimes come up within the middle of the local church (Acts 20). So, how can we be people who judge correctly, but don't sin in our judgement. This is an excellent question that really from Romans 12:1 on, Romans has been dealing with in the context of lavish love and total devotion to God and His Word.

How can we learn from Romans 14 to judge correctly? Well *first*, context matters, when something is clear in God's Word, we should be clear in our lives. God is our Master, and His Word is sufficient. He has addressed the things in His Word that He wants to address and where it is clear we should follow without wavering! *Second*, knowing who our Savior is and what He saved us from will drive us to our knees, and make us humble. This will allow us to view others from His perspective, and not the flesh. *Third*, keep the gospel central to all that we do. When we live in His grace, we will offer it to others as it overflows in our lives.

Once we have these three things down, we can rightly judge others. However, we will discover that the more mature we are, the less we will find ourselves judging, and the more we will find ourselves serving. The Kingdom of God, living under His rule is a matter of holiness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. If we focus on those three, other things will grow strangely dim in the mirror of His love.

If what we do causes someone to stumble, we must stop it. If we are stumbling because of what someone else is doing, we must grow up. Either way, the call is to make sure that all of life is an overflow of our relationship with Jesus, and constantly growing!

Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.



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FOLLOWING KING JESUS TOGETHER

Romans 14:11-23

- What from this text can I apply to my life today?

- What are a few things that I learned that I can share with someone else in my sphere of influence?



Bible Study Questions

Romans 14:11–23

- Read Proverbs 6:16–19
- I know you have discussed this before, but it is worth our time to discuss again as a group. Why do you think that God hates division so much?
- How does Jesus' prayer in John 17:20–23 remind us of the importance of the obedient pursuit of unity?
- Why does it seem that this pursuit of unity is so difficult in our modern church families?
- If you look at the three things that Paul says the Kingdom of God is about, why do you think he chose those three?
- How can we focus on those three in our own lives?
- What does joy in the Holy Spirit look like in real life?

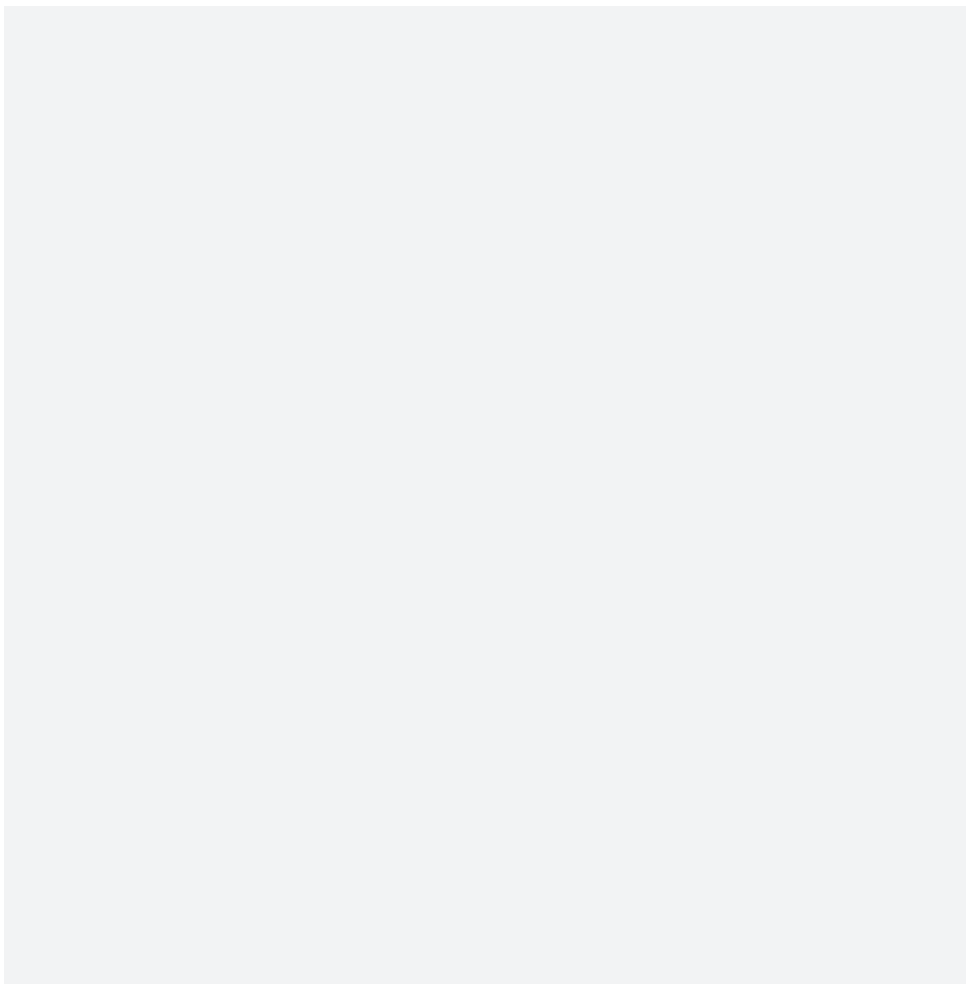
- How do we build one another up?
- When Paul says that if it doesn't come from faith it is sin, what does he mean in practical words?
- What is faith?
- Why do you think the Romans found it so easy to judge others for what they were eating and drinking?
- What are some things that we in our current culture judge, that others are doing, that are similar to this?
- How can we be those who *serve Christ* and thus are acceptable to God and approved by the Holy Spirit?
- What are some areas of your life that you want to change from your study of Romans 14? Make sure to share those with someone else.

☰ MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

ROMANS 14:13

Meditate



Study XI

KEEP FOLLOWING KING JESUS TOGETHER

Romans 15:1–13

Romans 14 has taught us that we are to live lives of love and faith. In fact, this is so strong that if what we do is not from faith, it is sin. I want to walk by faith and not by sight, so that my life is lived as close to God as I can get. He exists! He is good! He has shown me how to live for His glory! What this passage teaches us is that the authentic Christian learns not to insist on their rights, but to insist on their love! Romans 15 takes this back to relationship and being like Jesus again, where we learn that Jesus lived in a way that He displays selfless service, and we are to be like Him (Galatians 4:19). If we are like Jesus, we will be loving to one another.

Not only does Jesus serve as an example for His followers, His Word functions as a way to help us to have the strength to endure. The better we know the Bible, the better we will know Jesus, and the more we will love His people in the local church. To love Jesus is to love the church, and to seek unity and mission together for His glory. In fact verse 7 of our text is a call to welcome as we have been welcomed, and if we have Romans 5:6–11 ringing in our hearts, we will learn to love those whom others might deem unlovable. A friend of mine used to say, “How can the Spirit of God in me criticize the Spirit of God in you”. The answer: he can’t and won’t!

I think that Romans 15:5–6 is really a summary of all that has been taught, placed in the context of a prayer. It is passionate and important to find this oneness in Jesus and His Word. Through this we develop perseverance and encouragement, and can successfully be who He wants us to be in the long run.

If you have struggled with other believers, *look to Jesus!* If you feel like giving up, and need hope, choose to pray verse 5, and experience the blessing of other believers! It will mean that you give in the same way that Christ has given to you, but what you receive will be far more impacting than the cost of sacrificial love.

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KEEP FOLLOWING KING JESUS TOGETHER

Romans 15:1-13

- What from this text can I apply to my life today?

- What are a few things that I learned that I can share with someone else in my sphere of influence?



Bible Study Questions

Romans 15:1–13

- What does it mean to be under obligation to not please ourselves, but to bear with the failings of the weak?
- What are some examples that you can think of that could summarize the “failings of the weak”? How will doing this yield unity?
- What does it mean that Jesus did not please Himself?
- How is this to be an example for us?
- What is the value of the Old Testament according to verse 4? How can you take advantage of this value?
- Why is harmony with one another important according to verses 5–6?

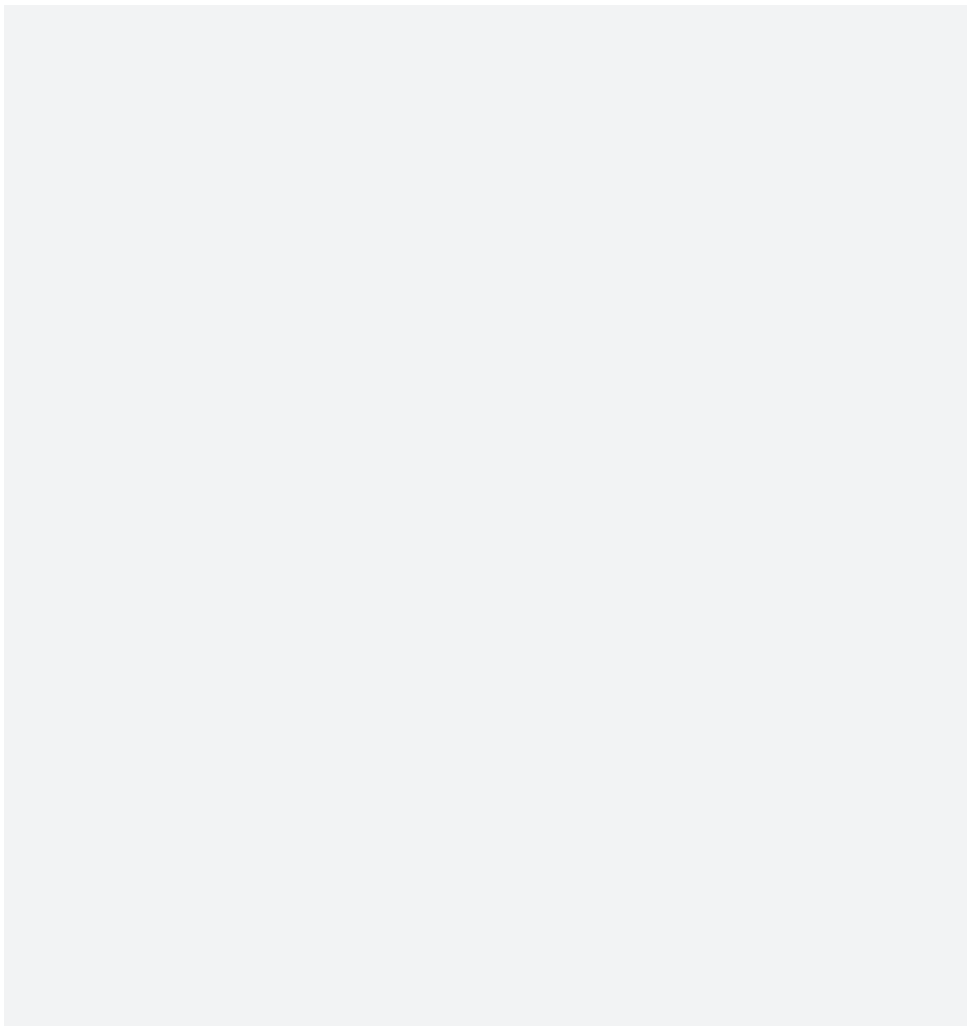
- How can you get this with other believers who are sometimes broken, weak, hurting people?
- Why is the repeated phrase, “for the glory of God”, so important for us to understand and live for?
- There are a few prayers in these passages. Find them and discuss why praying in a way that follows the patterns found here is important?
- What does it mean practically to be radically God-centred?
- How can you get there in your own life?
- Why do so few Christians live the way these verses call them to live?
- Draw a circle around yourself, write out three or four commitments from these verses, and seek to live them out in community for God’s glory.

☰ MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

ROMANS 15:1

Meditate



Study XII

BETTER TOGETHER: ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

Romans 15:14–21

It is good to live together in harmony, and to be a blessing to one another in the family of God. Paul moves into a new part of the letter he has written—now blessing the reader and encouraging them to stay strong. He is very personal in his interaction with this local church and it displays his love for them. Paul shares that they are full of goodness, focusing on their purity, honesty and kindness. They were marked with the fruit of the Spirit in a way that allowed them and others to see their authenticity.

God's grace is never something we can earn or merit, and people are saved by grace alone, *but* the grace that saves is never alone. It always brings about change, and marks people with God's image, and causes them to be put into the process of sanctification. One of the key ways that God works in His people is through knowledge, through His Word. The church in Rome was filled with knowledge. They were willing to be those who sought to understand God's Word and evaluate their own feelings, thoughts and traditions with what God was teaching them. The knowledge they had was not just for their minds, but was overflowing into a blessing for one another from lives impacted by a first love devotion to Jesus. They were, as Jay Adams would say, "competent to counsel", or the ESV, "able to instruct one another". There is always a desire to help one another in a true family, to carry one another's burdens in a way that shows that, together, we are seeking God's glory.

The Spirit of God was at work in the people of God and it showed in their goodness, knowledge and instruction of one another, His work is always on display in the local church, where authentic believers gather and serve together.

As you reflect on your own life and connection to the local church, do you see these three attributes on display in your own life? In the lives of others? Make sure over the next few days to be an encourager of others, especially those in whom you see God at work. If you try to give 10 encouragements of blessing for every one critique, your world, and those you influence will be blessed!

Sermon Notes | *Message available at cloverdalebaptist.ca*



BETTER TOGETHER: ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

Romans 15:14-21

- What from this text can I apply to my life today?

- What are a few things that I learned that I can share with someone else in my sphere of influence?



Bible Study Questions

Romans 15:14–21

- Why is it important for followers of Jesus to believe that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone?
- Interact with the comment: “The grace that saves is not based on any works in the one saved, the grace that saves always produces works in the saved one.”
- How does Paul understand the grace given to him by God in verse 15, and why does he bring it up here?
- Interact with Matthew 7:21–27
- What does the *house* represent?
- What is the difference between the houses? (Note what is similar and what is different, and don’t just say one is built on sand, and one is built on rock)
- How can you make sure your house is built on *rock*?

- In this passage Paul notes three things that he celebrates in these people. Discuss what each of them is, and how you would notice them in other people:
 - Goodness

 - Knowledge

 - Instruction of one another

- Do you see these on display in your own life? Where?

- How can you increase the production of these fruits?

- Paul states his goal for the book of Romans in Romans 1:5, and then restates it in our passage here (15:18), what does it mean to have an obedience that comes from faith?

- How can you produce this in your life? Keep in mind the essential role of faith.

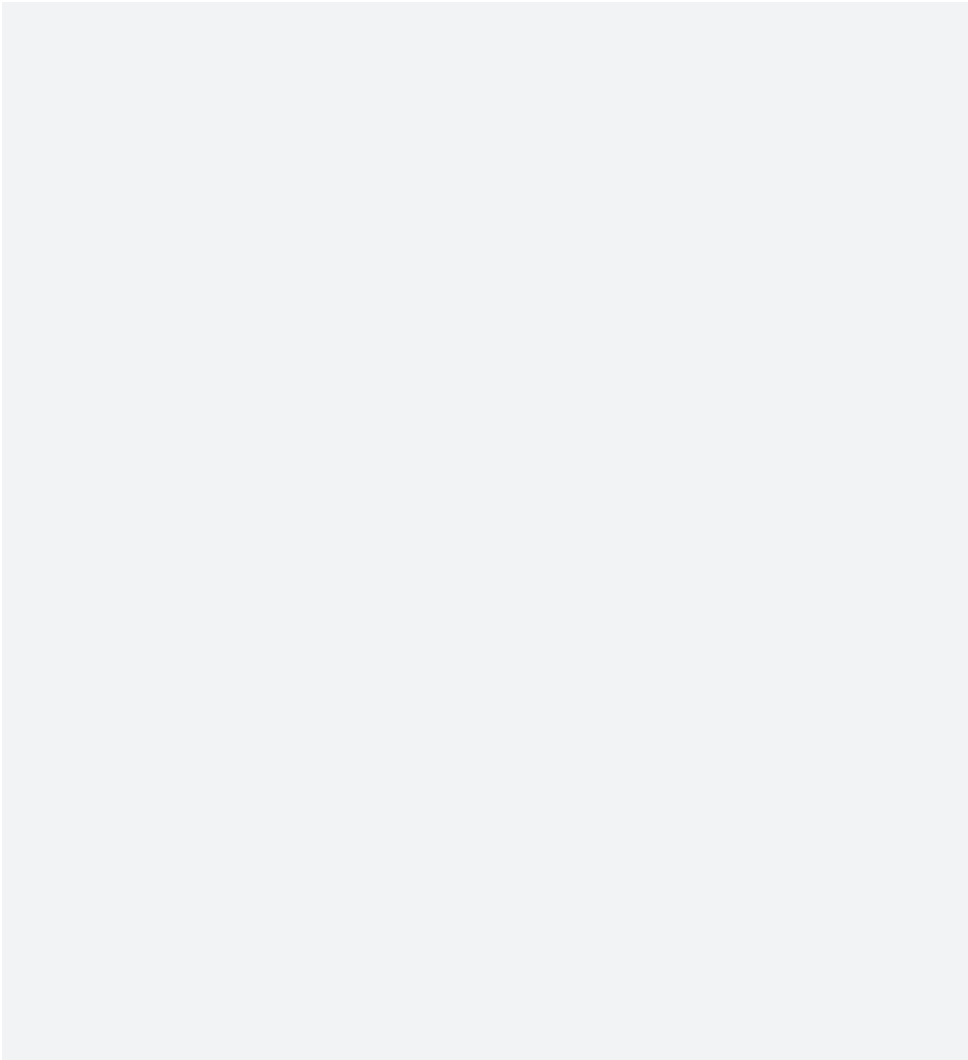
- What are four things you can do today (or this week) that will help you to be an encourager of the people around you?

