SAMPLE CONTENT • NOT FOR SALE



(in)courage

CHRISTIAN STANDARD BIBLE®





THE CSB (IN)COURAGE DEVOTIONAL BIBLE is an invitation for all women to find their stories within the tapestry of the greatest Story ever told—God's Story of Redemption. Featuring devotions by over one hundred writers of the (in) courage community, the CSB (in)courage Devotional Bible provides resources for women to explore the Bible, dive deep into Scripture, record their own stories, and find themselves among friends. Readers will experience Scripture in new ways in the company of women willing to "go first" with everyday stories that bear witness to God's grace to find beauty in brokenness and hope in the hard. (in)courage is a vibrant online community, reaching thousands of women every day, welcoming them just the way they are, offering a space to breathe, loving support, and resources for meaningful connection.

FEATURES INCLUDE:

312 Devotions by 122 (in)courage community writers

10 distinct thematic Reading Plans

 $66\,Book\,Introductions\,connecting\,each\,book\,of\,the\,Bible\,to\,the\,whole\,biblical\,narrative$

Stories of courage from 50 women of the Bible

Journaling Space

Topical index

Two-column text

Theme verses

Specialized presentation page

The CSB (in)courage Devotional Bible features the highly readable, highly reliable text of the Christian Standard Bible® (CSB). The CSB stays as literal as possible to the Bible's original meaning without sacrificing clarity, making it easier to engage with Scripture's life-transforming message and to share it with others.



Features



Themes

Throughout the (in)courage Devotional Bible you'll find ten themes. These themes provide a picture of the consistency of the message of Scripture. Each is marked with a specific color and design. Each theme corresponds with a reading plan, devotions, women of courage, and two beautifully designed Scripture verses.



Reading Plans

Each theme has a specific reading plan that corresponds with Bible passages and devotions. The reading plans range from five to seven weeks, with each day of the plan containing Scripture and a devotional reading. The reading plans provide a complete look at the theme throughout Scripture.



Throughout the (in)courage Devotional Bible you'll find 52 reflective devotions. These devotions are designed to begin each week of Scripture reading and are the anchors of the reading plans. Each reflective devotion includes reflection questions and space for journaling.



Devotions

Throughout the Bible there are 260 devotional pieces full of personal stories and connection. These devotions are designed to help us connect with the story of Scripture and further understand how God works in our lives individually.



Eve desired wisdom, and she believed the serpent when he said that God was holding out on her. She broke God's law and did the one thing He asked her not to do. Eve learned the hard way that God wasn't the one who lied. It was the serpent who deceived her. But God didn't leave her in her brokenness. The first mistake in history also led to the greatest second chance. While there were consequences for her actions, God promised to redeem her and make her the mother of all the living. He also promised that her offspring would one day crush the serpent and destroy his hold over man. God was faithful to fulfill His promise, too, bringing about redemption through the Second Adam—Jesus Christ.

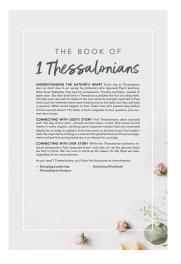


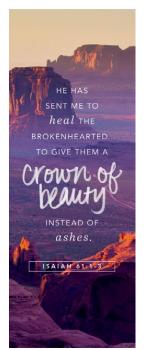
Women of Courage

Fifty women in the Bible are highlighted for different aspects of their character. Each woman's story reflects how God reached in and touched her life. These women's stories serve as an encouragement to us all, and they're connected with one of the ten themes.

Book Introductions

Each book of the Bible has an introduction which includes historical background, the message of the book, and why the book is important and applicable today.





Theme Verses

Each theme has one Old Testament and one New Testament verse which embody the heart of the theme. These verses have been artistically designed to present the beauty and truth of God's Word and aid in memorization.

Journaling Space

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Devotional Theme Guide

Beautiful Brokenness

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1826

 $The \ sacrifice \ pleasing \ to \ God \ is \ a \ broken \ spirit. \ You \ will \ not \ despise \ a \ broken \ and \ humbled \ heart, \ God. \ \textbf{PSALM} \ \ \textbf{51:17}$

Scripture is full of stories of broken people. But it is also full of stories of how God has redeemed them—their stories, their families, and their futures—by His grace. While the stories may seem wrought with brokenness and despair, God turns that brokenness into beauty, reflecting the power of the grace. God chooses to use broken people every day, and their brokenness leads them to fully depend on Him.

Better Together

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1827

For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink. 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-13

God designed men and women to live in community with one another and share their lives together. Throughout the Bible, there are stories of people living in community who are better because they live and work and serve the Lord together. The stories of these men and women in the Bible who were better together are wonderful examples for the church today of how we can love and support one another and always point each other toward Christ.

Daily Grace

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1828

 $Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day." {\it EXODUS 16:4}$

God provided manna for His people when they were living in the desert. Each day He provided enough for that day. In the same way. He provided enough manna each day for the Israelites, He also provided grace every day for His people throughout Scripture. He continues to provide the grace we need every single day and in exactly the right portion. Here you'll find encouragement that God is always working to meet your needs and draw you into His love with His ever-flowing grace.

$Every day\ Leadership$

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1829

 $Remember your \ leaders \ who \ have \ spoken \ God's \ word \ to \ you. \ As \ you \ carefully \ observe \ the \ outcome \ of \ their \ lives, imitate \ their \ faith. \ HEBREWS \ 13:7$

God is always faithful to provide wisdom and guidance for His people through the men and women He appoints as leaders. But God also calls leaders who may not be exactly what the world would consider a leader. Everyday leadership showcases stories of men and women who step out of their comfort zones to lead others, pointing them to the truth. Their leadership impacted more lives than they would ever know, and their stories give us confidence that God can and will use our lives to lead others and point them to Christ.

Friendship on Purpose

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1830

No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. JOHN 15:13

The ultimate example of friendship is in Jesus Christ. He gave His life to save His friends. He cared for His friends, challenged His friends, encouraged His friends, and enjoyed His friends. While Christ is the ultimate example of friendship, Scripture is full of many other beautiful examples of purposeful friendship that encourages, builds, cares for, and gives life. May we see these examples and wholeheartedly follow in friendship on purpose.

Hope in the Hard

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1831

 $This hope will not disappoint us, because \ God's \ love \ has been \ poured \ out \ in \ our \ hearts \ through \ the \ Holy \ Spirit \ who \ was \ given \ to \ us. \ \textbf{ROMANS 5:5}$

No matter the circumstance, God's Word is full of stories of hope. In the face of countless trials and tribulations, His people have hope that reflects their deep faith in the Father. Though circumstances are hard—sometimes even impossible—God's people choose to have hope and rely on Him for their every need. Their steadfastness is often the encouragement we need to face our own hard and find hope in our Savior.

Imperfect Hospitality

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1832

Love your neighbor. LEVITICUS 19:18

Biblical hospitality is never meant to be perfect. It is meant to engage, encourage, and build up others while simultaneously inviting them to share their stories and their lives. The stories of hospitality found throughout Scripture remind us to focus on our guests and sharing God's incredible love and grace with them. Regardless of the condition of our space, if our hearts are focused on encouraging others, our hospitality will honor God.

Intentional Gratitude

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1833

Give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 THESSALONIANS 5:18

God loves our gratitude. He loves it when His people stop and thank Him for what He has done. There are many examples throughout the Bible where God's people stop and celebrate what God has done. These stories serve as reminders of the importance of stopping and intentionally showing gratitude to the Lord for His provision and victory.

Second Chances

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1834

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 JOHN 1:9

While the entire story of Scripture is God's second chance for humanity, the Bible is full of individual examples of how He graciously poured out His love for His people and redeemed their lives. His heart for redemption is displayed through the way He continually reached into broken lives and gave His children another chance to follow Him. His patience and grace are unmerited and unmatched. He grants second chances to His people, not because they are deserving, but because He is merciful.

The Scared Brave

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1835

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment. 2 TIMOTHY 1:7

"Do not fear" is found 365 times in the Bible, once for each day of the year. God's desire for His people is not for them to live in fear, but to live in the confidence He is always with them and that with Him, they have nothing to fear. God is faithful to His children, and in their choice to be brave, His power is beautifully displayed. Scripture provides examples of men and women who faced impossible situations but chose to be brave and follow God's leading in their lives.

Beautiful Brokenness

READING PLAN

MEET THE WOMEN OF Beautiful Brokenness

Leah, page 47
Naomi, page 363
The Canaanite Woman, page 1335
The Woman with the Jar
of Perfume, page 1423
The Samaritan Woman, page 1481

Author, Page Number

Angie Ryg, p. 45

Aliza Latta, p. 804

Elisa Pulliam, p. 1580

Kim Hyland, p. 1044

Courtney Walsh, p. 1326

Amena Owen Brown, p. 1424

WEEK 1

Day Passage Devotion Title

Luke 7:36-50 At His Feet*

Genesis 29:1–30:24 The Times We're Passed Over

Psalm 92:12-15 When You're Wilting

Romans 3:21-28 Bought at a Price

Jeremiah 18:1-12 Still Cracked

Matthew 11:25–12:8 Rest for the Weary

WEEK 2

Lamentations 3 The Morning Will Come* Mary Carver, p. 1106 2 Kings 25 When You Can't Make Sense of Devastation Amanda Conquers, p. 540 Ephesians 4:25-32 Fighting Anger Kate Battistelli, p. 1669 2 Thessalonians The Thing We're All Sure We Want Angie Ryg, p. 1705 2:13-3:5 John 15:10-17 Elise Hurd, p. 1510 The Secret to Joy Covenant Renewal Becky Thompson, p. 317 Joshua 24:14-28

WEEK 3

1 2 Corinthians 4 Jars of Clay*
2 Proverbs 15:1 Soft Answers and the Hard Habit of Yelling
3 Luke 23–24 Between Friday and Sunday
4 Genesis 32 Grasping to Prevailing
5 1 Peter 2:1-10 A Holy Choosing
6 Exodus 38 The Bronze Mirror

WEEK 4

1 2 Samuel 11-12 Give Me a Heart Like His*
2 Mark 11:12-14,20-25 The Turning Tide of Forgiveness
3 Song of Songs 4 Beauty
4 Luke 9:1-36 Traveling Light
5 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 There Is One Who Is Always Enough
6 Hosea 3 Worth the Wait

WEEK 5

John 4 You Are Fully Known and Fully Loved*
Proverbs 19:21 When All Your Plans Fail
Ruth 3–4 The Story of Naomi*

Jennifer Dukes Lee, p. 1636 Kimberly Coyle, p. 873 Kaitlyn Bouchillon, p. 1465 Amanda Conquers, p. 54 Michele Cushatt, p. 1771 Kate Battistelli, p. 142

Wendy Blight, p. 432 September McCarthy, p. 1390 Laurie Tomlinson, p. 925 Sheila Dailie, p. 1430 Rachel Anne Ridge, p. 1646 Meredith Bernard, p. 1206

Kaitlyn Bouchillon, p. 1482 Jessie Weaver, p. 885 Trillia Newbell, p. 365

^{*}indicates a Reflective Devotion



MEET THE WOMEN OF

Togetherness

Shiphrah and Puah, page 86 Huldah, page 534 Shallum's Daughters, page 648 Isaiah's Wife, page 942 Joanna and Susanna, page 1426