☰ MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

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

ROMANS 15:13

Meditate



Study XIII

A WORTHY HERO

Romans 15–16

If you were asked to name your hero, or heroes, who would come to mind? John Piper makes the statement that our heroes should be dead, so they won't let us down. I think there is a lot of wisdom in that, however in these closing chapters, we find a hero of the faith on display. He is one who followed Jesus so passionately (Philippians 1:21) that he calls for us to imitate him as he follows Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:1). This is a challenge for any who name the name of Jesus in two key ways. It is first a challenge for us to follow Paul, to get to know him from God's Word, and even more importantly to get to know His Saviour. Three quick lessons from Paul (and there are many many more):

Lesson 1. No matter what your past, God can use you! Saul killed Christians for a living, in fact set off, with the killing of Stephen, one of the worst times in history for followers of Jesus. Not only did he find forgiveness in Jesus, God used him to change the world then and now. The lesson, if you feel broken, sinful, and beyond redemption, learn from Paul that God's grace is enough!

Lesson 2. No matter how weak you are, God can use you! Paul was beaten up, abandoned by his friends and attacked by Satan. Through it all he learned that not only does God use cracked pots, he learned that when we are weak, God is strong. In fact, he learned this lesson so well, that he called for us to boast in our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:10). The lesson, if you feel weak and useless, you are one step away from eternal impact! God uses weak useless people in such useful ways that eternity is changed. Learn from Paul that God's grace is enough!

Lesson 3. No matter how tough it is, the best is yet to come! Following Jesus in our times will not be easy, in fact if we are anything like Paul, or his Master, they will be incredibly difficult! The joy in the midst of the journey we can have is that what is coming is worth it, better by far, amazing. There is always hope, and what is unseen is worth investing our entire lives in (2 Corinthians 4:16–18). Ultimately, what Paul has to teach us is to live as though God exists, because he does! Jesus has risen from the dead, which means not only are we not to be pitied, we are to

be envied! He is risen from the dead, He is alive, and He is worth living for. Paul displays this powerfully, and if we follow Him as He followed Christ, we will live lives that matter for His glory.

Follow me as I follow Christ.



Sermon Notes | *Message available at cloverdalebaptist.ca*

A WORTHY HERO

Romans 15-16

- What from this text can I apply to my life today?

- What are a few things that I learned that I can share with someone else in my sphere of influence?



Bible Study Questions

Romans 15–16

There is way too much here to do in a Growth Group in one setting, so pick the best questions that are most suitable to your group, and grow up in the Lord!

- Who is your favourite comic book hero and why?
- Who is your favourite character in the Bible (other than Jesus) and why?
- If you could go back to any time in the Bible and be a participant in what was going on, where would you go and why?

Paul teaches us to live with:

1. Purpose

- What would you say is the purpose of your life? How does this compare with the purpose of Paul's life?

2. Proclamation

- When was the last time you shared your faith in Jesus with someone?
- If you have time, share your testimony with the people with whom you are studying. Try to keep under 5 minutes and focus on Jesus.
- Give a brief summary of the gospel. If you have time and space write it out, so that you know it well!

3. Passion

- What was Paul's passion?
- What is your *why*? that keeps you focused and going in the days and weeks of your life? How does that compare with Paul's?

4. Planning

- As we look at Paul's life, his plans are fluid and in submission to God, how can you make sure your plans are like this?

5. Prayer:

- Why is prayer so important for the follower of Jesus?
- How can you improve your prayer life over the next few months?

6. Plugged In

- Paul saw ministry as a partnership and joined together with many people in the pursuit of gospel ministry success. How can you do the same?
- If everyone in the church served like you are serving, gave like you are giving, and loved like you are loving, how healthy would the church be?

7. Praise

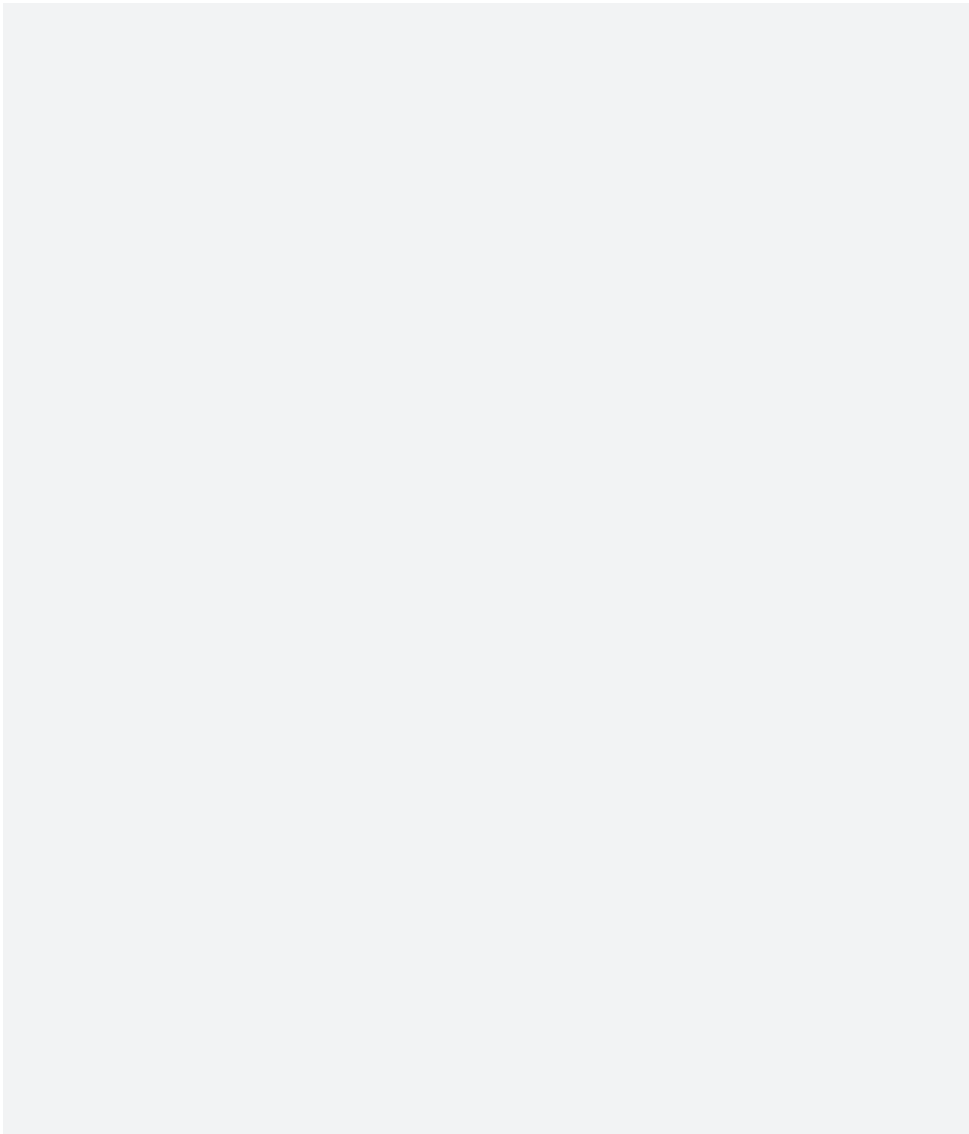
- Paul wanted all of the praise to go to God. This is difficult in a generation that seeks self-exultation. How can you live a life that directs praise to God?
- This study has been long and intensive, and if you took the time to do it well, life changing. Go back over your answers and see if the seven things that marked Paul's life mark yours, and what steps you can take to grow in them.

 MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1

Meditate



Study XIV

TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORIOUS GRACE

Romans 16:25-27

What does it mean to live to the praise of His glorious grace? This is an important question which drove Paul's life and ministry. If we understand it and pursue it, we will discover an all defining passion for our own lives.

We have reached the doxology. Paul closes by repeating his purpose in this letter for a third time (to bring about the obedience of faith), and then by turning to God and inviting us to do the same, praising God and longing for Him to be glorified! The Bible calls the follower of God to be radically God-centred, but the flesh demands we focus on ourselves. So how can we learn to be like Paul, and know the God of the Bible so well that we are God glorifying? The answer that is most important is that we are Word-saturated, or as Romans 12:2 would put it: spend the time needed to renew our minds. The better we know God's Word the better we can know the God who reveals Himself in His Word. So, as we end this life-changing and God-glorifying book, make it your goal to live in such a way that your life declares: "To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ. Amen."

Why do we exist? Why do we do church? Why do we love one another self-sacrificially? Why do we seek to be holy as He is holy? Why? A friend recently gave me a leadership book on the importance of answering the *why*. The idea behind the book is that the best way to motivate people to pursue excellence with passion is when they understand and believe the *why* and pursue it with you.

The *why* for all who know Jesus is: "To glorify God by enjoying Him forever". So, as we finish this study, may your heart know the greatness and power of the gospel, your mind be filled with the Word of God, and your passion be to bring Him glory. This is the greatest answer to *why* that can or ever will be found!

Amen and Amen

To God be the glory

Sermon Notes | *Message available at cloverdalebaptist.ca*



TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORIOUS GRACE

Romans 16:25-27

- What from this text can I apply to my life today?

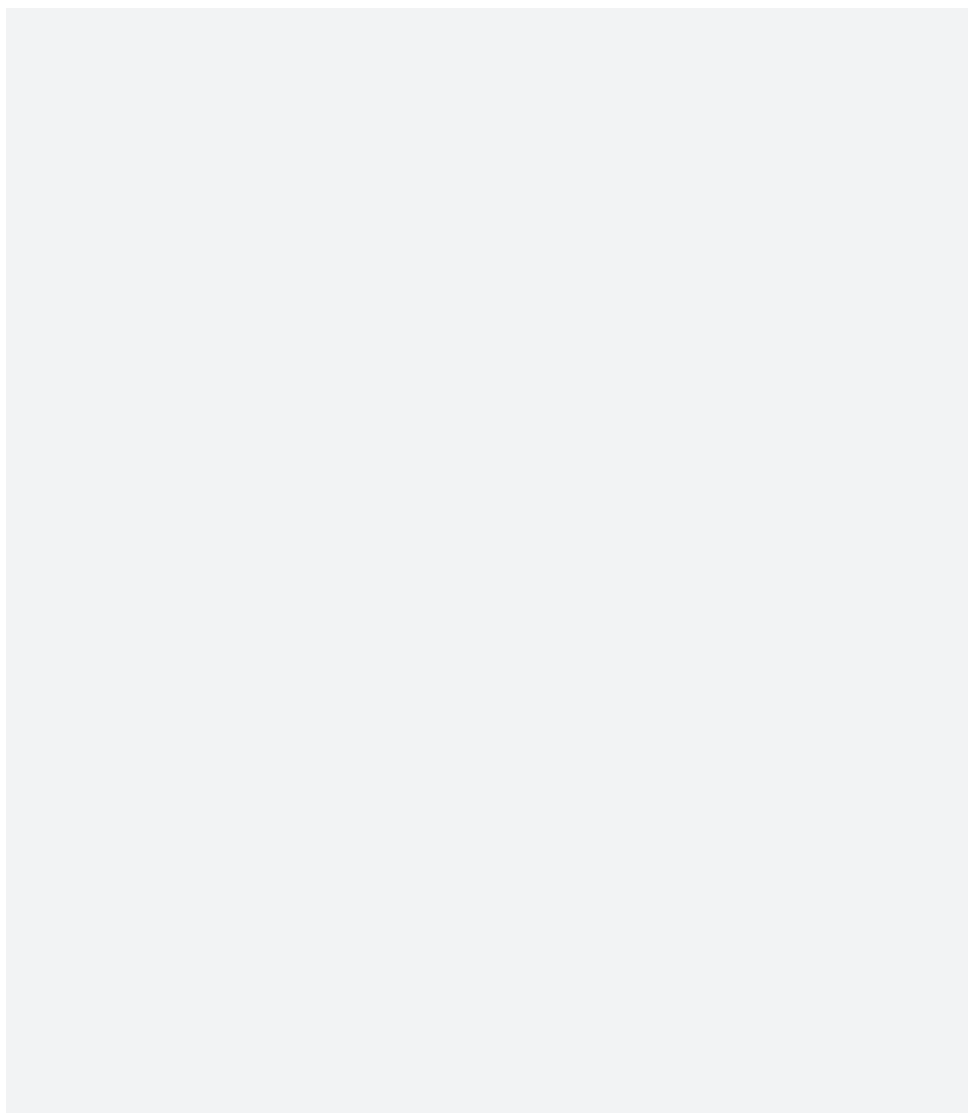
- What are a few things that I learned that I can share with someone else in my sphere of influence?

 MEMORIZE & MEDITATE

**To the only wise God be glory forevermore
through Jesus Christ! Amen.**

ROMANS 16:27

Meditate



**ARTICLES &
DEVOTIONALS**

IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL

31 DAYS IN ROMANS 12

Our desire is to grow in our intimacy with God and impact for God so that we live a life that matters. Romans 12 is one of the great passages of Scripture that teaches us to live in the view of the gospel. It is my hope that you can use this devotional guide as an opportunity to grow personally, as well as to interact with others who are working their way through this great chapter and its foundational realities.

If the gospel is kept in view, the followers of Jesus will find their lives radically altered! Please take the time to look up and read the text that is given, as not only does it serve as the basis of the devotionals, it is inspired and life changing. My experience is that many who read devotionals either don't take time for the text at all, or speed through it, and my eager desire for you is that you would make the text of Scripture your key focus in these devotionals.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 1

KEEPING THE GOSPEL IN VIEW: CONTENT UNDERSTOOD

Read Romans 12:1–2

This is day 1 of a 31 day journey that we hope you will follow through on, and share with others. When you do your devotions consistently there is a strong sense of accomplishment. A delight that your discipline has been strong. This is a great thing and worth celebrating. Even more, when you are consistent in your time with God, you will grow in your relationship with Him, and your life will change. A major problem in the Canadian church is that we sometimes can live as if God doesn't exist (Psalm 14:1), and so our goal in this time together is nothing short of learning to live in a relationship with God that delights in His existence 24/7, a relationship with God that drives and defines us. This will mean committing to God once in a radical way, and then daily renewing your vow to delight in Him and devote your time to seeking His glory (Luke 9:23).

Romans is one of the most impactful letters ever sent, and in the history of the church it quickly rises to the top as the one book that has been most used by God to bring about a renewal of first love devotion to God and His ways. It is a book that can change your life, if you open your mind to it, and one that the Holy Spirit will use to shape you, if you are His. The gospel is where the true Christian life starts and stays. It is foundational to a life that pleases God, and has the power of God to accomplish this. Romans 12 follows Romans 1–11, and in those chapters the gospel is defined and developed, and this good news is now the foundation for the rest of the life of the follower of God. Romans 12 and on calls us to live in the context of the gospel.

Stop. If you try to live your life as a follower of Jesus without the gospel in view you will quickly fail, and fall into rule keeping or Bible ignoring. In Jesus' earthly ministry He was harshest with the Pharisees (rule keeping) and the Sadducees (Bible ignoring), and the only hope for either is a profound understanding and experience of the gospel. The demonic attack is consistent, and we are not unaware of their schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11), they still seek to get us to be rule keepers, or Bible ignorers void of relationship with Jesus. We need the gospel. What is the gospel? If we do not get its content right, we will never get our experience to last or be authentic.

A simple and excellent way to understand the gospel in its foundational realities is found on the 9Marks website (<https://www.9marks.org/answer/what-gospel/>) and is as follows: A good way to summarize this good news is to biblically unpack the words God, Man, Christ, Response.

1. God. God is the creator of all things (Gen. 1:1). He is perfectly holy, worthy of all worship, and will punish sin (1 John 1:5, Rev. 4:11, Rom. 2:5–8).
2. Man. All people, though created good, have become sinful by nature (Gen. 1:26–28, Ps. 51:5, Rom. 3:23). From birth, all people are alienated from God, hostile to God, and subject to the wrath of God (Eph. 2:1–3).
3. Christ. Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully man, lived a sinless life, died on the cross to bear God’s wrath in the place of all who would believe in him, and rose from the grave in order to give his people eternal life (John 1:1, 1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 7:26, Rom. 3:21–26, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Cor. 15:20–22).
4. Response. God calls everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and trust in Christ in order to be saved (Mark 1:15, Acts 20:21, Rom. 10:9–10).

(Some of this material has been adapted from The Gospel and Personal Evangelism by Mark Dever, p. 43)

As we begin this 31 day journey, take the time to reflect on this short summary of the gospel, and then in your own words **write out in a paragraph or two the simple content of the gospel**. D.A. Carson has stated that the gospel is so simple a child can understand it, and so profound that it can drown an elephant. The right simple understanding is essential to further growing in depth and breadth of knowledge. Seek to understand the gospel in its simplicity and never tire of growing in your depth of experience in its richness.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 2

KEEPING THE GOSPEL IN VIEW: REALITY EXPERIENCED

Read Romans 12:1–2 and Ephesians 2:1–10

The gospel is life changing when it is seen, experienced, and when the follower of Jesus never loses sight of it. Romans 12 follows Romans 1–11, and in those chapters the gospel is defined and developed, and this good news is now the foundation for the rest of the life of the follower of God.

Stop. Knowing the simple content of the gospel is not enough. An authentic follower of Jesus not only understands the content of the gospel, but experiences its reality by grace through faith, and *keeps it in sight*. How do we experience the gospel? By *grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone*. Grace is receiving what we don't deserve, and in the context of salvation, it means we receive the ability to hear, and the opportunity to respond to the great message of the gospel. This foundationally means that God gets all of the glory for all who turn to Him as it is "to the praise of His glorious grace." Experiencing the gospel is radically God centred, and He gets the praise for His work and His call.

Our response as believers, which is demanded and enabled, is faith. Saving faith is much more than wishful thinking—it is the knowledge of what God has done for us through Jesus, and resting in it personally. Believing in Jesus means that we actually know what He did, why He did it, and we respond to that personally in a way that transforms us and makes us His new creation. If someone came to you and asked how they could get to know God, how would you answer? What is your own testimony of when you came to know God in a personal relationship by grace through faith? For me, growing up in a godly family, and being well church-ed and camp-ed, I said a prayer many times to "accept Jesus into my heart". Saying a prayer is a good thing, and the act of "accepting Jesus into your heart", if understood correctly, is one that I can live with. However, neither will help you experience the richness of the gospel in and of itself.

So how can you make sure you don't just know about God and the gospel, but you actually know Him and have experienced (and are experiencing) His love? The answer can be varied, but must include not only the content of the truth of the gospel, but also the personal acceptance of that content so that by grace

through faith there is found forgiveness, freedom, and a new life of full devotion. It is a turning from a way of life that does not include God at the center, to a way of life that seeks His glory as the central “why” to all of life. It is impossible to live a victorious Christian life unless the gospel is kept in view, and those seeking to live for God have experienced its richness. Many try and fail, and end up on the pathway of the Pharisees and/or Sadducees.

So, as we begin this 31 day journey together. *Stop.* We don’t want only more knowledge, or understanding, we want growth! Take the time before you move on from this devotional to remember when you by grace through faith first experienced the gospel. If you don’t remember, or haven’t ever experienced the power of the gospel, take the time to review in your heart and mind what it means to understand the content of the gospel and believe it. Make the choice to believe, to bask in wonder at the beauty and majesty of His love, and build your life on the basis of this relationship. The gospel is the foundation of the Christian walk, and without the foundation in place the obedience that is demanded will crumble into legalism or license, and short lived victories will be replaced by devastation and defeat.

Take the time to write out your own testimony in a few paragraphs. Reflect on the importance of not only knowing the content of the gospel but also experiencing the richness of what it means in everyday life.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 3

KEEPING THE GOSPEL IN VIEW: RELATIONAL RESPONSE

Read Romans 12:1–2 and John 17:1–5

The gospel is ultimately not just good news, although that is what the word *gospel* means—it is good news that accomplishes something. It is not just good news that accomplishes something, it is the best news in the universe that changes eternity. It ultimately accomplishes a reconciled relationship with God. It is intimate and individual even as it places the impacted into a community. The gospel, when understood and experienced, places those who believe it into a relationship with God. Eternal life is not from understanding the content of the gospel—it is from knowing the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom He sent, through the content of the gospel, received by grace through faith. It is a choice to confess in your heart that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead.

So the reality of eternal life is found in knowing Jesus, and keeping this in sight is essential to the assurance and vitality of any who want to live the Christian life. Tomorrow we will look at an experience of the gospel individually and intimately, and keeping it in sight is the key to being willing to give your entire life to God as a living sacrifice. It is also the key to persevering as a follower of Jesus. It is the most important news you can know, receive, and keep in sight. To get this full experience, followers of Jesus must understand that authentic Christianity is much more than news—it is relationship, and this relationship is one that not only saves, it places those saved on a road leading to deeper intimacy with the Almighty and lives lived fully devoted for His glory. Authentic Christianity is founded on the good news, but when fully experienced is about having a right (or reconciled) relationship with God.

Jerry Bridges has said that true revival comes when God's people are conscious of God's presence. Relationally driven Christians will find it much easier to obey Scripture and much more protected to stay away from the ditches of legalism (rule keeping to please God) or license (rule avoiding in pretend freedom). When His followers are conscious of His presence, and living in relationship, three things will occur. I give these to you as an encouragement and check list, both to see how you are doing, and to pursue.

1. Courage to serve no matter where or what God calls you to do (Psalm 16:8). Knowing God is with us means that we also will be aware that He empowers those who serve Him. This is a relational courage that has allowed God's people in history to do amazing things, and this same God does not change and is with us. Choose to be aware of His presence so that you have the courage to obey Him no matter what, or where.

2. Care to obey always (Joshua 22:5)

There is a phrase I noticed this year in my Bible reading, "be very careful to obey". The idea is that God is real and cares how we live, so that when we know this we live our lives for Him. His presence, and our relationship with Him, will always lead to a passion for holiness. To be a fool is to live as if He does not exist. To be a fully devoted follower of God and live in wisdom is to fear Him, and to choose obedience to His Word for His glory.

3. Call to impact (Matthew 28:18–20)

The great commission comes with a promise of His presence. When we know He is with us we will actively look for and take advantage of opportunities that come our way to serve Him and share with others how to live in a love relationship with the One who created them and is the Redeemer.

Living relationally through the gospel frees from fear, causes to obey, and releases on mission. As you reflect on your life this past week, can you see the reality that you know Jesus, and are keeping the glorious gospel in view? Take the time to reflect on what a relationship with Jesus looks like for you, and how you can make sure that you are pursuing deeper intimacy with Him as you seek to live your life relationally, aware of His presence in every area of your life, with the gospel in sight.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 4

KEEPING THE GOSPEL IN VIEW: RADICAL COMMITMENT

Read Romans 12:1–2 and Luke 14:25–35

The gospel is simple, and a message of grace. To engage the gospel as an individual takes faith, and it is of grace, and therefore all of God (Ephesians 2:1–10). There is a cost that needs to be paid for humans because as humans we are sinners who have sinned. We need the gospel so that we can be forgiven and the wonder of the gospel is that this cost—of what we have earned with our sin, the cost of death—is fully paid by God (Romans 6:23), in Christ Jesus our Lord (2 Corinthians 5:21) for all who believe.

Following Jesus is always about what He has done for us, not what we have done for Him. It is also a relationship that drives and defines us, or as James would say, authentic faith always works. He does not save us because He needs us, He rather saves us and chooses to use us as an act of love towards us, and a seeking of His glory (Psalm 50:8–15). The relationship that followers of Jesus enter into is one that transforms them and makes them new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). Being in relationship with the living God means that the follower will be willing to count the cost (Luke 9:23), or as Romans 12:1 states, to choose to be a *living sacrifice*.

The Greek in Romans 12:1 demands a once for all commitment to this—all in, all for Jesus devotion. *All in, all the time*, willing to count any cost and live for the glory of God no matter what. Anytime, anywhere, no matter what. Intimacy with God demands that we seek to impact the world for God no matter what the cost (Luke 14:25–35). This is a joyful response to belonging to Him and experiencing His love. Romans 12 says that this just makes sense, it is our spiritual, or logical act of worship. When we have experienced the foundation of the gospel in terms of what God has done for us, the overflow of that experience will be open hands, offering all that we have and all that we are to Him, to be used for His glory.

Kent Hughes states, “For Paul, true worship in offering ourselves to God is reasonable or logical because it is consistent with a proper understanding of the truth of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Total commitment is the only rational course to take when you really see who God is. Nothing else makes sense.”

If you are not willing to live your life for Jesus as a *living sacrifice*, then there is a very good chance that you don't understand the gospel, or that your experience of His love is stunted. If you are holding something back, it is because you have not experienced the rich love that Jesus wants you to. For each of us who longs for deeper intimacy with God and impact for God, this is the starting place, and the gospel is something we must never lose sight of. If we experience the richness of God's mercy ever deeper, our delight in Him will grow ever stronger, and our desire for a radical life ever more a delight. Are you willing to commit your life to Jesus, and to say to Him: "I offer to you my life as a living sacrifice, this is what makes sense in light of your grace. So, today, I choose to give you all that I am and all that I have to use as You desire for your glory". If you are not, look up and read/pray Ephesians 3:14–21. If you are, rejoice in the richness of God's love for you, and anticipate a great adventure where you must never lose sight of the gospel even as you grow in your impact for God.

Write a letter to God, and express to Him your desire to be a living sacrifice. Or ask what is holding you back from this demand that grace makes on our lives.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 5

KEEPING THE GOSPEL IN VIEW: AUTHENTIC WORSHIP

Read Romans 12:1–2 and John 4:24

There are times when my heart is drawn into the presence of God through music in such a rich way that I feel overwhelmed with His love and grace. There are certain styles of music, and certain songs, so impacting on my heart that I wish you could all feel what I feel. If only you could hear with me the power of these songs to the soul, you too would love them as I do.

When I arrived at Cloverdale Baptist Church in 2006 there was a battle going on for the style of music that we would own as our own as a church. A young drummer was the worship director at the time, and many found his style abrasive and modern. Lori and I attended a powerful hymn sing with hundreds (filled the old building) of precious seniors and they were impacted powerfully by the music. A few weeks later there was what we used to call, Lampstand, a younger-focused night of music, and there the church was filled with young people exalting God's name in song. What fascinated me was that not only did the people we watched thoroughly enjoy their style (I enjoyed both nights), they were so impacted that people from both groups said to me: "If only people who don't fully understand our style could have been here, then they would know what true worship is, and join us." I believe the people who shared those thoughts with me were being authentic to their hearts, and truly wanted others to experience the power of music with them, but both crowds missed out on the reality that worship in the New Testament, is not a style, but the substance of a life.

As you read this, I am sure you have a preferred style. For me, a good *Mercy Me* or *for King & Country* song thrills my heart, and in the congregation, I love *City of Light*. You may agree, or feel your skin crawl with how old or young I must be; however, true Biblical worship is not based on *style*, but on a life lived as a sacrifice to God for His glory. Really, as ironic as this is, real worship is living a life of love as God models in Jesus, enables with His Spirit and commands in His Word. Real worship is supporting what you prefer. Romans 12:1 makes this clear, but so does the rest of the New Testament. Authentic worship is: "All that I have, and all that I am, responding correctly to who He has revealed Himself to be".

Now obviously we need to grow in our grasp of who God is, and living as a sacrifice for Him. But what I want us to notice here is that true worship has a lot more to do with how you live your life than with the style of music you choose, how you love your neighbour than with the style that you believe they should choose.

So next time you feel frustrated, or engaged with the worship music of a particular church, remember that far more important than how you feel at that moment is how you live in the next. Singing is a part of who we are and who God wants us to be. Single minded devotion is way more important! Your spiritual act of worship is your life. The only worship that is acceptable to God is whole hearted devotion to Him and His ways.

- What kind of worship music do you prefer?
- Why is how you live your life way more important than that preference?
- How can you grow as a worshipper so that your life reflects His greatness and glory?

Write a prayer to God asking Him to help you become a true worshipper:

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 6

KEEPING THE GOSPEL IN VIEW: THE PATHWAY TO BETTER WORSHIP

Read Romans 12:1–2, Colossians 3:16–17, and James 4:4

Have you ever been to a great service, where you left thrilled with who God is, and what He had done for you; where you felt the presence of God so powerfully that it overwhelmed you; where it filled you with conviction and great joy, peace and a passion to please God no matter what the cost?

For me those times have as much to do with me as they do with the worship service. But a good reminder for us is that this is only a minute part of true Biblical worship. Worship is all that we are and all that we have responding to who God has revealed Himself to be. It is not a feeling, although it includes feeling. It is behaviour for His glory. It is becoming an all-in living sacrifice with your thinking, feeling and living. This is not easy. This cannot be produced by the right environment. In fact, as shocking as this is to the modern Canadian Christian, it has very little to do with style, feel, or experience. Romans 12:2 tells us that the pathway to better worship involves two steps. If you learn these two steps, your worship will become more better (I know that is bad English, but it is good theology). Step 1 today, step 2 tomorrow, and I pray for the rest of our lives.

Step 1: Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world

In other words, don't think like the world thinks. The root of our fruit is the way we think, or put another way, it is from the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks. The world is selfish, fleshly and materialistic. The way that the world learns to think is by time spent with the world, or perhaps better put in our current culture, spent before the box (TV). We learn what is normal, nice, and not appropriate from culture by listening to it.

It would be so much easier if we could depend on the feels, the right environment could produce for worship, rather than the discipline of tuning out the world. The world's way of thinking places me and my agenda and feelings and styles at the center and judges others by my experiences. The world assumes my importance, and as long as what I deem best is something that doesn't hurt others, God or His Word should not infringe upon my happiness.

To be a friend of the world is to think like the world, and this the Bible declares is a very dangerous thing, for being a friend of the world means that we are enemies of God (James 4:4). So how do I take Step 1 (do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world) in a practical manner? It means proactively thinking about what is shaping your thinking. When we were in youth ministry, we watched a cute show called Sister Act, and then asked our youth group what it was teaching. When evaluated, the cute show was no longer cute. We must be aware that the world is seeking to squeeze us into its mould. It is not neutral, but nasty. So, be aware of what is shaping your thinking, screen time, books, friends, and so many other things and actively choose not to have your pattern of thoughts influenced by the world. How we think impacts our worship, so make sure what is feeding your thoughts is not a conformity to the pattern of this world. It is important to be people who think of God and His Word first, others second, and our own fleshly desires in submission to the first two.

- As you evaluate where you spend your free time, what is shaping your thoughts?
- What differences do you notice between the pattern of your thinking and someone who does not know Jesus?
- How can you make sure you are avoiding the pattern of traditionalism as well?

Take a moment to make a commitment to God about steps you will take to obey this verse. How will you make sure you are not conforming to the pattern of this world? Write it out in paragraph.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 7

KEEPING THE GOSPEL IN VIEW: THE PATHWAY TO BETTER WORSHIP (PT. 2)

Read Romans 12:1–2, 2 Corinthians 10:5, Colossians 3:16–17, and Psalm 19

Step 1 of the pathway to better worship is to not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.