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WEEK 1

E	Day Passage	Devotion Title	Author, Page Number
1	1 Acts 2	Mission Possible*	Michele Cushatt, p. 1528
2	2 Genesis 47	Israel Moves to Egypt	Arlene Pellicane, p. 75
3	3 1 Corinthians 12:12-31	Twenty-Four Seven	Elisa Pulliam, p. 1619
4	4 Ezra 10	Hope for Revival	Arlene Pellicane, p. 640
5	5 Hebrews 11	The Fight of Faith	Erika Dawson, p. 1749
6	6 Amos 3	Walking Together	Jo Ann Fore, p. 1233

WEEK 2

1	Nehemiah 2–3	When You're #inthethickofit*	Denise J. Hughes, p. 646
2	Matthew 10	Safety in Numbers	Erin Mohring, p. 1323
3	Ezekiel 36:16-38	When Your Heart Needs to Soften	Dawn Camp, p. 1158
4	Colossians 1:1-23	The Visible Invisible	Tonya Salomons, p. 1687
5	Proverbs 3:27-35	Choose to Act	Laurie Tomlinson, p. 855
6	Joshua 7	Get Rid of What's Achan You	Melanie Dale, p. 295

WEEK 3

1	1 Corinthians 12:15-24	Many Parts, Yet One Body*	Dawn Camp, p. 1616
2	1 Samuel 21-22	I Didn't See That Coming	Erin Mohring, p. 401
3	2 Corinthians 3	Pen Pals: A Tangible Letter from Christ	Elise Hurd, p. 1633
4	Leviticus 20:21-27	Holy to the Lord	Lauren Chandler, p. 173
5	Ephesians 1:20-23	He Fills All Things	Elise Hurd, p. 1663
6	Hebrews 12	Can I Get a Witness for the Fitness?	Logan Wolfram, p. 1752

WEEK 4

- 1	Deuteronomy 10	Loving the Foreigner ^a	Heien Lee, p. 252
2	Luke 8:4-15	Room to Grow	Kendra Tillman, p. 1427
3	Ecclesiastes 1	Everything Is Futile	Lovelle Gerth-Myers, p. 9
4	Ephesians 2:11-22	His Dwelling Place Among Us	Kristin Taylor, p. 1665
5	1 Kings 15:9-24	Loyalty and Legacy	Kimberly Coyle, p. 485
6	1 John 3:11-24	Inviting God into Our Ordinary	Wendy Blight, p. 1788

WEEK 5

1	Philippians 2	But in Humility*	Teri Lynne Underwood, p. 1678
2	Luke 22:7-23	Community Strengthens Us	Lovelle Gerth-Myers, p. 1463
3	2 Kings 23:1-8	Stronger Together	Sheila Dailie, p. 537

^{*}indicates a Reflective Devotion

Featuring the CHRISTIAN STANDARD BIBLE

Faithful and True: These words remind us that God's Word reveals his character and will to us, transforms our lives, and leaves us in awe of his glory. At LifeWay, we strive to be faithful and true to the Word of God in all that we do, and we know that God is faithful and true to guide us as we publish biblical resources for life.

We are excited to introduce you to the *Worldview Study Bible* published in the Christian Standard Bible (CSB). As Christians go about their daily lives, they are called to view the world from a biblical perspective and allow God's Word to impact the decisions they make, along with their views on culture and society. A translation that is accurate to the original languages while still remaining accessible for Christians to engage on a daily basis can be very helpful in the pursuit of a biblical worldview. We believe that by publishing the *Worldview Study Bible* in the CSB, Christians can enjoy the articles and study notes to guide them in a biblical worldview while engaging in a translation that they can trust and feel comfortable reading every single day.

For the most up to date news on the CSB, visit **CSBible.com**



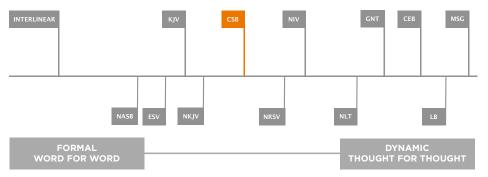




OPTIMAL EQUIVALENCE—A BEAUTIFUL BALANCE

The CSB was created using Optimal Equivalence, a translation philosophy that balances linguistic precision of the original languages and readability in contemporary English. In the many places throughout Scripture where a word-for-word rendering is clearly understandable, a literal translation is used. When a word-for-word rendering might obscure the meaning for a modern audience, a more dynamic translation is used. This process assures that both the words and thoughts contained in the original text are conveyed as accurately as possible for today's readers.

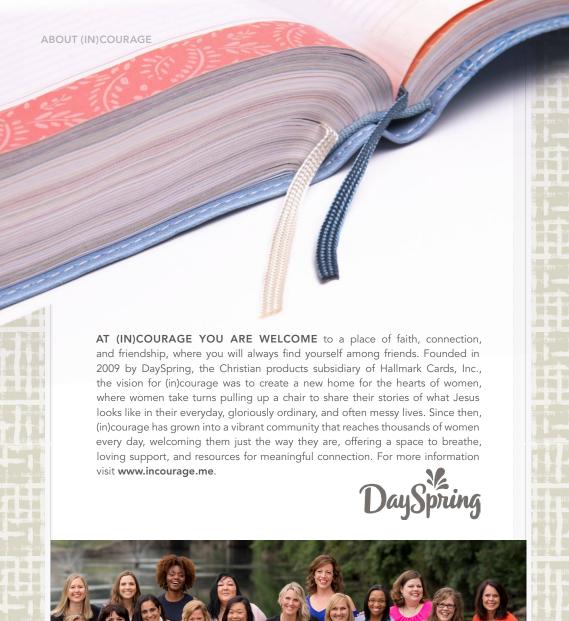
BIBLE TRANSLATION CONTINUUM



Bible translations shown in the top half of the chart are original translations directly from ancient languages to English. Versions shown below the line began with the English text of another Bible translation.

The CSB provides a highly accurate text for faithful sermon preparation and serious study, translated from the biblical languages by scholars who love God's Word. It is highly faithful to the original text. On the other hand, it does not compromise readability and clarity for those who may be less familiar with the traditional (and sometimes difficult) vocabulary retained in some translations of the Bible.

Beyond that, we know that the good news of the Bible is meant to be shared. A translation that maintains accuracy and readability opens the door for every believer to share the Bible with someone who has read it for a lifetime, or with someone who has never before read its life-changing message.





"Declare his glory among the nations, his wondrous works among all peoples." PSALM 96:3

The heart of (in)courage has always been to provide a place where women can gather to share their story and declare His glory. Since its inception in 2009, our website at incourage.me has published over 4,000 stories from more than 3,000 women.

We gather together daily to bear witness to the beauty of God's grace in our everyday lives. We share our stories because we believe it's a ministry—the ministry of being willing to "go first." To share what's really going on. To whisper what perhaps we've all been thinking and feeling. To admit when we're not fine. As friends and sisters in the body of Christ, our prayer is to continue the gift of going first through the stories here on these pages.

The (in)courage Devotional Bible is an invitation for all women to find their stories within the tapestry of the greatest story ever told—God's Story of Redemption.

After walking through the Red Sea on dry land, Miriam led all the women of Israel in dancing and rejoicing because of what God had done. After leading an army into battle, Deborah gave praise to God for the victory. After learning her prayer had been answered and a child would soon be born, Hannah sang with words of thanksgiving. After hearing the angel's words that she would give birth to the Savior who would sit on David's throne, Mary responded with gratitude and praise.

We seek to follow in the footsteps of these women. With 312 devotions by 122 women, we are telling our stories of how God's story has changed our lives. Because of His grace, we have found beauty in the brokenness and hope in the hard. With each devotion, we sing the praise of the One who has authored our story for His glory.

We believe Scripture is complete. Nothing needs to be added to it or taken from it, and we can find ourselves within it. God's Word is truth. Our circumstances may be different and our culture might not look the same, but God "is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8). We can look to Him as our unchanging source of hope.

The (in)courage community has always believed that friendship matters and we are better together. We are many voices with one heart, and we want to lift our voices so more women can hear of His goodness—that no matter where we've been or what we've done, God loves us and has a purpose for us. We are never beyond His reach. In Christ, new life awaits. It's the most beautiful story ever told.

Denise J. Hughes

Denise J. Hughes, General Editor









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Esther

UNDERSTANDING THE AUTHOR'S HEART While the author of Esther is unknown, the themes presented in her story are both timeless and universal: God will protect His people and preserve a remnant from which the Messiah will one day come. The story of Esther is unique in Scripture as it's the only book in the Bible that does not specifically mention God, but His divine presence and influence is seen and felt throughout the text.

CONNECTING WITH GOD'S STORY Set in the Persian empire after the Babylonian exile, the book of Esther gives us a glimpse into the lives of those who chose not to return to Jerusalem. For Esther—and many Jews like her—assimilation in Babylon was so complete that her Jewish heritage was not visibly evident. Yet certain events would conspire to take a young Jewish woman of little consequence and promote her to queen of Persia. In this new position of power, Esther is poised to intervene before the king on behalf of her people.

CONNECTING WITH OUR STORY Most of us won't ever live in a time or place where we could personally prevent a genocide, but whenever evil is present, we can be like Esther. We can fast and pray for our King to intervene on behalf of His people, and we can commit ourselves to being an instrument of justice and peace in our world today.

As you read Esther, you'll also find devotions on these themes:

- Imperfect Hospitality
- The Scared Brave
- Intentional Gratitude

VASHTI ANGERS THE KING

These events took place during the days of Ahasuerus, who ruled 127 provinces from India to Cush. ² In those days King Ahasuerus reigned from his royal throne in the fortress at Susa. ³ He held a feast in the third year of his reign for all his officials and staff, the army of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the officials from the provinces. ⁴ He displayed the glorious wealth of his kingdom and the magnificent splendor of his greatness for a total of 180 days.

⁵At the end of this time, the king held a week-long banquet in the garden courtyard of the royal palace for all the people, from the greatest to the least, who were present in the fortress of Susa. ⁶ White and violet linen hangings were fastened with fine white and purple linen cords to silver rods on marble [^] columns. Gold and silver couches were arranged on a mosaic pavement of red feldspar, ⁸ marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones.

⁷Drinks were served in an array of gold goblets, each with a different design. Royal wine flowed freely, according to the king's bounty. ⁸The drinking was according to royal decree: "There are no restrictions." The king had ordered every wine steward in his household to serve whatever each person wanted. ⁹Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women of King Ahasuerus's palace.

¹⁰ On the seventh day, when the king was feeling good from the wine, Ahasuerus commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas—the seven eunuchs who personally served him— ¹¹ to bring Queen Vashti before him with her royal crown. He wanted to show off her beauty to the people and the officials, because she was very beautiful. ¹² But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command that was delivered by his eunuchs. The king became furious and his anger burned within him.

THE KING'S DECREE

¹³ The king consulted the wise men who understood the times,^c for it was his normal procedure to confer with experts in law and justice. ¹⁴ The most trusted ones^c were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan. They were the seven officials of Persia and Media who had personal access to the king and occupied the highest positions in the kingdom. ¹⁵ The king asked, "According to the law, what should be done with Queen Vashti, since she refused to obey King Ahasuerus's command that was delivered by the eunuchs?"

¹⁶ Memucan said in the presence of the king and his officials, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king, but all the officials and the peoples who are in every one of King Ahasuerus's provinces. ¹⁷ For the queen's action will become public knowledge to all the women and cause them to despise their husbands and say, 'King Ahasuerus ordered Queen Vashti brought before him, but she did not come.' ¹⁸ Before this day is over, the noble women of Persia and Media who hear about the queen's act will say the same thing to all the king's officials, resulting in more contempt and fury.