Step 2: Be transformed by the renewing of our minds

This is the intake of God's Word. God's people are to be those who value the Word of God. Who love it and treasure more than gold. Who literally let it dwell in them. But what does this actually mean?

If you open your Bible to the middle, you will be in the book of Psalms. The largest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119, and it is filled with the importance and value of God's Word. Psalm 19 shouts out that it is more to be valued than gold, and perhaps most powerfully Psalm 138:2 shouts out that God values *above all* else, His Name and His Word.

In fact, in Hebrew, Psalm 138:2 declares that God values His Word above His Name. If this was not inspired it would be to shocking to believe for God places immense value on His name. So why this passion, this loud overwhelming declaration? Because the only authoritative way that we can truly get to know who God is (His Name), is through how He has revealed Himself to be (His Word). Oh, all of the universe is an arrow to God, and the Holy Spirit shows us who He is, but without God's Word we would never be able to trust what the universe was displaying or our inner hearts were declaring. The Word of God is how we renew our minds, and it is the only authoritative source of truth that we can absolutely trust.

In Romans 12, God's Word is what is to become the shaper of our thinking. Our filter and fabricator of thoughts for all of life. Our text in Romans 12 calls this being transformed by the renewing of our minds. It is the essential call for those who follow Jesus to take the time to wash their minds with the Word of God. This means that we learn to think as He wants us to think, to value what He wants us to value, and to hate what He hates. This means we learn to know who He is, and what He has done, and evaluate everything we feel, think and do by God's Word.

We check everything we believe using God's Word as our filter, and we desire to have everything we think to be an overflow of what God has declared. It is a lifelong pursuit of being Word-saturated, of bleeding bibline (what Spurgeon declared of Bunyan). God's Word must be our greatest treasure, our strongest pursuit, our longing to know better. If we are to live as God requires, we must, as an overflow of the gospel, value God's Word and God's Name above everything else.

- Take the time to read Psalm 19. What are some ways that it says that the value of God's Word is displayed?
- Take the time to write a quick note to yourself, in your own words, declaring the value of God's Word to you.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 8

KEEPING THE GOSPEL IN VIEW: HOW TO GET WET

Read Romans 12:1–2, Hebrews 4:12, and 2 Timothy 2:20

God wants His people to let His Word dwell richly in them (Colossians 3:16–17). This is what we mean when we use the term “Word-saturated”. To be saturated by something means that it fills us, it is something we sit in, and overflows from us, it shapes our inside, so that our outside displays what saturates us. So how do we do this as followers of Jesus. How do we practically become transformed by the renewing of our minds? Or, how do we become wet, soaked, saturated, with God’s Word? There are five essential ways to get God’s Word into your life:

1. Read, Read, Read

I am often asked how much Bible a person should read every day, and my answer is some. For me it depends on the time of year, and sometimes it is many books, and other times a few verses. The point is that you should read to get the big picture story, and read to meditate (more on this in a minute) on the small details that matter. You can’t be Word saturated if you don’t read God’s Word in a consistent pattern. Many find it helpful to set aside a specific time and place to intake God’s Word, and I am okay with that, but want to be clear, the most important thing is that you read. Try to read more in God’s Word than any other book, or if you don’t read much, then seek to be in your Bible longer than you spend in front of your TV.

2. Meditate

For some this is a scary word, so let us quickly define it and chase the fear away. It means to pick a verse, or passage, and think deeply about it. It might include repetition, but the idea is not vain repetition, but intense depth. It can be done by putting a favourite verse on a card and reading it throughout the day, or by memorizing a verse (more on this in a minute) and then reciting that verse throughout the day, asking what it means, and how you can apply it.

3. Memorize

If you want to pursue holiness and Word saturation, memorization is essential (Psalm 119:11). This is very easy for some, and difficult for others, so don’t become frustrated. Rather, choose a verse or passage you want to memorize and read it

over and over and over again. Start to recite it without looking at the verse, and soon it will be a part of Scripture hidden in your heart. Your goal is not to say you have done it, or to spit it out word for word when you need it (unless you're a pastor), but it is to get the water of God's Word into your heart, and this is one of the best ways to get wet, and move towards being saturated.

4. Messages

The preached word is one of the most important ways for the Christian to grow. In fact, we live in an era where you can download sermons on your phone, or listen to them at your computer, and have at your fingertips the best preaching in the world. I think as important as a steady diet of great preaching is to intake messages with consistency in your local church, and listen with intensity. The desire to grow, learn a way of thinking, and evaluate everything you hear with God's Word. Take notes and review them.

5. Share with others what you are learning.

Take the time to make God's Word a part of your conversation in your family, growth groups, with your friends, everywhere. Share what you are reading, what you learned from the sermon, how God's Word is shaping your thoughts. Share with others, and from that you will grow and help to whet their appetite as you are getting wetter.

This devotional was a little longer, and a lot heavier than some of the others. I am not sorry for that, but aware that some of you stopped reading a little while ago. Well, not all of you, because you are reading this, but some of the others. Keep going, it will pay off!

- How can you specifically apply this? Review those five essential ways of getting God's Word into your life.

- How are you doing on them?

- What are some goals (S.M.A.R.T. Appendix 1) that you can set to make sure you are getting wetter every day so that your saturation in God's Word is growing? Try to include all five of the ways to intake God's Word.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 9

KEEPING THE GOSPEL IN VIEW: DON'T JUST KNOW IT. DO IT!

Read Romans 12:1–2, Matthew 7:21–27

Knowing the Word of God is essential to living life in right relationship with God, and for God. The Word reveals who He is, and what He wants, so being able to evaluate all of life from His perspective, and with a knowledge of who He has told us He is, is key to the victorious Christian life. But the key must be turned.

Romans 12:2 tells us that if we are not conformed, but transformed, then we will be able to know and *do* God's will; that is the idea of "discern" in this verse. There is no question that God's people perish for lack of knowledge of His Word (Hosea 4:6), but they also will perish if they think they are God's people and don't live it.

One of the great alarm clocks in my life was understanding Matthew 7:21–27. I was raised in a good church, by a great family. I knew the Bible well, and could enter debates with pastors and have fun doing it (when I was 17, I knew everything), but was not applying God's Word to my life. I knew the Bible well, but it did not show in my life (religion did, I was a good Mennonite boy). After reading a book (*The Gospel According to Jesus*), and reflecting on Matthew 7, I realized that my life was not displaying a relationship with Jesus, but rather a declaration of Jesus being *Lord Lord*, but not doing what He said. After much reflection, and growth, Bible College, and the call of God on my life to help others know Jesus and conform to His image, I am committed to sharing Matthew 7 at almost every outside speaking opportunity I get.

A wise man builds his house on the _____

A foolish man builds his house on the _____

A great kid's story, and where it becomes a great adult story as well is when we understand the reality that the houses look the same, both go to church, both hear the Word of God (know it). The difference is the foundation. One applies and one hears and ignores. This is not only a challenge for us to hear and obey God's Word, but a warning to heed (two of them actually). If we don't hear and obey, but just hear, when the storms come our houses (lives) will collapse in chaos. The storms will come. Of that we can be sure from history, our own history, and

perhaps even from some reading this, a testimony of what is happening right now. There is a building pattern that will yield security and that is hearing and obeying God's Word. If we don't hear and obey, but just hear, we display ourselves to be those of whom Jesus will say: "Depart from me I never knew you." One of the ways we show we are followers of Jesus is by following Jesus.

So what now? Realize that knowing God's Word is essential and a worthwhile pursuit. Realize that living in obedience to God's Word is just as important, and become hearers and doers of the Bible. As you look at your life, can you see a point in time that you not only knew the Word of God, but also applied it to your life? If you look at your life and are not applying God's Word as you should, go back to the gospel, and start there. Build your passion for knowledge and obedience from that. The gospel is the starting and staying point for victorious Christian living.

In the space below, draw a picture of a wise man's house that you want yours to be, or write a note to God and express your desire to be one who builds your life, from today forward, on His word applied in your life.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 10

KEEPING THE GOSPEL IN VIEW: KNOWING GOD'S WILL

Read Romans 12:1–2, Proverbs 3:5–6

I was asked the other day to preach a sermon on knowing God's will. That is an excellent subject and one that is discovered not only in a process, but in process. It is while we live that we learn this great and most important lesson. However, the Bible is clear, there is a way to get a God directed path, or to know what His will is, His good pleasing and perfect will. If you have been doing these devotionals you already are well on your way to discovering His path for you. It is a lifelong pursuit of Word saturation and radical surrender. That being said, with the help of Bruce Waltke and his great book called, *Finding The Will Of God, A Pagan Notion*, there are 7 steps that can help you to discern God's will for your life.

Step 1: Bible Saturation (Romans 12:1–2)

We have covered this well, and so will just reiterate the importance of learning to think in the way that God has revealed is best. There is no substitute or shortcut for knowing God's will—it will take a passionate pursuit of letting the Word of God dwell in you richly.

Step 2: Develop a Heart for God (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 12:33–36; 22:37)

This means training your desires, and then guarding them. You do this by seeking to ensure that your first love is God, and that you delight in what delights Him. You guard your heart by what you feed it, and by having your mindset on what the Spirit desires (Romans 8 Reminder). A heart for God means a longing for Him relationally (Psalm 42), and with righteousness (practical pursuit of purity). If you are soiling your eyes with sin, or satisfying your desires with missing the mark, your heart will belong to the world, and you can't be a friend of God or know His will. This step is only done (all of the steps need Him) in the power of the Holy Spirit, who gives a new heart, and protects that heart with His power and presence. To be filled with the Spirit is to know God's will.

Step 3: Seek Wise Counsel (Proverbs 15:22; 12:15; Psalm 143:10)

By this I don't mean enter your question into Google. Rather find people you know who love God, know you and your situation and can speak into your life with the wisdom that God has given them.

God has called us to live together in community and this protects us from our deceitful hearts (Hebrews 3:12–14) and provides for us the opportunity for the discovery of His ways for us. If you don't have good friends who encourage you, and can give you wise counsel, get them!

Step 4: Look for God's Providence (Ephesians 1:11; 2:10)

God is at work in all things, and nothing happens by chance. Be aware of what is going on around you, and look for the hand of God even in the difficult (Joseph is a great example of this). If you are devoted to God and His ways, He has good works for you that He prepared in advance, and we should walk in them. Awaken an antenna that is constantly looking for the signals from a sovereign God that place you in the pathway of impact.

Four steps is enough for one devotional, three more tomorrow. For now, take the time to review these and answer the following questions:

- Are you Word-saturated?
- Do you have a heart for God, and are you protecting that heart?
- Do you have people you can ask for advice who are godly and wise?
 - Who are they?
 - Who would you like them to be?

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 11

KEEPING THE GOSPEL IN VIEW: KNOWING GOD'S WILL (PT. 2)

Read Romans 12:1–2 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17–18

It is good to remember as we begin our second day in this important subject that we follow a Person, not a program. What do I mean by that? I mean that these seven steps are really good, but useless unless you are in a vibrant living relationship with God. So I hope these seven steps will not be used by you to be a pattern that you follow, but rather that they would direct you to a Person to know. When giving formulas (like seven steps to knowing God's will) it is important to remember that the formula is only a tool to know, in order to follow the Master.

Review

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Bible Saturation | 3. Seek Wise Counsel |
| 2. Develop a Heart for God | 4. Look for God's Providence |

Step 5: Use Sound Judgement

Another way of saying this is *think*. Once you have trained yourself in a biblical worldview, and followed steps 1–4, do what makes the most sense.

Think:

- In light of Scripture
- In light of giftedness and opportunity
- In light of ability and need
- Current, past and future circumstances
- Overall life/church strategy

God has given us wisdom, and if you think you lack (and you do) pray for it and He gives to all generously.

Step 6: Watch for Divine Intervention

We believe that God is still active in life, and He cares. We are not deists who believe in a god who winds up the world and disengages. We believe in the God of the Bible Who listens to our prayers and uses our lives to impact eternity. He is with us, and He is active in *His story*. Be aware of what He might be doing and engage. If you run into someone by accident, realize that in God's economy accidents don't exist. If you see a need, and no one seems to be meeting it, you might be the plan that God has for that need. Look for God to be at work, because He is!

Step 7: Praise God

This is always God's will, so spend time with Him relationally and praise Him for who He is and thank Him for what He has done. That is the seven-step pathway to knowing God's Will. Three warnings, and then we will be ready to move on from Romans 12:1–2:

Warning #1: Remember that getting to Know God's will should always be an overflow of relationship. Knowing God is the key to knowing what God wants.

Warning #2: Remember that it is easier to turn a moving ship. Don't be frozen into inaction because of confusion as to what God wants. Move where you know He wants, and in that context move.

Warning #3: Remember that God's will is lived today forward, and the only use for looking at yesterday is healing, or repentance. If you have made a mistake don't spend any time beating yourself up over your stupidity (once you have truly repented), rather ask, from here, what is God's will for my life.

For most who struggle with doing God's will it is not a matter of knowing what it is, but a willingness to surrender all. So, get moving in His direction, follow the path, and most importantly know the Savior. 11 Days on two verses is a lot, but if you have been consistently reading Romans 12:1–2, you will now know them off by heart, or at least be very close to that. Try it! Close your eyes and say Romans 12:1–2 out loud. How did you do? If you failed miserably, go back to day one and start all over—*just kidding*, be confident that saturation takes time, and these precious verses, if you have done this, are now a part of your battle-ready weapons.

- What do you believe God's will is for you in the next week? Month? Year? And if you are willing, 5 years?
- I know this takes a lot of time, so if you want to close the book and come back to this later, feel free, but it is an important process. It is worth the effort in seeking to live a life that matters!
- What are three things you have learned from Romans 12:1–2 that you think can make a long term difference in your life?

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 12

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: RIGHT VIEW OF SELF

Read Romans 12:1–3 and Philipians 2:1–11

Who are you? How are you to think about yourself? Self-talk is very important, and how we view ourselves shapes our self-talk. When I was younger I read a book called *I'm OK – You're OK* by Thomas A. Harris, and it was about having a right self-esteem. There was the odd nugget of gold in that book, but I prefer Romans 12 to set our thinking about ourselves, not Harris (in fact, ignore Harris and read Paul). So, how does God want me to think about myself? Romans 12:3 is very helpful in helping us to see ourselves as God wants us to. Three helpful statements in this little verse should set our self-talk to be reflective of God and His Word, not the world, or the flesh.

All of Grace: Meaning an acknowledgement that I don't deserve God's love, and I can delight in it. This releases us from having to earn our keep, and renews our first love devotion and radical commitment to Him. In Christ, we have immense value, and His grace changes us, makes us His work of art, and places us in His impact zone, in and through us. Think of yourself in the context of grace!

Not More Highly: The temptation we have is to think about ourselves more than we should. This can lead to putting ourselves up, or down, and neither is helpful. I love C.S. Lewis's quote: "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking about yourself less". I think that is a good summary of what Romans 12:3 is calling for.

Sober Judgment: A simple summary of this is to think of ourselves in the context of God always—to treat our own self judgement seriously.

Ray Stedman, the man who mentored Chuck Swindoll said that he awoke every morning and reminded himself of three specific things:

1. I am made in the image of God. I am not an animal, God has called me to relate to Him, therefore I will do that.
2. I am filled with the Spirit of God. God has made me a new creation, I have immense value to Him in doing His work.
3. I am a part of the plan of God. God is working out all things to a great and final purpose on this earth, and I am a part of that plan. All of life therefore has

meaning, and I am a part of that meaning because I am a child of God! That seems like a pretty good start, and if you need some extra focus, F.B. Meyer has stated powerfully: "The only hope of a decreasing self is an increasing Christ". I have heard it said: "You are who you think you are", and know that is not true. However, we should learn to think in line with who God says we are, for what we think we are will shape us.

- How do you view yourself?
- In your own words, how does Romans 12:3 help you see yourself through God's eyes?
- Why does this matter?
- Summarize Romans 12:3 personally in a statement or prayer.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 13

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: 7 REALITIES THAT PRODUCE UNITY

Read Romans 12:1–6 and Ephesians 4:11–16

“To dwell above with saints we love, Oh, that will be glory. But to dwell below with saints we know, well, that’s another story.” Maybe you have heard this before, maybe you have experienced this “below” on earth as you meet and talk with other believers. We sometimes have a problem getting along as believers and instead of being known for our love (John 13:34–35), we can be known for our criticism of one another. Many new mega churches are built around the premise that churches are caustic, and people abusive. Some of us have experienced the wrath of people who name the name of Jesus, and certainly churches are filled with people like you and me, who are far from perfect. However, we are called in the context of the gospel to be different.