¹⁹ "If it meets the king's approval, he should personally issue a royal decree. Let it be recorded in the laws of Persia and Media, so that it cannot be revoked: Vashti is not to enter King Ahasuerus's presence, and her royal position is to be given to another woman who is more worthy than she. ²⁰ The decree the king issues will be heard throughout his vast kingdom, so all women will honor their husbands, from the greatest to the least."

²¹The king and his counselors approved the proposal, and he followed Memucan's advice. ²²He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to each province in its own script and to each ethnic group in its own language, that

1:6 Or alabaster	°1:6 Or of porphyry	1:13 Or understood propitious times	1:14 Lit Those near him

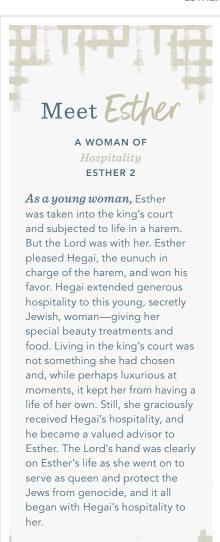
every man should be master of his own house and speak in the language of his own people.

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW QUEEN

Some time later, when King Ahasuerus's rage had cooled down, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what was decided against her. 2 The king's personal attendants suggested, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. 3 Let the king appoint commissioners in each province of his kingdom, so that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem at the fortress of Susa. Put them under the supervision of Hegai, the king's eunuch, keeper of the women, and give them the required beauty treatments. ⁴ Then the young woman who pleases the king will become queen instead of Vashti." This suggestion pleased the king, and he did accordingly.

⁵In the fortress of Susa, there was a Jewish man named Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite. ⁶He had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the other captives when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took King Jeconiah of Judah into exile. ⁷ Mordecai was the legal guardian of his cousin Hadassah (that is, Esther), because she had no father or mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was extremely good-looking. When her father and mother died, Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter.

⁸When the king's command and edict became public knowledge and when many young women were gathered at the fortress of Susa under Hegai's supervision, Esther was taken to the palace, into the supervision of Hegai, keeper of the women. ⁹ The young woman pleased him and gained his favor so that he accelerated the process of the beauty treatments and the special diet that she received. He assigned seven hand-picked



^2:7 Lit uncle's daughter

Handpicked

ESTHER 2:8-9

About seven years ago I became a small business owner. It wasn't something I sought out intentionally; it just came. I've struggled occasionally with the success of it because it's not my passion. It's hard work. It's detail oriented. I'm definitely an artist first, jewelry designer far second. My interest was something else, and yet this has been the path the Lord has set for me and blessed time and again. He's given me a platform, and the work He's put my hand to has become a ministry.

Reading through Esther I feel a common bond. She was a young Jewish girl minding her own business and all of a sudden she was plucked up and set on a path away from her family and friends. She spent almost a year in a harem before she was presented to the king.

Esther 2:8-9 says, "When the king's command and edict became public knowledge and when many young women were gathered at the fortress of Susa under Hegai's supervision, Esther was taken to the palace, into the supervision of Hegai, keeper of the women. The young woman pleased him and gained his favor so that he accelerated the process of the beauty treatments and the special diet that she received. He assigned seven hand-picked female servants to Esther from the palace and transferred her and her servants to the harem's best quarters."

Scripture doesn't say specifically, but I'm pretty sure she didn't want to go, yet during that year she won the favor of those around her and ultimately with the king of Persia. It was a year of preparation for what the Lord was going to do through her. He showered her with favor. He placed her in the right place at the right time. With her platform set, her whole reason for being there was to influence King Ahasuerus to save God's people.

When I think of Esther and the pivotal role she played in God's master plan, it makes me rethink my life and the position He has for me. It may not have been what I chose, but God is in the details. You may feel like somewhere along the way you took a wrong turn, but without a shadow of a doubt, He has you specifically placed to influence.

You've been handpicked for such a time as this.

Lord, we lay our lives at Your feet. Align our hearts with Your purpose and will. Use us despite our shortcomings and doubts. We long to be like Esther—obedient, patient in doing good, and a mighty weapon for Your kingdom. Equip us for whatever You bring our way. Thank You for handpicking us! In Jesus's name, amen.

Imperfect Hospitality

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1832 Author Index, page 1844 female servants to her from the palace and transferred her and her servants to the harem's best quarters.

¹⁰ Esther did not reveal her ethnicity or her family background, because Mordecai had ordered her not to make them known. ¹¹ Every day Mordecai took a walk in front of the harem's courtyard to learn how Esther was doing and to see what was happening to her.

¹² During the year before each young woman's turn to go to King Ahasuerus, the harem regulation required her to receive beauty treatments with oil of myrrh for six months and then with perfumes and cosmetics for another six months. ¹³ When the young woman would go to the king, she was given whatever she requested to take with her from the harem to the palace. ¹⁴ She would go in the evening, and in the morning she would return to a second harem under the supervision of the king's eunuch Shaashgaz, keeper of the concubines. She never went to the king again, unless he desired her and summoned her by name.

ESTHER BECOMES QUEEN

¹⁵ Esther was the daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai who had adopted her as his own daughter. When her turn came to go to the king, she did not ask for anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch, keeper of the women, suggested. Esther gained favor in the eyes of everyone who saw her.

¹⁶ She was taken to King Ahasuerus in the palace in the tenth month, the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. ¹⁷ The king loved Esther more than all the other women. She won more favor and approval from him than did any of the other virgins. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti. ¹⁸ The king held a great banquet for all his officials and staff. It was Esther's banquet. He freed his provinces

from tax payments and gave gifts worthy of the king's bounty.

MORDECAI SAVES THE KING

¹⁹ When the virgins were gathered a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the King's Gate. ²⁰ (Esther had not revealed her family background or her ethnicity, as Mordecai had directed. She obeyed Mordecai's orders, as she always had while he raised her.)

²¹ During those days while Mordecai was sitting at the King's Gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the entrance, became infuriated and planned to assassinate. King Ahasuerus. ²² When Mordecai learned of the plot, he reported it to Queen Esther, and she told the king on Mordecai's behalf. ²³ When the report was investigated and verified, both men were hanged on the gallows. This event was recorded in the Historical Record in the king's presence.

HAMAN'S PLAN TO KILL THE JEWS

After all this took place, King Ahasuerus honored Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite. He promoted him in rank and gave him a higher position than all the other officials. ² The entire royal staff at the King's Gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, because the king had commanded this to be done for him. But Mordecai would not bow down or pay homage. 3 The members of the royal staff at the King's Gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?" 4When they had warned him day after day and he still would not listen to them, they told Haman in order to see if Mordecai's actions would be tolerated, since he had told them he was a Jew.

⁵When Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing down or paying him homage, he was filled with rage. ⁶ And when he learned of Mordecai's ethnic identity, it seemed

2:21 Lit and they sought to stretch out a hand against				

repugnant to Haman to do away with Mordecai alone. He planned to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout Ahasuerus's kingdom.

⁷ In the first month, the month of Nisan, in King Ahasuerus's twelfth year, the Pur — that is, the lot — was cast before Haman for each day in each month, and it fell on the twelfth month, the month Adar. ⁸ Then Haman informed King Ahasuerus, "There is one ethnic group, scattered throughout the peoples in every province of your kingdom, keeping themselves separate. Their laws are different from everyone else's and they do not obey the king's laws. It is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. ⁹ If the king approves, let an order be drawn up authorizing their destruction, and I will pay 375 tons of silver to ⁸ the officials for deposit in the royal treasury."

¹⁰The king removed his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jewish people. ¹¹Then the king told Haman, "The money and people are given to you to do with as you see fit."

12 The royal scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and the order was written exactly as Haman commanded. It was intended for the royal satraps, the governors of each of the provinces, and the officials of each ethnic group and written for each province in its own script and to each ethnic group in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the royal signet ring. 13 Letters were sent by couriers to each of the royal provinces telling the officials to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jewish people — young and old, women and children—and plunder their possessions on a single day, the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month.

¹⁴ A copy of the text, issued as law throughout every province, was distributed to all the

peoples so that they might get ready for that day. ¹⁵The couriers left, spurred on by royal command, and the law was issued in the fortress of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, while the city of Susa was in confusion.

MORDECAL APPEALS TO ESTHER

When Mordecai learned all that had occurred, he tore his clothes, put on sack-cloth and ashes, went into the middle of the city, and cried loudly and bitterly. ² He went only as far as the King's Gate, since the law prohibited anyone wearing sackcloth from entering the King's Gate. ³ There was great mourning among the Jewish people in every province where the king's command and edict came. They fasted, wept, and lamented, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴Esther's female servants and her eunuchs came and reported the news to her, and the queen was overcome with fear. She sent clothes for Mordecai to wear so that he would take off his sackcloth, but he did not accept them. ⁵Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs who attended her, and dispatched him to Mordecai to learn what he was doing and why. ⁶So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square in front of the King's Gate. ⁷Mordecai told him everything that had happened as well as the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay the royal treasury for the slaughter of the Jews.

⁸Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa ordering their destruction, so that Hathach might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and command her to approach the king, implore his favor, and plead with him personally for her people. ⁹ Hathach came and repeated Mordecai's response to Esther.

¹⁰Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to tell Mordecai, ¹¹ "All the royal offi-

^3:6 Lit to stretch out a hand against B3:9 Lit will weigh 10,000 silver talents on the hands of text of Ahasuerus's letter here. P4:5 Lit what is this and why is this	^c 3:13 LXX adds the

cials and the people of the royal provinces know that one law applies to every man or woman who approaches the king in the inner courtyard and who has not been summoned—the death penalty— unless the king extends the gold scepter, allowing that person to live. I have not been summoned to appear before the king for the last⁴ thirty days." 12 Esther's response was reported to Mordecai.

¹³ Mordecai told the messenger to reply to Esther, "Don't think that you will escape the fate of all the Jews because you are in the king's palace. ¹⁴ If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jewish people from another place, but you and your father's family will be destroyed. Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this."

¹⁵ Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go and assemble all the Jews who can be found in Susa and fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my female servants will also fast in the same way. After that, I will go to the king even if it is against the law. If I perish, I perish." ¹⁷ So Mordecai went and did everything Esther had commanded him.

ESTHER APPROACHES THE KING

5 On the third day, Esther dressed in her royal clothing and stood in the inner courtyard of the palace facing it. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the royal courtroom, facing its entrance. As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard, she gained favor in his eyes. The king extended the gold scepter in his hand toward Esther, and she approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

³ "What is it, Queen Esther?" the king asked her. "Whatever you want, even to half the kingdom, will be given to you." ⁴"If it pleases the king," Esther replied, "may the king and Haman come today to the banquet I have prepared for them."

⁵The king said, "Hurry, and get Haman so we can do as Esther has requested." So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared.

⁶While drinking the wine, the king asked Esther, "Whatever you ask will be given to you. Whatever you want, even to half the kingdom, will be done."

⁷Esther answered, "This is my petition and my request: ⁸ If I have found favor in the eyes of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and perform my request, may the king and Haman come to the banquet I will prepare for them. Tomorrow I will do what the king has asked."

⁹ That day Haman left full of joy and in good spirits. But when Haman saw Mordecai at the King's Gate, and Mordecai didn't rise or tremble in fear at his presence, Haman was filled with rage toward Mordecai. 10 Yet Haman controlled himself and went home. He sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh to join him. 11 Then Haman described for them his glorious wealth and his many sons. He told them all how the king had honored him and promoted him in rank over the other officials and the royal staff. 12 "What's more," Haman added, "Queen Esther invited no one but me to join the king at the banquet she had prepared. I am invited again tomorrow to join her with the king. 13 Still, none of this satisfies me since I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's Gate all the time."

¹⁴His wife Zeresh and all his friends told him, "Have them build a gallows seventy-five feet[‡] tall. Ask the king in the morning to hang Mordecai on it. Then go to the banquet with the king and enjoy yourself." The advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows constructed.

^A 4:11 Lit king these ^E 5:14 Lit 50 cubits	^B 5:1 Lit house	^c 5:6 Lit During the banquet of	D5:9 Lit left rejoicing and good of heart

God's Curriculum for Character

ESTHER 4

Ifelt like I had crossed some imaginary finish line. I stood on the platform at my church to lead our congregation in worship. It had been a year to the day when we said goodbye to my dad and finally a song had returned to my broken heart. As the song began and the words flowed from the truest place of my heart, I felt a peace that surpassed all understanding. God had been with me. He walked me through every hard day, noticed every tear shed, and He held true.

I believed for a few moments that I had been granted some sort of reprieve from the suffering—the kind found when grieving hearts heal. Little did I know that God wasn't giving me rest; He was refining my character for another test of endurance. The same day the song returned concerning the loss of my father, a mysterious illness began unfolding for one of my girls. There was no break in the action. There was only Jesus taking me by the hand and walking me forward into another cloud of the unknown. Looking back now, I can see that in the midst of my hardest moments God was not only healing me, but He was preparing me as well. I was living this truth:

"And not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rm 5:3-5).

Affliction. Endurance. Character. Hope. This is God's character-cultivating curriculum. His way is hard, but effective. My year of affliction had produced an endurance in my heart and a strength of character I didn't know I would need until I did.

Here we look to Esther, one of only two women to have a book of the Bible named for her. She was a beautiful girl who became the queen of Persia. She was highly favored. And, you might know, she was called to be brave with this challenge:

"If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jewish people from another place, but you and your father's family will be destroyed. Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this" (Est 4:14).

Esther had to make a choice. She could stay silent or she could speak. She could back down or she could be brave. I don't think she randomly chose the latter when she sent this reply to her cousin Mordecai:

"Go and assemble all the Jews who can be found in Susa and fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my female servants will also fast in the same way. After that, I will go to the king even if it is against the law. If I perish, I perish" (Est 4:16).

Esther was not instantly brave. Her bravery was born in affliction, etched in endurance, and cultivated as character. During her life, God prepared her not only to be queen, but to lay down her life for her people. He used every affliction she encountered. Esther, the beautiful queen of Persia, was first a foreigner born in exile. Before she was taken to the palace, she was orphaned and taken in by family. Esther, highly favored, did not choose to be favored by an earthly, pagan king.

Affliction. Endurance. Character. Hope. God's curriculum had been at work in Esther's life. And in that critical moment, she didn't back down. She had faith in God and in the work he had done in her to prepare her for that decision. Along the way she had also learned a few things as her character was refined, as evidenced by her thoughtful response:

- She submitted to authority.
- She asked others to pray and fast for her.
- She knew the outcome was out of her hands.

It may be true that Esther already had the favor of the king, but in humility and out of respect, she sought it anyway. She wasn't brave in a vacuum. She asked for the prayers of her people.

When Esther went to the king to make her request, her eyes were fixed beyond his throne to that of her heavenly Father's. She knew that no matter what happened, hope would not disappoint. Not because in one moment she was scared and brave, but because she remembered the faithfulness of God in every moment that He had led her to before this one. Esther approached the throne, and the king extended mercy to her and her people. They were saved. Though willing, she did not lay down her life. Instead, she found grace had already done that for her.

God doesn't waste our affliction, my friend. He hasn't wasted mine. In His wisdom, He uses it to make us more like Him and to grow us into women who learn to draw near to His merciful throne with endurance and our character refined. Hebrews 4:16 tells us, "Let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need." His character-building classroom has taught us what we will find there. We will not be disappointed.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Are you currently facing a season of affliction?
- How has God used your circumstances in the past to bring you from a point of affliction to a point of hope?
- In what way is God asking you to endure difficulty as He refines you for something greater?

The Scared Brave

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1835 Author Index, page 1850

MORDECAI HONORED BY THE KING

That night sleep escaped the king, so he ordered the book recording daily events to be brought and read to the king. ² They found the written report of how Mordecai had informed on Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the entrance, when they planned to assassinate King Ahasuerus. ³ The king inquired, "What honor and special recognition have been given to Mordecai for this act?"

The king's personal attendants replied, "Nothing has been done for him."

⁴The king asked, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman was just entering the outer court of the palace to ask the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows he had prepared for him.

⁵The king's attendants answered him, "Haman is there, standing in the court."

"Have him enter," the king ordered. ⁶ Haman entered, and the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king wants to honor?"

Haman thought to himself, "Who is it the king would want to honor more than me?" ⁷ Haman told the king, "For the man the king wants to honor: ⁸ Have them bring a royal garment that the king himself has worn and a horse the king himself has ridden, which has a royal crown on its head. ⁹ Put the garment and the horse under the charge of one of the king's most noble officials. Have them clothe the man the king wants to honor, parade him on the horse through the city square, and proclaim before him, "This is what is done for the man the king wants to honor."

¹⁰ The king told Haman, "Hurry, and do just as you proposed. Take a garment and a horse for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the King's Gate. Do not leave out anything you have suggested."

¹¹ So Haman took the garment and the horse. He clothed Mordecai and paraded him

through the city square, crying out before him, "This is what is done for the man the king wants to honor."

¹²Then Mordecai returned to the King's Gate, but Haman hurried off for home, mournful and with his head covered. ¹³ Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened. His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "Since Mordecai is Jewish, and you have begun to fall before him, you won't overcome him, because your downfall is certain." ¹⁴ While they were still speaking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and rushed Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared.

HAMAN IS EXECUTED

The king and Haman came to feast with Esther the queen. Once again, on the second day while drinking wine, the king asked Esther, Queen Esther, whatever you ask will be given to you. Whatever you seek, even to half the kingdom, will be done.

³ Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your eyes, Your Majesty, and if the king is pleased, spare my life; this is my request. And spare my people; this is my desire. ⁴ For my people and I have been sold to destruction, death, and extermination. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept silent. Indeed, the trouble wouldn't be worth burdening the king."

⁵King Ahasuerus spoke up and asked Queen Esther, "Who is this, and where is the one who would devise such a scheme?"⁸

⁶Esther answered, "The adversary and enemy is this evil Haman."

Haman stood terrified before the king and queen. ⁷The king arose in anger and went from where they were drinking wine to the palace garden. ⁶ Haman remained to beg Queen Esther for his life because he realized the king was planning something terrible for

A7:1 Lit drink	^c 7:7 Lit the garden of the house, also in v. 8

him. ⁸ Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, ^A Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Would he actually violate the queen while I am in the house?" As soon as the statement left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

⁹ Harbona, one of the king's eunuchs, said: "There is a gallows seventy-five feet[®] tall at Haman's house that he made for Mordecai, who gave the report that saved[©] the king."

The king said, "Hang him on it."

¹⁰ They hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's anger subsided.

ESTHER INTERVENES FOR THE JEWS

That same day King Ahasuerus awarded Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Mordecai entered the king's presence because Esther had revealed her relationship to Mordecai. ²The king removed his signet ring he had recovered from Haman and gave it to Mordecai, and Esther put him in charge of Haman's estate.

³Then Esther addressed the king again. She fell at his feet, wept, and begged him to revoke the evil of Haman the Agagite and his plot he had devised against the Jews. ⁴The king extended the gold scepter toward Esther, so she got up and stood before the king.

⁵ She said, "If it pleases the king and I have found favor before him, if the matter seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let a royal edict be written. Let it revoke the documents the scheming Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. ⁶ For how could I bear to see the disaster that would come on my people? How could I bear to see the destruction of my relatives?"

⁷King Ahasuerus said to Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, "Look, I have given

Haman's estate to Esther, and he was hanged on the gallows because he attacked the Jews. Write in the king's name whatever pleases you concerning the Jews, and seal it with the royal signet ring. A document written in the king's name and sealed with the royal signet ring cannot be revoked."

⁹On the twenty-third day of the third month — that is, the month Sivan — the royal scribes were summoned. Everything was written exactly as Mordecai commanded for the Jews, to the satraps, the governors, and the officials of the 127 provinces from India to Cush. The edict was written for each province in its own script, for each ethnic group in its own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language.

¹⁰ Mordecai wrote in King Ahasuerus's name and sealed the edicts with the royal signet ring. He sent the documents by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses bred in the royal stables.

11 The king's edict gave the Jews in each and every city the right to assemble and defend themselves, to destroy, kill, and annihilate every ethnic and provincial army hostile to them, including women and children, and to take their possessions as spoils of war. 12 This would take place on a single day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month Adar.

¹³ A copy of the text, issued as law throughout every province, was distributed to all the peoples so the Jews could be ready to avenge themselves against their enemies on that day.
¹⁴ The couriers rode out in haste on their royal horses at the king's urgent command. The law was also issued in the fortress of Susa.

¹⁵ Mordecai went from the king's presence clothed in royal purple and white, with a great gold crown and a purple robe of fine linen. The city of Susa shouted and rejoiced,

7:8 Or the house of wine	B7:9 Lit 50 cubits	^c 7:9 Lit who spoke good for	D8:7 Lit stretched out his hand against

¹⁶ and the Jews celebrated with gladness, joy, and honor. ¹⁷ In every province and every city, wherever the king's command and his law reached, joy and rejoicing took place among the Jews. There was a celebration and a holiday. And many of the ethnic groups of the land professed themselves to be Jews because fear of the Jews had overcome them.

VICTORIES OF THE JEWS

The king's command and law went into effect on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month Adar. On the day when the Jews' enemies had hoped to overpower them, just the opposite happened. The Jews overpowered those who hated them. ² In each of King Ahasuerus's provinces the Jews assembled in their cities to attack those who intended to harm them. ^c Not a single person could withstand them; fear of them fell on every nationality.

³ All the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and the royal civil administrators⁵ aided the Jews because they feared Mordecai. ⁴ For Mordecai exercised great power in the palace, and his fame spread throughout the provinces as he became more and more powerful.

⁵The Jews put all their enemies to the sword, killing and destroying them. They did what they pleased to those who hated them. ⁶In the fortress of Susa the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men, ⁷including Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha. ¹⁰They killed these ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. However, they did not seize[§] any plunder.

¹¹ On that day the number of people killed in the fortress of Susa was reported to the king. ¹²The king said to Queen Esther, "In the fortress of Susa the Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men, including Haman's ten sons. What have they done in the rest of the royal provinces? Whatever you ask will be given to you. Whatever you seek will also be done."

¹³ Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, may the Jews who are in Susa also have tomorrow to carry out today's law, and may the bodies of Haman's ten sons be hung on the gallows." ¹⁴ The king gave the orders for this to be done, so a law was announced in Susa, and they hung the bodies of Haman's ten sons. ¹⁵ The Jews in Susa assembled again on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed three hundred men in Susa, but they did not seize any plunder.