How should we view/live with others here on earth who also love Jesus? The answer is in unity and love, with common mind and mission (Romans 15:5–6). The reality is that if we see life in the context of the gospel and view ourselves as this text demands, then we will find that we not only get along with other believers, we are one body and members of one another. We will own the goal of unity and pursue it with all our might. What does this actually mean? It means we will have a beautiful unity around God and His Word. We will see life the same (Romans 12:1–2), we will have a common passion to glorify God, we will delight in the reality that He has made us to function together in unity. Now that all sounds nice so why do we have so much trouble living with saints below? We would love to blame *them*. However, the text of God’s Word *always* points to me as a starting place. So, the question we need to ask, is: what do I need to make sure of in my own life so that I am a part of the unifying pursuit in the family of God? Follow these seven realities that will cause you to live in harmony here below as you prepare to live in heaven.

Reality #1: Grace

This reality includes first receiving God’s grace, and then living in light of this grace. Romans 12 repeats this idea that all we are is because of the grace of God, and it is worth repeating a lot in our own lives!

This entire devotional is based on the premise that the healthy Christian always lives in view of the gospel, in the context of grace, as one loved who loves (Ephesians 5:1–2). If we experience grace so richly that we offer it rightly to those in the family of God, we will discover a unity even in the midst of people who are not yet perfect. The depth at which you have received God’s grace will directly impact the delight you have in offering others this grace! If you find yourself at the center of division, there is a very good chance you need to go back to the gospel and stay there a while. In fact, as one who has received the wrath of people who claim to know God, don’t live there! Live in view of the cross.

Reality #2: Glory

The goal of one who has been bought with a price, who has been deeply impacted by God’s grace is to glorify God in all they say and do. This becomes a passionate pursuit, and the first question when life or others around us throw us a curve is: “How do I glorify God in this situation?” 1 Corinthians 10:31 is a command to look for ways in our lives when we are pressed to display the beauty of the gospel and the greatness of God. We are to live in unity with other believers. Even stronger, in reality we *are* unified with other believers. To accomplish this practical unity on earth, we must be those who have been impacted by grace deeply, and live for the glory of God in our lives widely (impacting everything we say and do). More to come, but before we go there:

- How do you find your response to people who are “difficult”?
- Can you see in your own life and responses to difficulties a passion to bring glory to God?
- What are some practical ways you can keep the gospel in view in your own life so that this reality of God’s grace changes your everyday life from moment to moment (see Appendix 2 for how I seek to do this).
- Take the time now to write God a note, expressing your gratitude to Him for making you a trophy of grace (Ephesians 2:7).

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 14

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: 7 REALITIES THAT PRODUCE UNITY (PT. 2)

Read Romans 12:1–10, Philippians 2:1–11 and Romans 15:5–6

One of my favourite sermon illustrations is about a lady who is at the airport, waiting for her flight. Picture her settling into her chair, pulling out her book and snack (cookies) and preparing to settle in for her long wait. As she reads, she hears a rustling beside her, and looks down and to her horror sees a nicely dressed man reaching into her cookies and taking one and eating it. Choosing not to make a scene, she decides that perhaps he is just rude, and so she reaches down and takes two. A few minutes later, that rustling sound pulls her eyes out of her book, and to the bag of cookies and sure enough, the man is taking her cookies again, and there are only a few left. She immediately reaches down and takes two more, leaving only one for later on the plane, which should be enough if the flight is smooth, but sure enough, she is rudely interrupted by the paper rustling and the last cookie being taken. To add insult to injury the man broke the last cookie in half and pushed it her way. Thankfully before she could respond to this rudeness, her flight was boarding, so she gave the man a dirty look, ate the half a cookie and boarded the plane, frustrated with the insolence of the man beside her. Relieved to be on the plane, and settling in, she reached into her purse, and to her shock her ears pick up the rustle of a bag of cookies, and her mind the horror that she had stolen from the man, not the other way around. I love this because it displays with emotion the reality that most people like to blame others when in reality if they would own the problem and the process for unity, the world would be a better place. If every person chooses God's way to unity, we will discover an ever-growing oneness and be an answer to Jesus' prayer in John 17.

Review: Grace; Glory

Reality #3: Growing

There are two helpful steps in this reality, the realization that we have not arrived (1 John 1:8–9), and the passion to grow in our own relationship with God so that we are conforming ourselves to the image of Jesus (Galatians 4:19). Realizing we have not arrived allows us to approach one another in humility, and with an openness to being wrong, and even being wronged. For me, I don't get angry at bad drivers, because, perhaps, I have done the very thing that is being done

in front of me. That is the idea here, we realize our own faults and it makes us more capable of being “long-suffering” with others. Realizing we need to grow should also cause us to build in disciplines so that we are always changing (conforming to Christ) in the ways His Word demands. This is the understanding and pursuit of basic discipleship: Having the disciplines of growth in place so that the people of God are growing in their knowledge of who He is, what His Word teaches, and applying that to their lives. If every Christian is growing towards Jesus, we will be growing towards one another, and if I (you) own this, then we will be getting more and more unified with saints we know.

Reality #4: Glowing

This is a “G” word I chose for being on mission for God, or living out the great commission. Not only are we to be disciples being taught to obey God’s Word (Matthew 28:18–20), we are to be on mission for Him, sharing the gospel with others (Acts 1:8). If our passion is to display the gospel with our lives and our lips we will find a unity with others seeking to do the same thing. In this reality, we will find ourselves working together to accomplish the task of evangelism, and in this working together in a powerful and beautiful unity. If you are concerned about others knowing Jesus (Romans 10:1), you will be significantly less selfish, and significantly more unified with others on this same mission.

There is more to come, but perhaps this is a good place to stop and look at as we feel rustling in our purse, to take a moment for some appropriate navel gazing.

- Do you see yourself as someone who needs to be continually growing? Are you a humble person? Why or why not?
- How can you grow in this?
- Are you growing in your walk with God? How?
- What are some S.M.A.R.T. goals you can set to make sure that you are taking steps towards Jesus in your own life so that you can be more unified with others who are doing the same?
- Who are three people you are praying for, to have an opportunity to share the gospel with?
- Write out a prayer for these people, and in this prayer as you close it, offer yourself to God to be His instrument in glowing for Him.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 15

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: 7 REALITIES THAT PRODUCE UNITY (PT. 3)

Read Romans 12:1–10 and Ephesians 4:11–16

A famous president once said: “Ask not what your church can do for you, but what you can do for your church”, or something like that. We live in a consumer dominated culture, and often the first and only question we ask when looking to join a church, or feeling blessed or frustrated with a church is, what are you doing for me and mine? I do think this is an important question, and there are things that a local church must do for God’s people who make her up, but the question that must be a part of our renewed minds is, where does God want me to serve. In fact until “each part” is asking this question the church will struggle doctrinally and missionally. So as we have said, it must begin with each of us asking the right questions, and if we are those who want to be a part of a unified church, it begins with me (the reader and the writer). Where has Romans 12 taken us so far in terms of this God centred, self-criticizing pursuit of unity?

Review of the Romans 12 Realities: Grace, Glory, Growing, Glowing

Now your active role in accomplishing this is using your gifts to serve the body of Christ. Much has rightly been written on this, and true life in the Spirit will always include this, but for us in this devotional, we will keep it limited to two days of seeking to understand and serve.

Reality #5: Gifts

There is much confusion when it comes to spiritual gifts, so we will focus together on the mind today, and tomorrow the feet, or choosing to serve. We will do it in a question and answer format, and seek in be informed.

What is a spiritual gift? A spiritual gift is an ability to do something that is given as the Holy Spirit chooses, to build the church. There are lists of spiritual gifts in the Bible (1 Corinthians 12–14, Romans 12, Ephesians 4), but they are not exhaustive and are given to help us identify our own gifts and to seek to work together as we find unity in diversity.

Who has spiritual gifts? Every believer. If you are an authentic disciple you have been baptized into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13), and this relational reality comes with spiritual gifts to be a part of that body, and build it. If you are a Christian, you have a spiritual gift that is unique and must be used for the church to be healthy.

Are they all the same? No. In fact, the reality that unity does not mean uniformity is essential for us to grasp. Each person in the body will bring something to that body that, when functioning together, as each part does its work, builds the body to maturity and doctrinal stability. The Holy Spirit distributes the gifts of the Spirit as He freely decides, and the people of God must then choose to use these gifts to build up the church. If you don't have a specific gift, trust God, and rejoice that He has made you for a purpose.

Why do we have spiritual gifts? I suppose we already answered this, but for a quick answer, to build up the body of Christ. If you have other questions, make sure to ask them, because if you are an authentic follower of Jesus your understanding and use of spiritual gifts is key to your own health, and the health of the church you attend.

- What do you think your spiritual gift is?
- Where have you served the church before?
- How can you be sure that your heart for God includes a delight in serving His bride?
- If you belong to Jesus, make a commitment in the coming days to know your gift and to use it to build the body, and see God glorified because you are doing what He has created for you to do.
- Ephesians 4:11–16

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 16

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: 7 REALITIES THAT PRODUCE UNITY (PT. 4)

Read Romans 12:1–10 and 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

I am not an Alfred Hitchcock fan. In fact, given a mystery novel, I almost always read the back of the book first so that when things become intense, I know it will all work out anyway. Maybe that is why I loved Louis Lamour books, as they all end the same way so I didn't have to do that. But we digress, there is one Alfred Hitchcock story I remember from my childhood (didn't have a TV so not sure where I watched it) where a starving man was put in a room filled with steak, *but* one had been poisoned in such a way that he would die in a very painful way if he ate it. So even though he was dying of starvation, he was unable to eat for fear of getting the wrong steak, and in the end, died of starvation, surrounded by steak. Yuck, not a great way to start an encouraging devotional, and yet in the bride of Jesus I wonder how many well-intentioned Christians are so busy hesitating in the use of their spiritual gifts because they fear getting it wrong, so many are hurting, and are starved as the church remains anemic, and independent.

Before we go any further, do you know your spiritual gift? Are you using it right now in community to build up the local church that you attend? What is holding you back?

Stop. Read those questions again and actually give it some thought.

Well, I hear two main reasons why those who are mature enough to know they have a spiritual gift and should be using it, don't. They don't know their spiritual gift, and they don't know where to engage. So if you are one who is sitting in a room full of steaks, and unsure which one you can't eat (metaphorically speaking), today is the day you will identify the one you should, and start eating. We will review the 7 realities tomorrow.

Today, let us keep going on reality #5: **Gifts**

How can I know my spiritual gift?

This needs a lot more writing, but for now, here are some steps you can take to know your spiritual gift:

- Pray. Ask God.
- Study spiritual gift passages in the Bible prayerfully, and seek the Spirit's illumination and understanding of what is being taught.
- Seek wise counsel. Ask those who are in leadership in the church and those you trust.
- Find a need and choose to serve.
- Ask yourself some questions:
 - What do I love doing?
 - What do I do well?
 - Where have others affirmed me in my service of the church?
 - Where is there a need in the family I am a part of?
 - What parts of my story that God is sovereign over have prepared me to serve His family for His glory?

Where should I serve?

Two answers to this: where you see a need, and where you want to (if you're a Romans 12:1–2 person). Being a servant does not mean you always get to do what you want, but it does mean you get to do what is needed. Ask, and then be all in where God has placed you. Remember greatness in the Kingdom comes from being a servant, or stronger, a slave of all, so get serving where there is a need, and let God use you, shape you, and move you to where your spiritual gift will yield maximum impact for God's people. If you are all in, He will give you the desires of your heart!

Is there a time I should not serve? Yes:

- If you don't know Jesus, you do not have a spiritual gift, and therefore, get to know Him first.
- If you are struggling in sin, and are unwilling to repent, or trapped and feel unable to find victory, focus your attention on that. (Check with an elder on this one, as some have too hard a conscience and others too soft.)
- If you are in a deep valley. This is not a request for you not to serve, but permission. If you have just lost a loved one, suffered abuse, or some other tragedy, it is sometimes okay for a short while to step back, receive, and get healthy.

If you don't meet any of those three, get off the pew and into the game and serve! One of the most important ways that Christians will find unity in local churches and with other believers is by choosing to use their gifts to build the body of Christ. If you have seen the poison of thinking you don't matter, or focusing on yourself and your flesh, remove it with God's Word in God's power and start serving.

- Where do you see a need in your local church?
- What do you think your spiritual gift is?
- Set three S.M.A.R.T. goals for yourself to meet in terms of seeking to be someone who chooses to serve in the local church more effectively.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 17

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: 7 REALITIES THAT PRODUCE UNITY (PT. 5)

*Read Romans 12:1–10, 1 Corinthians 12:12–31, 1 Corinthians 13,
Ephesians 5:1–2 and 1 Peter 4:8*

It is not easy to get along with others, unless they are exactly like me, and last time I checked I don't even like myself. Well, this may be a poor way of putting it, but the reality of Christians in the real world not only disliking one another but hurting one another can be stopped if Romans 12 is followed!

If each of us will live in the realities that this great chapter gives us in terms of living together, we will find ourselves pulling in the same direction with a love for one another that is beyond human comprehension.

Review: Grace, Glory, Growing, Glowing, Gifts

Now for perhaps the most important and difficult one. We are called to compete against one another, and that would seem strange in the context of the unity and love we are trying for until we grasp what we are competing about. You have already read Romans 12:10, but in the space provided here, **write it out:**

It is interesting to note that each time there is an extensive list of spiritual gifts, there is also a call to love, or in the case of Romans 12:10, to honor.

Reality #6: Goal

Our goal is to win! This is something those who have played sports understand well; however, the game here is to out honour one another. Every morning, you should get up and realize that you are called to competition, and if you compete well you will glorify God and build an atmosphere of love in your local church. To honour someone means to place them ahead of yourself, to give

them deference, to value them. We are to put others ahead of ourselves, and to seek to beat them at the game (okay, a lot more than a game) of seeking to honour them. Our *goal* is to out honour fellow believers. To show them with our self-sacrificial love that they are valuable to God and to us. Warren Wiersbe writes: “Spiritual gifts, no matter how exciting and wonderful, are useless and even destructive if they are not ministered in love.

I once ministered with two men who had opposite attitudes toward their gifts: the one man constantly belittled his gifts and would not use them, and the other man constantly boasted about gifts that he did not possess. Actually, both of them were guilty of pride, because both of them refused to acknowledge God’s grace and let Him have the glory. Moses made a similar mistake when God called him (Ex. 4:1–13). When the individual believers in a church know their gifts, accept them by faith, and use them for God’s glory, then God can bless in a wonderful way.”

And, when we as followers of Jesus, enter this competition to out honour one another, there will never be a person in the body of Christ that doesn’t feel loved. I know your church is a long way from that, but you are the tool He has chosen to take the next step in getting there!

- What are some ways you can win in this out honouring one another competition?
- How can you remind yourself to choose to be competitive in this?
- Why do you think so many of us don’t enter this competition, or lose at it?
- What are six ways that you are going to out honour people next Sunday, as you gather in church?

Some of you will be concerned that we missed verse 9, but really, we didn’t—we will come back to it in a few days!

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 18

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: 7 REALITIES THAT PRODUCE UNITY (PT. 6)

*Read Romans 12:1–10, 2 Corinthians 10:1–5,
1 Corinthians 2:14–16, and Philippians 2:1–11*

We have now covered seven realities that, if known and trusted, will produce a unity in the family of God. If we have been applying what we are learning, then we can change our starting point and now say: “To dwell above with saints we love, oh, that will be glory, and to dwell below with saints we know, well, that’s a glorious story.” Remember it begins with me (you) and if we each take responsibility for ourselves what will be produced will be amazing, and in the unity we have an answer to Jesus’ prayer, and an overflow of life in the Spirit.

Review: Grace, Glory, Growing, Glowing, Gifts, Goal.