¹⁶The rest of the Jews in the royal provinces assembled, defended themselves, and gained relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand[†] of those who hated them, but they did not seize any plunder. ¹⁷They fought on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar and rested on the fourteenth, and it became a day of feasting and rejoicing.

¹⁸ But the Jews in Susa had assembled on the thirteenth and the fourteenth days of the month. They rested on the fifteenth day of the month, and it became a day of feasting and rejoicing. ¹⁹ This explains why the rural Jews who live in villages observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a time of rejoicing and feasting. It is a holiday when they send gifts to one another.

²⁰ Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews in all of King Ahasuerus's provinces, both near and far. ²¹ He ordered them to celebrate the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar every year ²² because during those days the Jews gained relief from their enemies. That was the month when their sorrow was turned into rejoicing and their mourning into a holiday. They were to be days of feasting, rejoicing, and of sending gifts to one another and to the poor.

^8:16 Lit had light ⁸ 8:17 Lit good day ^c 9:2 Lit cities to send out a hand against the seekers of their evil ^p 9:3 Lit and those who do the king's work; Est 3:9 [‡] 9:10 Lit not put their hands on, also in vv. 15,16 ^p 9:16 Some LXX mss read 10,107; other LXX mss read 15,000	

Victory for the Jews

ESTHER 9

On October 30, 2007, I was driving home with a friend from Bible study. It was late, we had done a Beth Moore study, and it seemed like we always talked for an hour longer than we should. That night, I was at the intersection of Franklin Road and Old Hickory Boulevard in Nashville when someone across the intersection passed out in her car. She drifted across the intersection, pretty much taking off the driver's side of my car. It was the scariest moment of my life.

I never let October 30 pass without reflecting on my accident. I'm so thankful that God was not done with me yet. I'm thankful that I walked away with nothing more than a little puncture wound from some glass on one of my arms, even though I had to be cut out of the car. I'm thankful for the red-haired angel who came and talked to me when I couldn't get out of the car. We talked about Beth Moore studies; she was a nurse, and she helped me breathe when I was so incredibly scared and couldn't remember to do it myself. I'm thankful for my friend who went to get my husband because his phone was messed up and he wasn't picking it up. I'm thankful that although we both wanted to be, neither I nor my friend were pregnant. It was a strange and awful night, but I'm thankful for all the grace God gave in this situation.

The conclusion of the Book of Esther climaxes with victory for the Jews. Rather than being defeated, they defeat their enemies. Haman and his sons get the outcome they had plotted for the Jewish people. Realizing the incredible importance of this event, Mordecai instructs the Jews to observe what is now known as Purim—days of remembrance of their escape from certain death—during the Hebrew month of Adar, "the month when their sorrow was turned into rejoicing and their mourning into a holiday. They were to be days of feasting, rejoicing, and of sending gifts to one another and to the poor" (Est 9:22). In synagogues on Purim, the book of Esther is read and the Jews boo and stomp at Haman's name, remembering their deliverance centuries later. They celebrate wildly the fact that their people still exist—that God took Esther, a nobody, and made her a queen "for such a time as this" (Est 4:14).

Is there an event in your life you remember with this intense gratitude? Purim and Esther remind us to schedule these days in our calendars—days when we deliberately give thanks to God for our value to Him. We don't need a Mordecai to instruct us to have this celebration. We can choose days that are special to us and find our own ways to mark and celebrate God's goodness.

Intentional Gratitude

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1833 Author Index, page 1846

²³ So the Jews agreed to continue the practice they had begun, as Mordecai had written them to do. 24 For Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them. He cast the Pur — that is, the lot — to crush and destroy them. ²⁵But when the matter was brought before the king, he commanded by letter that the evil plan Haman had devised against the Jews return on his own head and that he should be hanged with his sons on the gallows. ²⁶ For this reason these days are called Purim, from the word Pur, Because of all the instructions in this letter as well as what they had witnessed and what had happened to them, ²⁷ the Jews bound themselves, their descendants, and all who joined with them to a commitment that they would not fail to celebrate these two days each and every year according to the written instructions and according to the time appointed. 28 These days are remembered and celebrated by every generation, family, province, and city, so that these days of Purim will not lose their significance in Jewish life, and their memory will not fade from their descendants.

²⁹ Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote this second

letter with full authority to confirm the letter about Purim. ³⁰ He sent letters with assurances of peace and security ⁸ to all the Jews who were in the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, ³¹ in order to confirm these days of Purim at their proper time just as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had established them and just as they had committed themselves and their descendants to the practices of fasting and lamentation. ³² So Esther's command confirmed these customs of Purim, which were then written into the record.

MORDECAI'S FAME

King Ahasuerus imposed a tax throughout the land even to the farthest shores. All of his powerful and magnificent accomplishments and the detailed account of Mordecai's great rank with which the king had honored him, have they not been written in the Book of the Historical Events of the Kings of Media and Persia? Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Ahasuerus. He was famous among the Jews and highly esteemed by many of his relatives. He continued to pursue prosperity for his people and to speak for the well-being of all his descendants.

A9:28 LXX reads will be celebrated into all times on the land and the coasts of the sea	B9:30 Or of peace and faithfulness	^c 10:1 Or imposed forced labor



THE BOOK OF

Romans

UNDERSTANDING THE AUTHOR'S HEART Paul is the undisputed author of this book, which is one of several letters Paul wrote to various churches. Most of Paul's letters address specific issues within specific congregations, and his letter to the Romans is no different—except that it's longer than most and far more thorough in his treatment of Christianity's core beliefs. The church in Rome comprised both Jewish and Gentile believers, and Paul's purpose for writing was to alleviate the tension between the two groups and strengthen the believers.

CONNECTING WITH GOD'S STORY Romans is often regarded as the pinnacle of Paul's writings. Believers everywhere can mine its pages for a rich exploration of what it means to live forgiven, saved, and redeemed. This letter serves to clarify the gospel so believers can grow in their faith and knowledge of God by understanding the universal nature of human sin and our desperate need for God's grace. A strong foundation of truth is as important to the church today as it was to the church in Rome.

CONNECTING WITH OUR STORY Unity among believers is essential for the church to flourish and share the gospel with our neighbors. May we become instruments of unity in our own local churches wherever we call home today.

As you read Romans, you'll also find devotions on these themes:

- Beautiful Brokenness
- Daily Grace
- Everyday Leadership
- Imperfect Hospitality
- Second Chances

THE GOSPEL OF GOD FOR ROME

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle^A and set apart for the gospel of God— ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures— ³ concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was a descendant of David^B according to the flesh ⁴ and was appointed to be the powerful Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness^C by the resurrection of the dead. ⁵ Through him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about^D the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the Gentiles, ^E including you who are also called by Jesus Christ.

⁷To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints.

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

PAUL'S DESIRE TO VISIT ROME

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because the news of your faith⁵ is being reported in all the world. ⁹ God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in telling the good news about his Son—that I constantly mention you, ¹⁰ always asking in my prayers that if it is somehow in God's will, I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹ For I want very much to see you, so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, ¹² that is, to be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

¹³ Now I don't want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I often planned to come to you (but was prevented until now) in order that I might have a fruitful ministry among you, just as I have had among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am obligated both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

THE RIGHTEOUS WILL LIVE BY FAITH

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: **The righteous will live by faith.** ^{KL}

THE GUILT OF THE GENTILE WORLD

¹⁸ For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, 19 since what can be known^M about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse. ²¹ For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.

²⁴Therefore God delivered them over in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. ²⁵They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.

FROM IDOLATRY TO DEPRAVITY

²⁶For this reason God delivered them over to disgraceful passions. Their women[№] exchanged natural sexual relations^o for unnatural ones. ²⁷The men[₱] in the same way also left natural relations with women and were

^1:1 Or Jesus, a called apostle B1:3 Lit was of the seed of David C1:4 Or the spirit of holiness, or the Holy Spirit P1:5 Or him for; lit him into E1:5 Or nations, also in v. 13 F1:8 Or because your faith C1:13 Lit have some fruit H1:14 Or non-Greeks C1:16 Other mss add of Christ J1:17 Or revealed out of faith into faith K1:17 Or The one who is righteous by faith will live C1:17 Hab 2:4 M1:19 Or what is known N1:26 Lit females, also in v. 27 C1:26 Lit natural use, also in v. 27 C1:26 Lit males, also later in v.

The Gospel of the Unashamed

ROMANS 1:16-17

Considering the current state of our world, this passage in Romans 1:16-17 couldn't be more necessary for Christians to believe and live out in their everyday lives. A subjective way of living has become increasingly popular. Values and morals have become merely suggestions. Convictions have fallen by the wayside. Truth has been buried deep beneath the surface.

I'm not one for popular. I don't tend to be easily swayed by others' opinions and standards. That's not an easy place to get to. This place is only found when we surrender to the One who created the standards of holiness and righteousness.

In college and in my career God seems to surround me, more often than not, by people who are searching for truth and for grace to be seen and valued. I love it! I love it because that is right where He wants me. I love it because I get such joy from watching the Holy Spirit work through me. He wants to place you there as well. He wants to do a work through you that only He can do.

Salvation is waiting.

Salvation is calling.

Salvation is as close as the whisper of His name.

Salvation comes through Christ alone, but we carry His name. We carry the words of life. We carry the good news of the work of the cross. When we count the high cost of a fully abandoned life and decide He's worth it, that's when the adventure begins and God's righteousness is revealed. Souls are saved. Lives are changed.

I want to live in such a way that the lost are drawn to repentance and the believer is captivated by His presence. I want to boldly proclaim the power of the gospel despite my environment or pressure. I want to be steadfast with the revelation that God has given me. I want to love well, but always to point to the ways of the Lord.

He is worthy of all of our devotion.

He is worthy of our whole life.

He is worthy of an unashamed gospel.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith" (Rm 1:16-17).

$Every day\, Leadership$

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1829 Author Index, page 1846 inflamed in their lust for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error.

²⁸ And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right. ²⁹ They are filled with all unrighteousness, ⁸ evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ senseless, untrustworthy, unloving, ^c and unmerciful. ³² Although they know God's just sentence—that those who practice such things deserve to die ⁶—they not only do them, but even applaud ⁶ others who practice them.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

Therefore, every one of you^F who judges is without excuse. For when you judge another, you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, do the same things. 2 We know that God's judgment on those who do such things is based on the truth. 3 Do you really think anyone of you who judges those who do such things yet do the same — that you will escape God's judgment? 4 Or do you despise the riches of his kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? ⁵Because of your hardened and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed. 6 He will repay each one according to his works: 7 eternal life to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality; 8 but wrath and anger to those who are self-seeking and disobey the truth while obeying unrighteousness. 9 There will be affliction and distress for every human being who does evil, first to the Jew. and also to the Greek; ¹⁰ but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does what is good, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. ¹¹ For there is no favoritism with God.

12 All who sin without the law will also perish without the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For the hearers of the law are not righteous before God, but the doers of the law will be justified. 14 So, when Gentiles, who do not by nature have the law, do what the law demands, they are a law to themselves even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their consciences confirm this. Their competing thoughts either accuse or even excuse them 16 on the day when God judges what people have kept secret, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus.