See if you can define each of these in your own words, as a reflection of your desire to be the one who is pursuing this with God’s people. How many of you wondered if we had a seventh, after talking about it so much, and listing only six. You are sharp! The seventh, is perhaps the most important, and really a reflection back to Romans 12:1–2, and it is back to making sure our worldview is from God’s Word, not the world.

Reality #7: God’s Word

A.W. Tozer helpfully pictures it like this: “Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become ‘unity’ conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”

If you want unity, then the best way to get it is to join together around one common theme. Lori and I have only been to one basketball game together, and we are not huge basketball fans. We were in the nose bleed section, and the game was not all that thrilling until, with around 1 second left, down by 1 point, the Orlando Magic inbounded to a high leaping Dwight Howard, who

seemed to float for minutes catching the ball and slamming it in as the buzzer sounded. The stadium erupted and we were a part of a screaming, hugging, high fiving crowd caught up in the joy of victory and passion of a beautiful play. The couple sitting next to us who seemed to be on a very awkward first date were all of the sudden hugging and overwhelmed with joy. The moral of that story is not to take a girl on your first date to a sporting event (although probably an amazing idea), but rather what unites is a mind focused on one goal. We get this by having the mind of Christ, or Romans 8, the mindset of the Spirit, or Romans 12:2 the transformed mind.

So if you want unity with other Christians it is absolutely essential that you are filling your mind with the Word of God, and walking in the Spirit of God. This unity with God demands and acquires unity with other followers of God. The closer we are to God, the closer we will be to one another. Way too often, division and destruction among Christians comes because we do not focus on Jesus, but let the flesh rule. If you struggle with unity, one of the greatest things you can do is to draw near to Christ, and to become saturated in His Word. If you do, those around you who have this same humility and passion will find themselves a part of a unified family with you.

- What does it mean to have the mind of Christ?
- How can you get this mind?
- How do you find others who are as committed to Jesus in humility as you?
- Today, review the 7 Realities that mark those who are unified, and in your heart and mind how you will seek to make these realities a part of your life.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 19

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: A LIFE OF LOVE

Read Romans 12:1–10, Ephesians 5:1–2, and John 13:34–35

Love one another. What does that even mean, and why is it important, and how do I live it out in the real world? Christianity is always to be lived out in community, and in living that out, to display the love that God has for us in our love for one another. It is impossible to be a healthy Christian and not be committed to the gathering of other Christians. If you are not committed to loving, giving and serving in a local church, you are either in a short transitional time, or being disobedient.

Stop. Read that last paragraph again, and remember what you read from Ephesians 5:1–2.

One of the most important ways that we conform to the image of Christ is through living a life of love as we follow the model of Jesus. This is not easy, and the more we experience God's love for us in Jesus the more this is a difficult task. If we are to love like we are loved, what does this mean?

It is God-centred. This means that we are to love in the way that He describes and defines it. You can see this modeled in Jesus, mandated in 1 Peter 4:8, and messaged in 1 Corinthians 13, but the bottom line is God is the one to whom we turn and from whom we learn. He is the one who describes love!

It is self-sacrificial. This means that it notices God's best and pursues it for other people even if there is a great cost in that pursuit. Love means seeing life from God's perspective and pursuing it for other people. Self-love is assumed in the Bible, and really is a focus on self, even if that is hating self, Biblical love is from God, and focused on others' best as God defines it.

It is not conditioned on the worth of others. The way the world loves is based on how we are treated or what the other person's value is to us. This is not how God chooses to give to us. His love comes to us while we were still sinners, and this is the kind of love we are commanded to give.

Knowing it is self-sacrificial, and not only to those who have something to give us, it will be impossible and exhausting to try unless it comes from God's work in us. It is based on God's love for us. This is the key to authentic community. To experience God's love and overflow that to others, which marks every true follower of Jesus (John 13:34–35, 1 Peter 4:8). It is essential to pursue through prayer and perseverance a deep experience of Jesus' love! (Ephesians 3:14–21).

We have now gone full circle. The Christian loves because we are loved. This gives the energy and the conviction, and allows to choose to love even their enemies. It is loving because the gospel is in view, or when love is a struggle, keeping the gospel in view. We are called to be a healthy part of the church, and in Christ to live a life of love—because of the gospel, in light of the gospel, and following the model of the One who has given us the gospel.

Sister, love! Brother, love! Be an imitator of God, and live a life of love!

- Why do you think it is so hard to love God's way?
- Who do you find difficult to love?
- Are you committed to your local church with your time, treasures, talents, and so display your love?
- Write a letter to God that keeps the gospel in view, and asks God for help in living a life of love. Express to Him what you think that means in a S.M.A.R.T. way.
- Memorize Ephesians 5:1–2

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 20

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: ABHOR WHAT IS EVIL

Read Romans 12:9–13 and Proverbs 6

One of the ways that love is proven to be genuine is hate. This is something that is not tolerated in our current cultural setting, and something that we must discover afresh if we are to have a genuine love as God defines it.

We live in a world that calls evil good, and good evil. This is not new (Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Isaiah 5:20), and is one of the ways that the demonic realm worms its way into the church and the lives of followers of Jesus. We tolerate, we excuse, and eventually we not only accept, we approve. To move in a genuine love (Biblical) path means not only fighting against our friendship with the world (James 4:4), but also fighting for a love for God that dominates and defines us. To love God is to hate evil. We learn to love what He loves and hate what He hates, and to do it in His way. Evil is not subjective, it is as God defines it. Evil hurts people and dishonours God, so to be tolerant of it is not in line with genuine love.

So practically, what does this mean, and how do I get it? It means that we learn to think with the mind of Jesus, and therefore the things that offend Him offend us. We learn to hate what He hates! How does this look practically? We learn what God hates from His Word, and we value Him so much that in genuine love, we hate evil. There are many places we could turn to for an answer, but perhaps the best is where God lays it out for us—in Proverbs 6:

¹⁶ There are six things that the LORD hates,
seven that are an abomination to him:

¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,

¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that make haste to run to evil,

¹⁹ a false witness who breathes out lies,
and one who sows discord among brothers.

How do we gain this kind of genuine love? Or perhaps better, ensure that we have it? We have a *category* for evil. We let God *call* the shots for what is evil and what is not, not the culture. We *cultivate* a love for God that is so strong that we love what He loves and hate what he hates (Psalm 139:21–22; Revelation 2:6). We become *gospel-centred* so that our lives are lived as an overflow of our relationship with Jesus, and inviting others to know Him.

What you love is often seen most clearly in what you hate. Make sure your love is genuine, and *abhor* what is evil!

- What do you hate?
- Why?
- How can you grow to hate what God hates?
- In your own words reflect on the seven things that God hates from Proverbs 6, and where you see them in your world.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 21

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: BOILING FOR CHRIST

Read Romans 12:1–14, Philippians 1:21 and 1 Corinthians 15:58

What does it mean to boil for Christ (a title I borrowed from a John Piper sermon on this text)? It means that not only are we called to action, we are called to feel. Don't *Just Do It*, feel it! A new Nike slogan!

Romans 12:11 is a command, not to be slothful in our zeal, but to be fervent in spirit. It is a command to boil! To be alive and vibrant, engaged and energetic, excited and eager to live our lives on mission for Jesus! It is not only emotional, it commands emotion! Now for a Mennonite boy (my denominational origin), this passage makes no sense, at least outside of the Flames winning the Stanley cup in 1989. But it is a call which the Bible takes seriously. God wants us to be emotionally on fire and to avoid apathy or slothfulness when it comes to serving Him. We are to choose obedience, and a part of that obedience is a passion, a zeal for God and the works He has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10)! God wants our wills, and He commands our hearts to feel certain things, in this case, a fervency of spirit, a passion of heart, a boiling of the desires.

I love how Jonathan Edwards understood this: "Resolved: to live with all my might, while I live." Following Jesus is an all-in, all the time passionate pursuit that impacts not only what we do but also how we feel! I long for this—to be a Psalm 63 passionate pursuer! It matters how you feel. So this command is twofold, stop being slothful in your zeal, in your passionate pursuit of Jesus. Stop being apathetic towards serving Jesus! Piper, who has taught me more about this than any other author, sums it up by saying: "Over and over the Bible says: intensity matters. Zeal matters. Wholeheartedness matters. Don't settle for anything less. We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God. You can't spread what you don't have. Ask God for it in constant prayer and ransack the Word of God for wonders that make you boil for Christ. That's the intensity part of verse 11."

A friend of mine, who writes books, commented to me the other day: "We must learn to emotionally work through our doctrine". He is a Presbyterian, to a Baptist, and now to all followers of God. This is the command of Romans 12:11.

So how do I obey this command?

- Perceive It Matters: We have spent the devotional on this, but there are many other passages that back this command up. Be *all-in* with passion!
 - Pursue It: Jeremiah 29:13; Deuteronomy 4:29. Remember this is a seeking of God with all of our hearts, and that includes our passion. To live is Christ, to die is gain!
 - How? Meditate on the gospel, and if that leaves you unimpacted you don't understand it, nor have you experienced it, so keep doing it!
 - Pray for a passion: Confess your slothfulness, and cry out to God for this passion!
 - Practice Service: More on this tomorrow, as that is where this verse takes us. Serve the Lord, whether you feel like it or not, serve. But, in the context, pursue *both*! Don't just do it, feel it!
-
- How is your "fervent in spirit" thermometer?
 - What can you do to grow in passion for serving God?
 - Reflect on the gospel, and in that reflection let it impact not only the facts of what God has done for you, but the feelings...
 - Write a note to God expressing your thanksgiving, and overflowing in your feelings towards God, longing for this fervency of spirit.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 22

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: SERVE THE LORD

Read Romans 12:1–14, Luke 22:24–27 and John 13

It has been said that the Canadian church is a lot like a CFL football game—10,000 fans watching and cheering while 24 players work hard and play the game. Okay, I know that there are more than 24 players, and as long as you are not in Toronto, more than 10,000 fans. However, the point is that God has called us all to serve and not just spectate.

In our chapter in Romans, the call is simple and clear: serve the Lord (verse 11). The passage has covered this already in terms of using your spiritual gifts to build the church, however the Holy Spirit will not let this idea of serving God go without another mention. Often people with passion use it in singing, or fighting, and although we should always be singing, and fighting is sometimes needed, the goal of the fervent in spirit command in our text is serving the Lord. The title used for Jesus here is not an accident, in fact, it is a name that reminds us of His absolute right to command us. He is Lord. In this case the call to serve Him is both a privilege and a passionate pursuit.

He has chosen to work through His people, and thus all who know Him are called to serve. He does not need to (Acts 17:25), nor have to (Psalm 115:3), but He does. So we are *needed* in the sense that God has chosen to work His will through His people for His glory (Ephesians 2:10). So how should we respond?

S: Serve. Choose to be a person who obeys this command: serve the Lord.

E: Eager. Be eager to do good works (Titus 2:14)

R: Ready. God has prepared good works for you to do. Be ready, look for them (Ephesians 2:10).

V: Value: God has chosen you to be a part of His impact on the world. Your living on mission for His glory matters, for you are His choice to change eternity.

E: Exclusivity: You matter as an individual, and your response to life matters. God has chosen you as a unique and valuable member of His family to do works He has prepared in advance for you to do.

So, S.E.R.V.E!

- Why do you think people struggle with an entitlement mentality?
- Where has God placed you so that you can serve Him?
- What steps can you take to know your identity, and in this choose to serve Him?
- Why is being a servant so important to Jesus and His followers?
- Using your name, write an acrostic that expresses who you are to Jesus, and how you can serve Him.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 23

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: REJOICE IN HOPE

Read Romans 12:1–12 and Romans 5:1–11

Life is sometimes painful. I suppose we could occasionally argue more painful than not. The Bible is clear that we live in a broken world, and in this broken world, how we care for one another matters. We are to be people who rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep, who truly feel with one another in community.

The problem is how do we not only survive in our own troubles, but thrive enough that we can minister to others? I want someone to rejoice with me, and if it ever happens, to weep with me. But I am too tired to do those things with others (for those who are offended that I don't weep often—I have once in a while. Please get the point and don't get angry).

Romans 12:12 calls us to rejoice in hope. What does this even mean? It means that the root of our joy is hope, and this hope is in an absolutely secure future. We are those who are secure in our salvation, and our Savior. This means that our focus is on Jesus, and our hope is found in His power, and procurement of our future.

- What is coming is better by far (2 Corinthians 4:16–18)
- What is coming is sure (Romans 5:1–2)
- What happens to us now is preparing us for what is coming (James 1:1–5)

As those who first received the letter to the Romans, and those who read it now know, following Jesus is not easy (2 Timothy 3:12), and in fact will include all sorts of trials and tribulations. But in this life we can have joy in our hope during trials. Practically this means that those who know Jesus can trust Him enough that they can experience an inexpressible and glorious joy at all times (1 Peter 1:8), and that this expression of rejoicing displays the hope that only those who authentically know Jesus can have. If we can learn to treasure our relationship with Jesus (keep the gospel in view), then our present sufferings become an opportunity for rejoicing in our future hope.

In the community of faith to which you are committed, people are going through trials and tribulations. Unless you are rejoicing in hope, you will not be able to weep with the weeping, or rejoice with the rejoicing because you will be so caught up in your own needs and feelings.

In view of the gospel, rooted in hope, we can find joy always and overflowing can offer that hope and display that power of joy to others. To truly be healthy, and to truly be one who helps others, it is essential that we find our joy in hope.

- Why do you think many struggle with rejoicing when life is difficult?
- How can you learn to live in hope?
- Write out 2 Corinthians 4:16–18, and then compare your life to Paul's in a note to God.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 24

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: BE PATIENT IN TRIBULATION

Read Romans 12:12, James 1 and Romans 5:1–11

Tribulation is not very fun! In fact, the pain we go through can be overwhelming. A number of years ago I was in pain. In fact, it was so intense that I would literally groan my way through the hour, on the hour, take a Tylenol 3 (which was painful in itself), experience some relief and then repeat. Perhaps this was the worst pain any human has ever gone through, although once we finally sorted it out, the hospital had the audacity to write sore throat on my hospital bed notes, though it was almost unbearable. I can remember wanting to die, or anything else that would give me some relief from the pain I endured.

It is interesting that the Bible often uses words that allow us to individualize our pain and understand what our expected/commanded response is to be. In Romans 12, the word for tribulation is a word that can mean to be crushed, pressed, squeezed, stressed, burdened, troubled. That sounds a lot like my sore throat, or perhaps many things you have gone through (although you couldn't even begin to understand my pain!).

The Christian life is full of tribulations. So how are we to respond to them? Romans 12:12 says with patience. Clearly Paul has never had a sore throat that came close to my pain. In fact, how could he really understand me and my tribulations? Well of course you know that his life was significantly more filled with tribulations than mine (or yours), so what is this seasoned veteran of the Christian life trying to teach us? He is saying, hold firm in your walk with Jesus. We will deal with the trust that this demands later, but for today, keep living for Jesus even when the tribulations feel overwhelming and the sore throat unbearable. Be patient—the short-term pain will be overwhelmed by the long-term gain. Be patient, stand firm, let nothing move you from always giving yourself fully to the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

If you are not currently facing this kind of pressure, you will be shortly, so what are some things you can put in place to make sure that you can be patient?

- Build your house on the rock, hear and obey God's Word when the trials are not there, and when they are (Matthew 7:21–27).
- Live in community, so that you can be encouraged, and all the more as the return of Jesus approaches (Hebrews 3:12–14; 10:24–25), avoiding sin and devastation.
- Understand that trials are in place to produce perseverance, and perseverance to produce conformity to Jesus (James 1:2–4).
- Live in view of the gospel (Romans 12:1–2).
- Live conscious of the presence of God in your life (Psalm 16:8).
- Pray constantly. More on this tomorrow (James 1:5).

If you have a sore throat, or something far worse (if that is possible), then rejoice and be patient. Know that in the short time we have on earth, anything we are called to go through is worth it, if it is a part of God's plan, glorifies God and conforms us to His image.

- How are you at being patient in tribulation?
- What do you think this looks like in your own life?
- How can you obey this command in your life right now?
- Look over the steps and write one S.M.A.R.T. goal for each, so that your house can stand firm when the trials come.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 25

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: BE CONSTANT IN PRAYER

Read Romans 12:1–14, James 1:1–5; 5:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17–18

If God is Sovereign, and has planned our sufferings for His glory and our good, why bother praying? A pastor friend answered: “Because God needs us to pray so that He can move.” No, no! God is a *lot* bigger than us, and our prayers. He can move before, during or after our requests, or lack thereof! Maybe a better question is why do we struggle with so much prayerlessness? Well, let us answer both:

Why Pray?

1. It is commanded: this is tied to the relational reason, which will be the last reason to pray, but for now, we realize that we are servants, He is our Master, and He commands us to be constantly in prayer. Therefore, seek to live life in His presence, in communion with Him. Seek also to take longer extended periods of time, as our Master did, to seek His face in prayer. We are commanded to pray.
2. It is God’s chosen way to work in and through us. Prayer is one of His chosen instruments to accomplish His Sovereign predetermined plan. In other words He has chosen to include us in the work He does on earth, and one of the key ways that we do that is to pray! In fact I believe that if we could but grasp the power of prayer, we would be a people who would only reluctantly be drawn away from prayer.
3. It is powerful: yes, that is the same as the last reason, but I pull it out to remind us that, when we pray, we actually are an instrument that moves the hand of God, or through Him, mountains. Really. No, Really! Normal men like Elijah are used to change weather patterns, and we are called to be a part of changing lives and eternity through our prayers. In fact in heaven we will discover that mountains were moved when faithful men and women prayed!
4. He wants to be asked: yes we are commanded, yes this is relational, but more... He desires to be asked. James says so clearly: “you do not have because...”. He desires His people to be dependent, and we display that most richly when we

pray constantly. When we don't ask Him first, He is offended, when we don't pray constantly we are disobedient—this is like breathing for the authentic Christian.

5. We need it: that is the point of James 1, we need wisdom so that we can live our lives for God's glory together; so that we can survive as Christians; so that we can help others around the world; so that we can know God better. We need it!

So, is it any wonder that one of the most important things in the Christians life is also one of the ones we most lack due to battles with the flesh, the world, and the demonic realm? So pray constantly.

Why do we struggle so much with prayerlessness? Because we don't believe we need to pray. So look back over those last five reasons for praying, and in a passionate relationship with the living God, choose to become a man or a woman who prays more!

- How is your prayer life?
- Why do you think you should change that?
- Set some S.M.A.R.T. goals below to pray more and review them weekly.
Seek to obey, know, and be used by the God of the Bible.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 26

LIVING IN VIEW OF THE GOSPEL: BE HOSPITABLE

Read Romans 12:1–13, Hebrews 13:2 and 1 Peter 4:19

How many of you have been out at a restaurant and seen a table filled with people on their cell phones? How many of you have been those people? We live in a connected/disconnected society. Access to Instagram instantaneously and surface relationships are found in abundance, but connection, love, and hospitality have almost disappeared. We are connected and lonely. Surface and sad.

What is hospitality?

Literally the word means to love strangers or “a lover of strangers”, but in the context and way the Biblical word concept is used, it could be defined as: “the quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests in a warm, friendly, generous way” (<https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-hospitality.html>).

It means that we are commanded to have an open life with other people. When we were in Houston, this was easy (Houston is a small town in Northern BC, not to be confused with a small town in Texas). When we bought our home, the previous owners had to get keys made as they had lost their own, and we quickly lost ours. We didn’t lock our home because it would keep neighbours out who might need something from our cupboard. Our insurance declared that we were not covered if our home was unlocked, so we hired a locksmith but quickly we lost our keys again, and when we finally left this precious church and home, we had to get another set of keys made. One day, Lori got up and a friend was in our kitchen making coffee. The joys and curses of a small town. We were into people’s homes at least twice a week, and invited back into our home at least once, and when we engaged with the Dutch community (I helped shepherd a CRC church when she didn’t have a pastor) we had more invites than nights. Then we moved to Cloverdale, and we discovered we are not in Houston any more. We are invited into people’s homes, but it is very rare, and although children from all sorts of the world make nests in our home, we rarely have adults over.

Yes, there is a culturally a difference between Houston and Cloverdale, Jerusalem and Rome, but there is not a difference in the command to be hospitable. So how do we obey this command where we are, not where we think it might be easier?

1. Be aware: that we are called to be hospitable, and although this does not mean the opening up of our homes necessarily. It does mean the opening up of our lives to strangers and to church family. It means engaging in the lives of other people and living life together.

2. Be open: God wants us to not only live together in community, but also to engage those on the outskirts of our community. Not only are we called to get along with fellow Canuck fans, but even to pursue Oilers fans (for you non-sports people, Samaritans). This is an openness to be used by God to be a blessing to people.

3. Be intentional: choose to make the decision to look for people to love. Come to church and be in time to take part in community, look out for someone to share a coffee or lunch with, set apart time to be hospitable.

4. Be invitational: I think this might include your home, but I know it includes your life. Invite people into your journey, and care about theirs. Where you see a need step out and meet it. Where you see someone on the outskirts, bring them into the family. Invite people to get to know you, and take the time to get to know them.

You might be glad that so far you are off the hook for opening your home, but please hear the text, you are not off the hook for a pursuit of this love of strangers, sharing of life, joining in service.

- What does it mean for you to be hospitable in your life?
- What are you going to do this week to choose hospitality?
- Who does God want you to reach out to right now, and love in this way?
- Do you think you have ever entertained an angel? Have you been hospitable enough that it is a possibility?
- Read Matthew 25:34–36 and put it in your own words in terms of how you are going to love Christ by being hospitable.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 27

LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL: PURSUE PEACE

Read Romans 12:1–16 and Philippians 2:1–11

What does it mean to be humble? For some it means that we take the time to put ourselves down and build others up. This is not biblical humility. For others it means hating ourselves—a worm-eating pursuit—knowing we are nothing, and living that out in real life. This is not Biblical humility. So what does it mean to be humble? I love C.S. Lewis’s definition: “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less”. The pathway to humility is to truly delight in the gospel, and in the brightness of the Son, have everything else seen clearly. Humility may be the most important attribute of a follower of Jesus (Matthew 5:3), and the characteristic that is foundational for love and life.

Why?

- Because it is the beginning and staying place to receive the richness and reality of the gospel.
- Because it is the fountain of unity.
- Because it is commanded by God.
- Because the humble love better than the haughty.

Do not be haughty!

So how do we pursue humility God’s way, and avoid the devastation of pursuing humility the world’s way?

1. See God. A proper view of self always comes from a Biblical view of God. Certainly, this is what Job discovered (Job 42:1–6), and what Isaiah 6 displays. It may not mean something that drastic, but when a person has a Biblical view of God, humility is an obvious and natural overflow of that.

2. See the gospel. All of these devotionals have sought to place the worldview of the reader in the context of the gospel with Romans 12, so it would be obvious in one sense, but if one does not grasp the gospel, and remain gripped by it, the humility from seeing God can quickly move to destruction. We have covered this already and will end in the beauty of what this means. But a humble

person lives in the shadow of the cross, or as we have repeatedly stated, in the view of the gospel.

3. Choose humility. The Bible is full of repeated commands, like this one in Romans to not be haughty, or to humble ourselves. So, we should make this choice to live for God, and in love for others and receive from God the power to place others ahead of ourselves, or to Romans 12:10 them.

4. Hate Haughtiness. Pride is one of the most destructive forces in the universe. We must learn to recognize it in ourselves and hate it. It is not just a pride of thinking we are better, but it is a focus on self that is unhealthy.

5. Love the lowly. Not much to add to this, other than to say if you find yourself always with people who give to you, or can repay you, you have a pride issue. One of the best ways that we can display God's grace is to associate with the lowly.

So, choose God's way, and think less about yourself, and more about God and others.

- Why do you think seeing the majestic greatness of God is so important to developing Biblical humility?
- How are you doing in this central attribute?
- Why do you think it is so difficult in our world to truly be humble?
- How do humility and unity go hand in hand? Where have you seen this in a healthy way? Unhealthy way?
- What are steps you can take to build humility into your life?

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 28

LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL: TRUST GOD

Read Romans 12:1–21

Bruce Waltke once shared with a class I was in that a good definition for evil from the Old Testament is doing things that hurt your community. He meant by this, things that serve self. In that service of self is thoughtlessness to what happens around you: butting into line, littering, choosing good for self over what is good for the people around you. My own definition would be much wider than this, but given the scholastic quality of Bruce, and his influence on my life, it has helped me to realize the importance of how we respond to others.

Biblical humility leads to a care for others, and it also can set the humble person up to be hurt and/or taken advantage of. We live in an individualistic society that tends to drive into the garage, and function in a way that avoids community and serves self. The world we live in does not create a healthy environment for humble community. Rambo is our idea of the ideal man, and humility is seen in the bumbling foolishness of a Ray Romano.

The New Testament gives us some very difficult commands, and they often are given in the context of community. In fact the Christian life is a communal life, and humility and selfless love are key to a successful community. Romans 12 calls for the follower of Jesus to not only live in harmony, but to trust God when you are mistreated and allow Him space to bring vengeance as you love those who mistreat you. This does not mean it is okay for you to be mistreated, or taken advantage of. It does mean that a follower of Jesus does not repay evil with evil, and where possible, pursues peace. This means each follower of Jesus trusts Jesus, and lives life in His presence so that they function as though He exists and cares, and respond to people in light of that. This is possible only when trust is real and full. In Romans 12, this trust includes two key elements.

1. He Notices: God is involved in life, and He is aware of all that happens to us. God is all knowing and omnipresent. Nothing happens outside of His awareness. Now this is only interesting until we also realize that:

2. He cares: He will take care of our situations so that we can live based on His love, not on our situation. Romans 8 profoundly teaches this, but it is also found at the end of Romans 12. If you trust God, you will know He is all powerful, all wise, good, and loves you enough to involve Himself in your life. More on this tomorrow. So, feed your enemy, give him something to drink, and in so doing you honour God and heap coals on the enemy's head.

Sadly for us who still battle with true humility and selfless love, this does not mean that you are punishing your enemy with fire, but it does mean that they would feel a burning sense of shame as their conscience is engaged and they see the beauty of a Christ-like response to hate. There is another option to what this means, burning coals being the punishment of God, and it is possible this is what it means, but most likely it is a good thing you do for your enemy by giving them love and restoring to them a sense of how to live right, and where they have lived wrong. Trust God, and live as though He exists, because He does! Choose to do what is best for the community at personal cost, and in so doing, you will show yourself to be God's child.

- Do you have someone that you are not in harmony with?
- Why?
- What is your responsibility before God to restore this relationship?
- How is one to love their enemy? Be practical.
- Why is truly believing in God essential to living life the way that He calls us to?
- Write out Psalm 16:8, and try to memorize it.

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 29

LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL: TRUST GOD (PT. 2)

Read Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 10:5 and Proverbs 3:5–6

In another lifetime (a few years ago), the church I was serving was going through a major crisis, and one elder disagreed with the rest, and stated, in frustration as the vote was taken to go in a different direction: “yes, but I am wise”—in fact when pushed, the wisest. If you feel that, or declare it, it is a little dangerous. Actually *very* dangerous, and disobedient to Scripture and destructive to the people around you. This elder was not only caught in his pride, he was wrong to state this or believe it. In fact, our text today states, Be wise not in your own eyes (Romans 12:16). But what does this actually mean? Clearly we are to pursue wisdom (lots of wisdom literature in the Bible), and learn how to think logically and spiritually.

A number of years ago I was introduced to the term “cognitive dissonance”. In simple definitions, this is having thoughts that don’t always align with reality, that shapes behavior that can be disruptive. Usually the term is used in seeking to move towards behavioural change, and that is helpful, but for us today, I think it is beneficial if we realize that all of us at some level struggle with cognitive dissonance. We don’t live life perfectly, our thoughts are clouded by worldly thinking, or fleshly hazes cause us to not be able to see life as God does, or through the lens of Scripture. In fact, one of the main things that will help us think biblically and take captive every thought is a humility in our own self-evaluation.

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

(Proverbs 3:5–6)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart: a faith in who He is and what He has said. *Lean not:* a humility in evaluating your own wisdom. *In all:* choose to see life holistically, all of life for Him. *Acknowledge Him:* be consciously aware of His presence. *He will direct:* He will give you His mind, and clear up your cognitive dissonance as you trust in Him.

So to take this step of trusting God's wisdom and not our own, we have to trust God. You are not as wise as you think you are, and He is all-wise. Learn to listen to others in humility, and it will yield a tenderness and love that brings unity. To trust God you have to believe that He has revealed Himself, and that He is who He says He is.

1. He has revealed himself to us
2. He is all powerful
3. He is all wise
4. He is loving and good
5. He cares about me

More on this in Appendix 4 if this is a struggle for you, but for now, be humble in your own view of your wisdom. It will make you hungry for God's Word and healthy in your relationships with others.

- Why do you think it is important that we learn not to be wise in our own eyes?
- How can you grow in this commanded attribute?
- In your own words, what is wisdom? How can you grow in biblical wisdom?
- What are three things that float to the top in what you have learned from this time focused on Romans 12?

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 30

LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL: IT IS THE POWER OF GOD

Read Romans 12, Romans 1:5; 16–17; 16:25–27

As we approach the end of our 31 day journey through Romans 12, and the continuation of our normal lives, it is helpful to be reminded that when the power of the gospel is truly experienced, it impacts all of life. There is a change that comes from all who are impacted by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and this change is relational and lived from the inside out. There is an obedience of faith. Below is a helpful check list to make sure that you are on the right path—the path that leads to eternal life through faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior!

- Confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour: The word “confess” is a public declaration, but more than that it is an agreement. This is an agreement that the gospel is true, and more than that, worth basing your life upon.
- Count the cost
- Commit to His life: This is the Romans 12:1, living sacrifice commitment that we are all called to make. It is in view of the gospel, and for all of life.
- Continue to live: This is an acknowledgement that it is a Marathon, not a sprint, and all of life is to be lived in God’s presence for God’s glory for as long as we live.

This influence of the gospel is to save from the penalty of sin, and the power of sin, and both are essential if we are to live victorious Christian lives. So, a quick reminder of what the gospel is for our hearts is helpful now, and really every day, as we seek to live our lives for the glory of God in the view of the gospel.

What is the Gospel?

The gospel is the good news about what Jesus Christ has done to reconcile sinners to God. Here’s the whole story:

1. The one and only God, who is holy, made us in his image to know him (Gen. 1:26–28).
2. But we sinned and cut ourselves off from him (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:23).
3. In his great love, God sent his Son, Jesus, to come as King and rescue his people from their enemies—most significantly their own sin (Ps. 2; Luke 1:67–79).
4. Jesus established his kingdom by acting as both a mediating priest and a

priestly sacrifice—he lived a perfect life and died on the cross, thus fulfilling the law himself and taking on himself the punishment for the sins of many (Mark 10:45; John 1:14; Heb. 7:26; Rom. 3:21–26, 5:12–21); then he rose again from the dead, showing that God accepted his sacrifice and that God’s wrath against us had been exhausted (Acts 2:24, Rom. 4:25).

5. He now calls us to repent of our sins and trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness (Acts 17:30, John 1:12). If we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, we are born again into a new life, an eternal life with God (John 3:16). Now that’s good news!

A good way to summarize this good news is to biblically unpack the words God, Man, Christ, Response.

1. *God*. God is the creator of all things (Gen. 1:1). He is perfectly holy, worthy of all worship, and will punish sin (1 John 1:5, Rev. 4:11, Rom. 2:5–8).

2. *Man*. All people, though created good, have become sinful by nature (Gen. 1:26–28, Ps. 51:5, Rom. 3:23). From birth, all people are alienated from God, hostile to God, and subject to the wrath of God (Eph. 2:1–3).

3. *Christ*. Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully man, lived a sinless life, died on the cross to bear God’s wrath in the place of all who would believe in him, and rose from the grave in order to give his people eternal life (John 1:1, 1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 7:26, Rom. 3:21–26, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Cor. 15:20–22).

4. *Response*. God calls everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and trust in Christ in order to be saved (Mark 1:15, Acts 20:21, Rom. 10:9–10).