JEWISH VIOLATION OF THE LAW

¹⁷ Now if^N vou call vourself a Jew, and rely on the law, and boast in God, 18 and know his will, and approve the things that are superior, being instructed from the law. 19 and if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light to those in darkness, 20 an instructor of the ignorant, a teacher of the immature, having the embodiment of knowledge and truth in the law— 21 you then, who teach another, don't you teach yourself? You who preach, "You must not steal" — do you steal? ²² You who say, "You must not commit adultery"—do you commit adultery? You who detest idols, do you rob their temples? 23 You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴ For, as it is written: **The** name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.

CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART

²⁵Circumcision benefits you if you observe the law, but if you are a lawbreaker, your

A1:27 Or in themselves B1:29 Other mss add sexual immorality C1:31 Other mss add unforgiving D1:32 Lit things are worthy of death B1:32 Lit even take pleasure in B2:1 Lit Therefore, O man, every one G2:4 Or patience, because you do not recognize B2:6 Ps 62:12; Pr 24:12 D2:12 Lit in D2:13 Or acquitted S2:14 Or who do not have the law, instinctively do C2:15 The code of conduct required by the law M2:15 Internal debate, either in a person or among the pagan moralists M2:17 Other mss read Look— O2:24 Is 52:5

circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶ So if an uncircumcised man keeps the law's requirements, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? ²⁷ A man who is physically uncircumcised, but who keeps the law, will judge you who are a lawbreaker in spite of having the letter of the law and circumcision. ²⁸ For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, and true circumcision is not something visible in the flesh. ²⁹ On the contrary, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart — by the Spirit, not the letter. ^A That person's praise is not from people but from God.

PAUL ANSWERS AN OBJECTION

So what advantage does the Jew have? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ²Considerable in every way. First, they were entrusted with the very words of God. ³ What then? If some were unfaithful, will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? ⁴ Absolutely not! Let God be true, even though everyone is a liar, as it is written:

That you may be justified in your words and triumph when you judge.

⁵ But if our unrighteousness highlights ^c God's righteousness, what are we to say? I am using a human argument: ^c Is God unrighteous to inflict wrath? ^c Absolutely not! Otherwise, how will God judge the world? ^d But if by my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? ^d And why not say, just as some people slanderously claim we say, "Let us do what is evil so that good may come"? Their condemnation is deserved!

THE WHOLE WORLD GUILTY BEFORE GOD

⁹What then? Are we any better off?[∈] Not at all! For we have already charged that both Jews and Gentiles[∈] are all under sin, [∈] 10 as it is written:

- There is no one righteous, not even one.
- There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.
- All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one."
- Their throat is an open grave; they deceive with their tongues. Vipers' venom is under their lips.
- 14 Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. K
- 15 Their feet are swift to shed blood;
- ruin and wretchedness are in their paths.
- and the path of peace they have not known.
- There is no fear of God before their eyes.[™]

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are subject to the law, ^N so that every mouth may be shut and the whole world may become subject to God's judgment. ²⁰ For no one will be justified in his sight by the works of the law, because the knowledge of sin comes through the law.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD THROUGH FAITH

²¹ But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets. ²² The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, since there is no distinction. ²³ For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. ²⁴ They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as an atoning sacrifice in his blood, received through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his

^2:29 Or heart—spiritually, not literally \$3:4 Ps 51:4 \$3:5 Or shows, or demonstrates \$9:5 Lit I speak as a man \$3:9 Are we Jews any better than the Gentiles? \$3:9 Lit Greeks \$9:9 Under sin's power or dominion \$4:10-12 Ps \$4:1-3; 53:1-3; Ec 7:20 \$4:1-3; 53:13 Ps 51:9 \$4:1-3; 53:1-3; Ec 7:20 \$4:1-3; 53:14 Ps 10:7 \$4:15-17 Is 59:7-8 \$4:18 Ps 36:1 \$3:19 Ps 140:3 \$4:14 Ps 10:7 \$4:15-17 Is 59:7-8 \$4:18 Ps 36:1 \$3:19 Dit those in the law \$9:19 Or become guilty before God, or may be accountable to God \$9:20 Or will be declared righteous, or will be acquitted \$9:21 When capitalized, the Law and the Prophets = OT \$9:22 Or through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ \$3:23 Or and lack the \$7:3:25 Or a propitiation, or a place of atonement

Bought at a Price

ROMANS 3:21-28

Not long after we bought our first home, we discovered that the promise of a home warranty wasn't nearly as great as we hoped. While we anticipated some immediate repairs, like the roof and fridge, we were in no way prepared to replace the boiler. Both the inspector and former homeowner never indicated there was any problem. We realized after it was too late that the leak between the chambers of the aging unit was the source of the water stain on the floor.

We were duped, not only by what we didn't know to look for, but also by the fine print.

The promise of a home warranty led us to believe that should the boiler fail within a year of purchase, we'd have the whole replacement covered. Ah. Not so. See, the fine print in that warranty said, "Up to \$1,500.00." Do you know how much it costs to replace a boiler system? I hope you're sitting down, because ours cost over \$8,000, and that was not the most expensive quote.

As I reflect upon how unprepared we were to be homeowners and the financial strain of owning a house, it often makes me think of God and the promise of salvation. I know, that may seem odd, but stick with me for a minute.

When it comes to God and His Word, there is no hidden fine print that will jump up to bite us in the you-know-what.

His Word, when it is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, is honest and true. We may not understand His ways, but we can always count on God to be faithful and true. He is never-changing and always full of loving kindness.

Unlike owning a house and not knowing what it will really cost to maintain it until you're in the thick of it, God takes care of all the charges when we choose to enter into a relationship with Him.

He bought us at a price, through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, and He makes a way for us to be right with Him. To us, this is a free gift. To God, it cost everything.

With owning a house, there's always this sense of, "Oh no, what's going to break next and what will it cost us?" But with God, there is the promise of eternity, no matter what the earthly strain might be. In Christ, we have full confidence that the price has been paid for our eternal salvation.

$Beautiful\, Brokenness$

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1826 Author Index, page 1845 restraint God passed over the sins previously committed. ²⁶ God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be righteous and declare righteous he one who has faith in Jesus.

BOASTING EXCLUDED

²⁷ Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By one of works? No, on the contrary, by a law of faith. ²⁸ For we conclude that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰ since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then nullify the law through faith? Absolutely not! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

ABRAHAM JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about — but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness. Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness. But to the one who does not work, but believes on him who declares the ungodly to be righteous, his faith is credited for righteousness.

DAVID CELEBRATING THE SAME TRUTH

⁶ Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

- Blessed are those whose lawless acts are forgiven and whose sins are covered.
- Blessed is the person the Lord will never charge with sin.

ABRAHAM JUSTIFIED BEFORE CIRCUMCISION

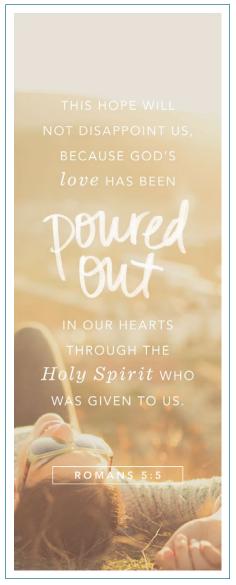
⁹Is this blessing only for the circumcised, then? Or is it also for the uncircumcised? For we say, Faith was credited to Abraham for righteousness. 10 In what way then was it credited - while he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? It was not while he was circumcised, but uncircumcised. 11 And he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith" while still uncircumcised. This was to make him the father of all who believe but are not circumcised, so that righteousness may be credited to them also. 12 And he became the father of the circumcised, who are not only circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith our father Abraham had while he was still uncircumcised.

THE PROMISE GRANTED THROUGH FAITH

¹³ For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ If those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made empty and the promise nullified, ¹⁵ because the law produces wrath. And where there is no law, there is no transgression.

16 This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants — not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of Abraham's faith. He is the father of us all. 17 As it is written: I have made you the father of many nations. He is our father in God's sight, in whom Abraham believed — the God who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist. 18 He believed, hoping against hope, so that he became the father of many nations according to what had been spoken: So will your descendants be. 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body to

A3:26 Or and justify, or and acquit \$3:27 Or what principle? \$\cap23:27 Or a principle \$\textstyle{\textstyle{94}}\$. Or What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh? or What, then, shall we say that Abraham our forefather found according to the flesh? \$\textstyle{\textstyle{12}}\$. F4:2 Or was declared righteous, or was acquitted \$\textstyle{\textstyle{14}}\$. F4:3,9 Gn 15:6 \$\textstyle{94}\$:7-8 Ps 32:1-2 \$\frac{14}{4}\$:11 Lit righteousness of faith, also in v. 13 \$\frac{14}{4}\$:16 Or not to those who are of the law only \$\frac{14}{4}\$:17,18 Gn 17:5 \$\frac{15}{4}\$:18 Gn 15:5 \$\frac{1}{4}\$:19 Other mss read He did not consider



be already dead (since he was about a hundred years old) and also the deadness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ because he was fully convinced that what God had promised, he was also able to do. ²² Therefore, it was credited to him for righteousness. ²³ Now it was credited to him has not written for Abraham alone, ²⁴ but also for us. It will be credited to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

FAITH TRIUMPHS

Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace^c with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²We have also obtained access through him by faith^c into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice^c in the hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, ⁴ endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. ⁵ This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

THOSE DECLARED RIGHTEOUS ARE RECONCILED

⁶ For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ How much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath. ¹⁰ For if, while we were enemies,

22,23 Gn 15:6 ⁸ 4:25 Or because of ^c 5:1 Other mss read faith, let us have peace, which can also be translated h, let us grasp the fact that we have peace ^D 5:2 Other mss omit by faith ^E 5:2 Lit boast, also in vv. 3,11	

we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.

11 And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation.

DEATH THROUGH ADAM AND LIFE THROUGH CHRIST

¹²Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned.^A ¹³In fact, sin was in the world before the law, but sin is not charged to a person's account when there is no law. ¹⁴Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression. He is a type of the Coming One.

¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if by the one man's trespass the many died, how much more have the grace of God and the gift which comes through the grace of the one man Jesus Christ overflowed to the many. ¹⁶ And the gift is not like the one man's sin, because from one sin came the judgment, resulting in condemnation, but from many trespasses came the gift, resulting in justification. ⁹ To Since by the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone. ¹⁹ For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ The law came along to multiply the trespass. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more ²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so

also grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? ² Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness^c of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self E was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin^F might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, 7 since a person who has died is freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him, 9 because we know that Christ, having been raised from the dead, will not die again. Death no longer rules over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died, he died to sin once for all time: but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. ¹³And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will not rule over you, because you are not under the law but under grace.

FROM SLAVES OF SIN TO SLAVES OF GOD

¹⁵What then? Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? Absolutely

A5:12 Or have sinned the body of sin G6:7 G:13 Or members, al	7 Or justified; lit acc	al ^c 6:4 Or a nev quitted H 6:11 C	v way De:5 Be join Other mss add <i>our L</i>	ned with him E6:6 Lit ord 16:12 Other mss	man F6:6 Lit that add sin (lit it) in

not! 16 Don't you know that if you offer yourselves to someone^A as obedient slaves, you are slaves of that one you obey—either of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But thank God that, although you used to be slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching to which you were handed over, 18 and having been set free from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness. 19 I am using a human analogy because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you offered the parts of yourselves as slaves to impurity, and to greater and greater lawlessness, so now offer them as slaves to righteousness, which results in sanctification. ²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free with regard to righteousness. 21 So what fruit was produced then from the things you are now ashamed of? The outcome of those things is death. 22 But now, since you have been set free from sin and have become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in sanctification—and the outcome is eternal life! ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

AN ILLUSTRATION FROM MARRIAGE

Since I am speaking to those who know the law, brothers and sisters, don't you know that the law rules over someone as long as he lives? ² For example, a married woman is legally bound to her husband while he lives. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law regarding the husband. ³ So then, if she is married to another man while her husband is living, she will be called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law. Then, if she is married to another man, she is not an adulteress.