(Some of this material has been adapted from *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* by Mark Dever, p. 43) <https://www.9marks.org/answer/what-gospel/>

- Have you placed your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior?
- Does your faith show itself in obedience?
- How can you grow your faith?
- Take a moment to write out your testimony. Use the tools provided in Appendix 3

MY TESTIMONY

DEVOTIONAL | DAY 31

LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL: FORGIVEN AND FREE, AND SOMETIMES A FAILURE

Read Romans 1:5; 16:25–27 and James 2

What if I fail? Let me encourage you and share that you will fail. A friend who was challenged to make a radical commitment to God shared with me that he would not do that because he felt it was presumptuous and because he could not keep that commitment. He was right, and yet wrong. It was helpful to hear his heart, and over the years it has been helpful for me to discover that there is a fear of failure in some, when there is a call to full devotion. Really, we all should realize we will fail—we are human, and we are in process!

Now the good news. When you keep the gospel in view, the fear of failure can only be seen as a distant marker out of the rear window. Romans 12 is a demanding chapter of Scripture. The great theology of the Romans 1–11 is very demanding. If you understand and experience the gospel, you will never be the same, and you will choose to be radically committed to God (a living sacrifice). When you do this, remember to do it in the context of the gospel and discipline. Yes, build into your life *Key Stone Habits*. Yes, build into your life reminders and relationships that help you live in the context of the greatness of God and His gospel. But even in these, remember that when you fail, you are accepted by grace, through faith, not works.

There is nothing you can do to make God love you more if you are His child, and nothing you can do to make Him love you less if He has saved you.

Read that again.

We are saved by grace to works, but those works do not earn our keep—they prove we are kept. Even our working out of our salvation includes incredible dependence (Philippians 2:12–13). So, tomorrow when you wake up, you will have (I hope) made a Romans 12:1 commitment to God, and I know—you will fail. So take heart, His mercies are new every morning, and as you begin, or continue to exist as a living sacrifice, your value is tied to His sacrifice, not yours, so take heart.

Romans 12 ends well, even as we begin the new steps that will come tomorrow: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Amen and amen.

- Take a moment and reflect on what it means according to Romans 12 to be a living sacrifice

I AM A LIVING SACRIFICE

I choose by God's grace, and in His power to live in light of the gospel. I choose to live in light of the gospel, and to be a *living sacrifice*. My life is His, I am all in, and keeping the gospel in view, I will live my life for Him. Wherever, whatever, and whenever.

Signed: _____

APPENDIX 1

S.M.A.R.T. GOALS

You will have noticed that we talk a lot about setting S.M.A.R.T. goals, so it is helpful to explain what we mean by these. This is a common workplace acronym and one that we think is helpful when seeking lifechange. We believe that for goals to be helpful, they should be S.M.A.R.T. There are some differences if you look online for what the acronym should stand for, but for us, it stands for:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Time

Specific

When setting a goal it is best to make it clear and understandable. This allows for the direction of the goal to be understood as well as for its accomplishment to be pursued. Proper goals should help us to get where God wants us to be, and therefore clarity is helpful.

Measurable

S.M.A.R.T. goals should include precision when it comes to what is trying to be accomplished. This will help you know if you have attained your goal or not, and if you are moving toward it. If you have a goal, such as "I want to read the Bible more", it is unclear what that means. If you say "I want to read at least two chapters of the Bible every day" it is measurable, therefore, something you can use to measure your success in achieving your goal.

Attainable

It is not helpful to set goals that are impossible to attain. So take the time to make sure that the goal you set is possible. You can probably do more than you think. When I was explaining this to our youth group in the 90s, I said: "don't say you want to read the Bible in a month", but then one of our kids did that. Now that is one of my goals twice a year. So set big goals (BHAG), but not impossible goals. Impossible goals will cause you to give up, and lose confidence in the process.

Make sure your goals push you towards your ultimate goal of being Christ-like, so avoid making them so easy that their accomplishment is irrelevant. Avoid “I will read one verse week” as much as “I will read the Bible in a day”!

Relevant

Setting goals that don't help you could be counter productive. Make sure you understand where God wants you to go in the big picture of things, and the goals that you are setting will help you get there. Keep your goals aligned with His purposes for you. Over time, if you are consistent in this, you will develop focus and accomplish great things, and live a successful life as defined by God.

Time

S.M.A.R.T. goals always have a timeline that you are moving towards. Then you can celebrate when you have accomplished your goal, or adjust your goal to fit your pursuit more specifically and passionately. Having a timeframe will also help to increase your sense of urgency and typically increase your desire to pursue the direction. Having time in the goal setting process usually moves you toward your goal more expediently.

Two Quick Helps:

1. Include grace in your goals. Grace that empowers, and grace that helps you understand that what makes you okay is not your accomplishment of the goal, but your being found in Christ. Goal setting should help you pursue godliness, not acceptance.

2. Be willing to make mid-course corrections. Your goals do not define you, rather they direct you. You might find that life's circumstances change, or your understanding of what God wants you to pursue is adjusted. You might find the goal you set was too small, big, general, specific, quick, slow, and we could go on and on. So, be willing to humbly assess your goals, and alter them if they are not helping you address where God wants you to go.

APPENDIX 2

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Taken from "What is the Gospel" (<https://www.9marks.org/answer/what-gospel/>)

The gospel is the good news about what Jesus Christ has done to reconcile sinners to God. Here's the whole story:

1. The one and only God, who is holy, made us in his image to know him (Gen. 1:26–28).
2. But we sinned and cut ourselves off from him (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:23).
3. In his great love, God sent his Son Jesus to come as king and rescue his people from their enemies—most significantly their own sin (Ps. 2; Luke 1:67–79).
4. Jesus established his kingdom by acting as both a mediating priest and a priestly sacrifice—he lived a perfect life and died on the cross, thus fulfilling the law himself and taking on himself the punishment for the sins of many (Mark 10:45; John 1:14; Heb. 7:26; Rom. 3:21–26, 5:12–21); then he rose again from the dead, showing that God accepted his sacrifice and that God's wrath against us had been exhausted (Acts 2:24, Rom. 4:25).
5. He now calls us to repent of our sins and trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness (Acts 17:30, John 1:12). If we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, we are born again into a new life, an eternal life with God (John 3:16).

Now that's good news. A good way to summarize this good news is to biblically unpack the words God, Man, Christ, Response.

1. *God.* God is the creator of all things (Gen. 1:1). He is perfectly holy, worthy of all worship, and will punish sin (1 John 1:5, Rev. 4:11, Rom. 2:5–8).
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3. *Christ.* Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully man, lived a sinless life, died on the cross to bear God's wrath in the place of all who would believe in him, and rose from the grave in order to give his people eternal life (John 1:1, 1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 7:26, Rom. 3:21–26, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Cor. 15:20–22).
4. *Response.* God calls everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and trust in Christ in order to be saved (Mark 1:15, Acts 20:21, Rom. 10:9–10).

APPENDIX 3

HOW DO I SHARE THE GOSPEL?

Q: Are we supposed to be able to share our faith?

A: 1 Peter 3:15–16: But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. Every Christian should be ready to share their faith, and be ambassadors for Jesus with their lives and with their lips!

Q: Is the gospel an important part of this sharing? Can we just talk about how we helped ourselves, or our Grandma helped us, or our friend, or our auto-mechanic, or, or, or...

A: 2 Corinthians 4:5: “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord...”
1 Corinthians 1:23: “But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.”

The gospel message should focus on Christ, and include an understanding of the key issues,

- God Is Holy
- I am not, and because of that, have earned death and condemnation
- Jesus came, lived a perfect life, died, and rose again
- By grace, through faith, His life and death can be on my behalf, and I can be forgiven, reconciled to Him, and have a life of purpose to be lived with passion.
- I can find new life in Him.

Q: How can I structure my testimony?

A straightforward way to structure your testimony is in three stages:

- Before: Tell what your life was like before you surrendered to Christ. What were you searching for before coming to know Christ? What was the key problem, emotion, situation or attitude you were dealing with? What motivated you? What were your actions? How did you try to satisfy your inner needs? (Examples of inner needs are loneliness, fear of death, insecurity.

Possible ways to fill those needs include work, money, drugs, relationships, sports, sex.)

- **How:** How were you converted? Simply tell the events and circumstances that caused you to consider Christ as the solution to your searching. Take time to identify the steps that brought you to the point of trusting Christ. Where were you? What was happening at the time? What people or problems influenced your decision?
- **Since:** How has your life in Christ made a difference? How has his forgiveness impacted you? How have your thoughts, attitudes and emotions changed? Share how Christ is meeting your needs and what a relationship with him means to you now.

Important Tips to Remember

- **Stick to the point.** Your conversion and new life in Christ should be the main points.
- **Be specific.** Include events, genuine feelings and personal insights that clarify your main point. This makes your testimony tangible—something others can relate to.
- **Be current.** Tell what is happening in your life with God now, today.
- **Be honest.** Don't exaggerate or dramatize your life for effect. The simple truth of what God has done in your life is all the Holy Spirit needs to convict others of their sin and convince them of his love and grace.

Things to Avoid

Stay away from "Christianese" phrases. These "foreign" or "churchy" words can alienate listeners and readers and keep them from identifying with your life.

Components of the gospel you could include in your testimony: ("Bracelet Colors")

Yellow

The first color on our bracelet is yellow. What does yellow symbolize? Heaven. God's Home. This is where we should all want to go, and it is where we can go if we are in right relationship with God. This is by grace, through faith, resulting in obedience. Focus on God and His holiness (God has no sin and is morally perfect, and set apart from everyone else. There is no one like Him)! Heaven is a place to rightly want to go. The gospel is God-centred!

Black

But, we have one problem. That is we have sin in our lives. This black bead represents our sin. The Bible says that all of us have sin. Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." God does not allow any sin in heaven. So how can we get into heaven? We can't. God says the punishment of sin is death. Death is eternal separation from God in hell: "For the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23). At this point, you want people to understand that they have done wrong things and that these wrong things have broken their relationship with God, and they can't earn their way back—ever.

Red

This red bead symbolizes Christ's blood. When we accept His free gift of salvation God washes us with his blood. God sent his Son, Jesus Christ to die on the cross in our place so that we don't have to receive the punishment we deserve for our sins! (Grace: It is important to talk about how this was something that we didn't deserve, and can't earn even in part.)

To make our relationship with God right, we have to believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and accept what He did on the cross for us as a replacement for the punishment of sin.

2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 10:9–10; Ephesians 2:8–10; John 3:16–17; Acts 4:12

When we really believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, this will include submission to God and learning to follow Him with our lives. At this point you want the people to understand what it means to believe, and follow. Please focus on the person of Jesus and what He has done for us. Repentance summarizes this concept well—a change of mind that impacts every area of life, a change of direction.

White

Once Jesus washes us with His blood we are pure. We are no longer black with sin, but we are clean like the white bead. Because God took the place of our sin, when we die, God can let us into heaven because our sin is paid for by Jesus' death on the cross.

Romans 8:1; 1 Peter 2:24; John 1:12, 29; John 3:16

Green

After we believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we want to grow so that we can become closer to God. This green symbolizes growth much like the green grass grows. We can grow by reading the Bible, praying to God, going to church and learning to obey God in all of life (baptism and beyond).

“But you dear friends build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.” (Jude 1:20)

Romans Road

The first verse on the Romans Road to salvation is Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” We have all sinned. We have all done things that are displeasing to God. There is no one who is innocent. Romans 3:10–18 gives a detailed picture of what sin looks like in our lives. The second Scripture on the Romans Road to salvation, Romans 6:23, teaches us about the consequences of sin: “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The punishment that we have earned for our sins is death. Not just physical death, but eternal death!

The third verse on the Romans Road to salvation picks up where Romans 6:23 left off: “But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 5:8 declares, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus Christ died for us! Jesus’ death paid for the price of our sins. Jesus’ resurrection proves that God accepted Jesus’ death as the payment for our sins.

The fourth stop on the Romans Road to salvation is Romans 10:9: “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Because of Jesus’ death on our behalf, all we have to do is believe in Him, trusting His death as the payment for our sins—and we will be saved! Romans 10:13 says it again, “for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins and rescue us from eternal death. Salvation, the forgiveness of sins, is available to anyone who will trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The final aspect of the Romans Road to salvation is the results of salvation. Romans 5:1 has this wonderful message: “Therefore, since we have been justified

through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Through Jesus Christ we can have a relationship of peace with God. Romans 8:1 teaches us: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Because of Jesus’ death on our behalf, we will never be condemned for our sins. Finally, we have this precious promise of God from Romans 8:38–39: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Would you like to follow the Romans Road to salvation? If so, here is a simple prayer you can pray to God. Saying this prayer is a way to declare to God that you are relying on Jesus Christ for your salvation. The words themselves will not save you. Only faith in Jesus Christ can provide salvation! “God, I know that I have sinned against you and am deserving of punishment. But Jesus Christ took the punishment that I deserve so that through faith in Him I could be forgiven. With your help, I place my trust in You for salvation. Thank You for Your wonderful grace and forgiveness—the gift of eternal life! Amen!”

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Romans-road-salvation.html>

A Model Testimony:

Lee Wiebe has served as an elder at Cloverdale Baptist Church for a number of years, and is a man of God, who not only gave me a desk, but his loyalty to God and his bride at CBC, and loving leadership has allowed me to continue to serve Jesus behind it.

LEE WIEBE'S TESTIMONY

I was born into a Christian home and at a very early age I accepted Christ as my Savior. I felt accepting Christ was an expectation placed upon me. I wanted to please my family and everyone around me was a Christian, so it seemed the right thing to do. In fact, I did it many times over the course of my youth, in my home, in church, at Bible camp. I thought at least one of my many attempts at "saying the prayer" had to work.

As I entered my adolescent years little did I realize that my wonderful Christian heritage would become the root of my confusion. As I grew older, I found myself wondering, why was I so fortunate to be raised in the only true religion? Didn't all the other religions of the world also claim to be unique and the only true path? Was I a Christian because I simply attached myself to my family's beliefs? I found myself wondering about all the other possibilities. Perhaps there really wasn't a God. Perhaps I was just born into a set of beliefs by happenstance.

It was at this time in my life I started to drift away from my family's beliefs and decided that I would follow my own path. I was working at this time and my work caused me to travel a lot of the time. I would see my family on the occasions I was in the city. They could sense that I was changing, and my sister Jean in particular, pushed me to consider the path I was on. I felt convicted by her words and it started to impact our relationship in a negative way. At this point she gave me a book and told me if I promised to read it, she would never bother me again. It was a short book and I thought this might be a great way to deal with this impasse between us. I eagerly promised to read the book and was secretly hoping I could find flaws that would help me to defend my beliefs or should I say lack of beliefs. As I look back, I realize my awakening was less about the book and more of the Holy Spirit and the prayers that came with the book.

The next Saturday morning I took my boat out on the lake. I anchored the boat and began to read this book written by a scientist who came to know the Lord through an intellectual review of the evidence. I learned that knowing God was not just an emotional experience but that you could also know God intellectually. There is overwhelming evidence that God does exist. I was convinced by the arguments of God's existence and it caused me to realize that I needed to choose a way forward. If there was indeed a God, I had a choice to make. That day in

the middle of the lake I poured out my heart to God. I repented and asked Him to forgive me and to sit on the throne of my life. I returned to the shore a changed person, a new person. Suddenly every word in the Bible jumped off the pages and straight into my heart. I now had a relationship with the God of the universe and all my doubts disappeared.

Over the years I have had times of real joy and have also walked through some deep valleys. I no longer expect God to change my circumstances but rather I expect him to change me to joyfully accept whatever the circumstance. Since the day I gave my life wholly to Christ I have always felt a sense of His presence and guidance. I have come to realize that God has created each of us with a unique purpose and work to complete. A few years ago, I was diagnosed with stage 3 high risk cancer. I did not know if it would be God's will to take me home or if I had more work to do. Incredibly through a very difficult time God gave me the strength to endure and truly a peace that passes understanding. We really do grow in the valleys of our life. I know that whatever happens is for my good and His glory.

Not only do I now have a heavenly Father, but I also have a new spiritual family. I thank God for the opportunities to serve with my brothers and sisters here at CBC. I am so thankful that God led Donna and I to CBC. I pray that I might live my life in alignment with Paul's words to the Colossians.

¹⁰ So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;" (Colossians 1:10–11)