⁴Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also were put to death in relation to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another. You belong to him who

was raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. ⁵ For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions aroused through the law were working in us ⁵ to bear fruit for death. ⁶ But now we have been released from the law, since we have died to what held us, so that we may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the law.

SIN'S USE OF THE LAW

⁷What should we say then? Is the law sin? Absolutely not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin if it were not for the law. For example, I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, Do not covet. ⁶ And sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind. For apart from the law sin is dead. 9 Once I was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life again 10 and I died. The commandment that was meant for life resulted in death for me. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. 12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. 13 Therefore, did what is good become death to me? Absolutely not! On the contrary, sin, in order to be recognized as sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment, sin might become sinful beyond measure.

THE PROBLEM OF SIN IN US

¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷ So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the

A6:16 Lit that to righteousness 17:14 Lit under s	E6:21 Lit what from	yourselves ^B 6:17 uit do you have	7 Or entrusted F 7:5 Lit in our me	^c 6:19 Or your hu embers G7:7 Ex	man nature □ 6:2 20:17 H 7:14 Or	0 Lit free to unspiritual

desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. 19 For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one that does it, but it is the sin that lives in me. 21 So I discover this law: A When I want to do what is good, B evil is present with me. ²² For in my inner self^c I delight in God's law, 23 but I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself am serving the law of God. but with my flesh, the law of sin.

THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT

Therefore, there is now no condemna- tion for those in Christ Jesus,^{E 2} because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you^F free from the law of sin and death. 3 What the law could not do since it was weakened by the flesh. God did. He condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, 4 in order that the law's requirement would be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit. 6 Now the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it is unable to do so. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. ¹⁰ Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through his Spirit who lives in you.

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S MINISTRIES

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, ¹³ because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba," Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, ¹⁷ and if children, also heirs — heirs of God and coheirs with Christ — if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

FROM GROANS TO GLORY

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility - not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in the hope ²¹ that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. ²³Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ Now in

^7:21 Or principle \$7:21 Or I find with respect to the law that when I want to do good \$7:22 Lit inner man \$\times 7:23 Lit my members \$\in \times 1\$ Other mss add who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit \$\in \times 2\$ Other mss read me \$\in \times 3\$:3 Or for sin \$\text{H8:10 Or spirit}\$ \$\in \times 18:10 Or your spirit is alive \$\in \times 18:11 Other mss read because of \$\in \times 15\$ Aramaic for father	se

Spirit-Minded

ROMANS 8:5-8

I went through a season in life where I felt spiritually and emotionally stuck. God began dealing with my heart about some areas in my life that were holding me back. At the time, God had placed a mothering mentor in my life and we became very close. As the trust grew between us, she became a vital part of my healing journey. She would send me Scriptures, and we would talk through things and then end our time with prayer. Many times my mentor would give me a book.

The first book she gave me was *Boundaries*. It didn't take her long at all to pick up on the fact that I was a firstborn people-pleaser, without a backbone. After lunch one day, she handed me a book, hugged me, and left quickly. My mouth dropped open when I read the title *Who Switched Off My Brain*. I drove home with the book in the passenger seat and a dazed look on my face. Truth be told, I was stuck emotionally and dealing with the same things over and over again because I had become a toxic thinker. I didn't just have thoughts, I had thoughts that bossed me around and held me captive.

In Romans 8:5-6 it says, "For those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit. Now the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace."

My mind-set was my biggest setback. How could I walk in the freedom of God when my thoughts imprisoned me? It was time for me to figure out how to switch on my brain. The only way we can do this is by reading the Word and taking thoughts captive, instead of the other way around.

The biggest indicator of where we are spiritually is the words that come out of our mouths and the thoughts that fill our head. In this passage, Paul shows us that holiness is not only in words and deeds, but also in the thoughts that fill our heads. Life and peace are the outflow of our souls when we are spiritually minded. When lies or toxic thoughts surface in our hearts, we can trust God to help us find the truth in His Word and trust Him over the feelings in our hearts.

Have you felt like your thought-life is taking you down toxic trails? Are you dwelling on the negative things in your life instead of focusing on the blessings and promises of God?

If you are weary from the perpetual war zone in your head, you can make progress in this area by being honest with God and yourself. Life and peace will be the ultimate reward.

Imperfect Hospitality

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1832 Author Index, page 1846 this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

²⁶ In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us^A with unspoken groanings. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸ We know that all things work together⁸ for the good^c of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.

THE BELIEVER'S TRIUMPH

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He did not even spare his own Son but offered him up for us all. How will he not also with him grant us everything? ³³ Who can bring an accusation against God's elect? God is the one who justifies. ³⁴ Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

Because of you
we are being put to death
all day long;
we are counted as sheep
to be slaughtered.

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For

I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF CHRIST

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience testifies to me through the Holy Spirit[®]— ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off[®] from Christ for the benefit of my brothers and sisters, my own flesh and blood. ⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the promises. ⁵ The ancestors are theirs, and from them, by physical descent, ⁶ came the Christ, who is God over all, praised forever. ⁸ Amen.

GOD'S GRACIOUS ELECTION OF ISRAEL

6 Now it is not as though the word of God has failed, because not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Neither are all of Abraham's children his descendants. On the contrary, your offspring will be traced through Isaac. 8 That is, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but the children of the promise are considered to be the offspring. 9 For this is the statement of the promise: At this time I will come, and Sarah will have a son.™ ¹⁰ And not only that, but Rebekah conceived children through one man, our father Isaac. 11 For though her sons had not been born yet or done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to election might stand — ¹² not from works but from the one who calls -she was told. The older will serve the younger. N 13 As it is written: I have loved Jacob. but I have hated Esau.

^8:26 Some mss omit for us \$8:28 Other mss read that God works together in all things \$^8:28 The ultimate good \$^8:36 Ps 44:22 \$^9:1 Or testifying with me by the Holy Spirit \$^9:3 Lit to be anathema \$^9:5 Lit them, according to the flesh \$^9:5 Or the Messiah, the one who is over all, the God who is blessed forever, or Messiah. God, who is over all, be blessed forever \$^19:7 Lit seed \$^9:7 Lit called \$^9:7 Gn 21:12 \$^19:8 Lit children of the flesh \$^9:9 Gn 18:10,14 \$^19:12 Gn 25:23 \$^13 Mal 1:2-3\$	
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In All These Things

ROMANS 8:37-39

Have you ever had one of those days? No, I don't mean the bad kind. I mean the kind of day where you wake up on the right side of the bed and everything goes right? Somehow, miraculously, you're living a charmed life on easy street? All the lights are green on the way to work. You get a raise or a promotion or a pat on the back. Your daughter gets called to the principal's office—for a special award. The new puppy pees outside. The new baby sleeps through the night. You have the perfect hair day.

It does happen. Some days really are awesome. You get to spend time with the people you truly enjoy—or perhaps you get to spend time alone, soaking up the peace and quiet. You accomplish something that's important to you, or maybe you do something for fun—for once.

On those rare occasions, super amazing good days leave me so thankful, so overjoyed, and a little bit nervous. Because I know that, even though every good gift is from God and He has good plans for my life, trouble is most likely around the corner. As the pastor at our old church used to say, "If you haven't faced this particular problem, buckle up."

I'm not sure this looming fear of what's around the bend is a good approach to life in general. But this not-counting-chickens-before-they-hatch thing has made me wonder about how I view the more challenging times. When life gets hard, when easy street is a distant memory, when nothing goes right at all, do I treat those seasons as temporary the way I do my good days?

When the lights are red and I get a speeding ticket, when the puppy chews on my new shoes, when the baby has a terrible rash, when my daughter brings home a note for talking back in class, do I think to myself, *Buckle up*, *because this is when things get really good?*

Most often, I don't. I get bogged down in the everyday and the difficult, and I forget. I forget about God's plans for good in my life. I focus on words like, "Ugh! Not again!" or "That's not fair!" or "Why me?" and I fail to pull up truth and encouragement like, "And if our God is for us, then who could ever stop us?"

But that's it. God is for us. And nothing—no bad day, no rough week, no hard season—can stop that. Nothing! No Debbie Downer reaction, no loss of hope, no belief that blessings are fleeting while problems are forever will make God's love any less real or any less true. He is for us. He loves us. Not even my attitude or outlook can change that. I pray that today you rest in this truth. Nothing can separate you from God's love.

Daily Grace
Devotional Reading Plan, page 1828
Author Index, page 1848

GOD'S SELECTION IS JUST

¹⁴What should we say then? Is there injustice with God? Absolutely not! ¹⁵For he tells Moses, I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ^{A 16} So then, it does not depend on human will or effort but on God who shows mercy. ¹⁷For the Scripture tells Pharaoh, I raised you up for this reason so that I may display my power in you and that my name may be proclaimed in the whole earth. ^{B 18} So then, he has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

¹⁹ You will say to me, therefore, "Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" 20 But who are you, a mere man, to talk back to God? Will what is formed say to the one who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" 21 Or has the potter no right over the clay, to make from the same lump one piece of pottery for honor and another for dishonor? 22 And what if God, wanting to display his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much patience objects of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And what if he did this to make known the riches of his glory on objects of mercy that he prepared beforehand for glory — ²⁴ on us, the ones he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? 25 As it also says in Hosea,

I will call Not My People,
My People,
and she who is Unloved, Beloved.

And it will be in the place where
they were told,
you are not my people,
there they will be called sons
of the living God.

Though the number of Israelites
is like the sand of the sea,

only the remnant will be saved;

since the Lord will execute his sentence completely and decisively on the earth.⁵⁰

²⁹ And just as Isaiah predicted: If the Lord of Hosts¹¹ had not left us offspring, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah.

ISRAEL'S PRESENT STATE

³⁰ What should we say then? Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained righteousness — namely the righteousness that comes from faith. ³¹ But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not achieved the righteousness of the law. ³² Why is that? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were by works. ⁸ They stumbled over the stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written,

Look, I am putting a stone in Zion to stumble over and a rock to trip over, and the one who believes on him will not be put to shame.

RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH ALONE

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation. I can testify about them that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Since they are ignorant of the righteousness of God and attempted to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes, since Moses writes about the righteousness that is from the law: The one who does these things will live by them.

6 But the righteousness that comes from faith speaks like this: Do not say in your

9:15 Ex 33:19 *9:17 Ex 9:16 *9:25 Or he *9:25 Hs 2:23 *9:26 Hs 1:10 *9:28 Or land *9:27-28 Is 10:22-23; 28:22; Hs 1:10 *9:29 Gk Sabaoth; or the Lord of Armies *19:29 Is 1:9 *19:31 Other mss read the law for righteousness 9:32 Other mss add of the law *19:33 Is 8:14; 28:16 **10:1 Other mss read God for Israel **10:4 Or goal **110:5 Lv 18:5

heart. "Who will go up to heaven?" A that is. to bring Christ down ⁷ or, "Who will go down into the abyss?" that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. 8 On the contrary, what does it say? The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. This is the message of faith that we proclaim: 9 If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame, o ¹² since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord of all richly blesses all who call on him. 13 For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.[□]

ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF THE MESSAGE

14 How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful? are the feet of those who bring good news. 16 But not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our message? 17 So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ. 18 But I ask, "Did they not hear?" Yes, they did:

Their voice has gone out to the whole earth, and their words to the ends of the world.

¹⁹ But I ask, "Did Israel not understand? " First, Moses said.

I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that lacks understanding." And Isaiah says boldly, I was found by those who were not looking for me; I revealed myself to those who were not asking

 21 But to Israel he says, All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and defiant people.^M

ISRAEL'S REJECTION NOT TOTAL

for me.

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? Absolutely not! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Or don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah — how he pleads with God against Israel? 3 Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars. I am the only one left, and they are trying to take my life! 4 But what was God's answer to him? I have left seven thousand for myself who have not bowed down to Baal. 5 In the same way, then, there is also at the present time a remnant chosen by grace. 6 Now if by grace, then it is not by works: otherwise grace ceases to be grace.

⁷What then? Israel did not find what it was looking for, but the elect did find it. The rest were hardened, ⁸ as it is written,

God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear, to this day.

⁹ And David says,

Let their table become a snare and a trap,

a pitfall and a retribution to them.

Let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and their backs be bent continually.

10:6 Dt 9:4; 30:12 **10:7 Dt 30:13 ** 410:8 Dt 30:14 *10:11 Is 28:16 ***10:13 Dt 32 ***10:15 Dt welcome, or time **10:15 Is 52:7; Nah 1:15 ***10:16 Is 53:1 ***10:17 Other mss read God ***10:18 Ps 19:4 ***10:19 Dt 32:21 ***10:20 Is 65:1 ***M10:21 Is 65:2 ***11:3 1Kg 19:10,14 ***011:4 1Kg 19:18 ***P11:6 Other mss add But if of works it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. ***011:8 Dt 29:4; Is 29:10 ***11:9-10 Ps 69:22-23	∍ly
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ISRAEL'S REJECTION NOT FINAL

¹¹ I ask, then, have they stumbled so as to fall? Absolutely not! On the contrary, by their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel jealous. ¹² Now if their transgression brings riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fullness bring!

¹³ Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Insofar as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if I might somehow make my own people⁴ jealous and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection brings reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? ¹⁶ Now if the firstfruits are holy, so is the whole batch. And if the root is holy, so are the branches.

¹⁷ Now if some of the branches were broken off, and you, though a wild olive branch, were grafted in among them and have come to share in the rich root[®] of the cultivated olive tree, 18 do not boast that you are better than those branches. But if you do boast - you do not sustain the root, but the root sustains vou. 19 Then vou will say. "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ True enough; they were broken off because of unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but beware, c 21 because if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. 22 Therefore, consider God's kindness and severity: severity toward those who have fallen but God's kindness toward vou - if vou remain in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. 23 And even they, if they do not remain in unbelief, will be grafted in, because God has the power to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut off from your native wild olive tree and against nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these - the natural branches — be grafted into their own olive tree?

²⁵I don't want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you will not be conceited: A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

The Deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

And this will be my covenant with them^E

when I take away their sins.

²⁸ Regarding the gospel, they are enemies for your advantage, but regarding election, they are loved because of the patriarchs, ²⁹ since God's gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable. ³⁰ As you once disobeyed God but now have received mercy through their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now disobeyed, resulting in mercy to you, so that they also may now receive mercy. ³² For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may have mercy on all.

A HYMN OF PRAISE

- Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways!
- For who has known the mind of the Lord?
 - Or who has been his counselor?
- And who has ever given to God, that he should be repaid?
- For from him and through him and to him are all things.To him be the glory forever. Amen.

A LIVING SACRIFICE

12 Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true

E11:26-27 Is 59:20-21 111:34-35 Jb 41:11; Is	G11:29 Or are no	ot taken back	111:31 Other mss on	nit now

A11:14 Lit flesh B11:17 Other mss read the root and the richness C11:20 Lit fear D11:26 Or And then all

Choosing to Thrive

ROMANS 12:2

For the first ten years of my faith journey, my understanding of the Bible was dependent on Sunday school classes and small group studies. My prayer time was more like leaving a text message with God when I urgently needed something. All that changed when one of my best friends called me out on my commitment to God. She said, "I'm concerned that God is nothing more than an item on your to-do list. If you really want to grow in your faith, you need to give Him your time, not just your demands."

She was right. Like a clumsy toddler learning how to walk, I began a habit of meeting with God each day. As soon as my daughters went down for their afternoon nap, I headed for the couch and read my Bible—closing my eyes to the laundry, dishwasher, and emails beckoning my attention. Within months, I could see fruit from the dedication of this time, and I felt closer to the Lord.

Over the next few years, I moved my quiet time to the mornings and committed to reading the whole Bible. It took three grace-marked years. Now when I look upon that worn-down Bible, I feel the warmth of God's love and mercy, knowing it was His sustaining power that enabled me to accomplish such a feat as a young mom nursing her twins and chasing them through their toddler years.

I remember dreaming of the day when all the kids would head off to school and I would finally have uninterrupted, unrushed hours with the Lord. If only. Instead of oodles of time, I came upon oodles of demands on my time. When all my children finally entered school, and I found myself finally alone, I filled my schedule to the brim. Like a racehorse let out of the gates, I began to feel like I must sprint through each minute, especially if I was going to meet the "must do" tasks.

Yes, I was committed to giving God a portion of my time, but my heart was numbing out. God ended up back on my checklist of things to do each day, and I could sense the damage to my spiritual life. Even though I spent one or two mornings a week with God, it wasn't enough. I was feeling more and more parched. I knew I needed more than what I was getting—and giving—to God.

I was desperate for change and remembered what my friend once challenged me to do—to get into the Word. I want to be that friend for you. In Romans 12, Paul encourages us to renew our minds. We do this through time in God's Word. I've learned the hard way what can happen when I neglect to spend time each day with Him. As I steep myself in Scripture, I see God move in my life. I go from parched to refreshed, from despairing to humbly redirected, from striving to thriving.

And so can you.

Second Chances

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1834 Author Index, page 1845 worship. A 2 Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

MANY GIFTS BUT ONE BODY

³ For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. 4 Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, 5 in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. ⁶ According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; 7 if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; 8 if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

⁹Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil: cling to what is good. 10 Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. 13 Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. ¹⁸ If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, **Vengeance belongs to me**; **I will repay**, says the Lord. ²⁰ But

If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.^E

²¹Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.

A CHRISTIAN'S DUTIES TO THE STATE

Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God. 2So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. 4 For it is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. 5 Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience. ⁶ And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's servants, continually attending to these tasks. 7 Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those vou owe honor.

LOVE, OUR PRIMARY DUTY

⁸ Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, Do not commit adultery; do not murder;

A12:1 Or your reasonable service F13:6 Lit to this very thing	^B 12:6 Or the, also in v. 19	^c 12:11 Or in spirit	12:19 Dt 32:35	E12:20 Pr 25:21-22

Always Be Eager

ROMANS 12:13

After my mother-in-law passed away, I wanted to be alone. My only desire was to sit in my room wearing my gray sweatpants and cry. I did do that quite a bit, but I was forced out into the open by the guests we kept having day after day. A wise friend came over early on and put easy-to-serve groceries in our fridge—sliced meats, cheese, and crackers. At first I thought this strange, having seen casserole after casserole after my grandpa's passing when I was younger.

But this gift was a gift that kept giving. As more and more people showed up, I found myself out of my room, welcoming people in, and grabbing snacks from the fridge as the Holy Spirit somehow helped me show hospitality and gratitude at a time when I would rather have been moping around like Eeyore all day.

Our Lord knows us and knows what is best for us. We are encouraged to practice hospitality. While we might see entertaining as a burden, with the right spirit it can be a gift that strangely gives back. The house need not be perfect, or the food fancy, but we must have our hearts right—eager to practice hospitality.

While being friendly and generous to receive our guests, we are blessed in a way we could not manufacture through any amount of comfy pajamas or tubs of ice cream. To welcome others is to do the work of God. May we be equipped, ever-ready with salami and cheese in hand, eager to practice hospitality, even in the toughest of times.

"Share with the saints in their needs, pursue hospitality" (Rm 12:13).

What is your attitude toward unexpected guests? Do you find yourself resentful or bothered as your regular schedule is changed? What might it look like to practice radical and creative hospitality the next time someone shows up at your door?

Imperfect Hospitality

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1832 Author Index, page 1845 do not steal; do not covet; and any other commandment, are summed up by this commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.

PUT ON CHRIST

¹¹ Besides this, since you know the time, it is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep, because now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. ¹² The night is nearly over, and the day is near; so let us discard the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and don't make plans to gratify the desires of the flesh.

THE LAW OF LIBERTY

Accept anyone who is weak in faith, but don't argue about disputed matters. ² One person believes he may eat anything, while one who is weak eats only vegetables. ³ One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat, and one who does not eat must not judge one who does, because God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge another's household servant? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And he will stand, because the Lord is able ⁶ to make him stand.

⁵One person judges one day to be more important than another day. Someone else judges every day to be the same. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ Whoever observes the day, observes it for the honor of the Lord. ⁶ Whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; and whoever does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat it, and he gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives for himself, and no one dies

for himself. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ Christ died and returned to life for this: that he might be Lord over both the dead and the living. ¹⁰ But you, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ⁶ ¹¹ For it is written.

As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will give praise to God."

¹²So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

THE LAW OF LOVE

13 Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister. 14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. Still, to someone who considers a thing to be unclean, to that one it is unclean, 15 For if your brother or sister is hurt by what you eat, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy, by what you eat, someone for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore, do not let your good be slandered, 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 Whoever serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God and receives human approval.

¹⁹ So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another. ²⁰ Do not tear down God's work because of food. Everything is clean, but it is wrong to make someone fall by what he eats. ²¹ It is a good thing not to eat meat, or drink wine, or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble. ²² Whatever you believe about these things, keep between yourself and God.

A13:9 Other mss add do not bear false witness B13:9 Ex 20:13-17; Dt 5:17-21 C13:9 Lv 19:18 D13:11 Other mss read for us E14:4 Other mss read For God has the power F14:6 Other mss add but whoever does not observe the day, it is to the Lord that he does not observe it G14:10 Other mss read of Christ H14:11 Is 45:23; 49:18 114:21 Other mss add or offended or weakened	

The Loneliest Star

ROMANS 13:12

Yesterday was the first day of autumn. Our two hemispheres receive the sun's rays equally for a spell—night and day, standing side-by-side, neither one outreaching the other. We call it the equinox. Only it doesn't feel equal to me. The morning is slow in coming, and evening slips down over the horizon too quickly. The sun is stingy with her light, and the days seem to end before we're ready for the dark.

There was a time when people were more in tune with the rhythms of nature, when the sky was their clock and calendar. We see this evidenced in ancient man-made structures such as the Intihuatana Stone at Machu Picchu in Peru. This unassuming stone structure has been shown to precisely date the equinoxes and other celestial events. The shadow the stone casts tracks the journey of the sun across the sky throughout the year.

The night sky, too, announces autumn, with certain constellations moving into prominent view. But also, there rises in the southern sky what some call the "Loneliest Star"—also known as the "Lonely One"—since it's the only bright star in that part of the sky this time of year.

Last night, I went outside and searched the horizon for the brightest star. It did, indeed, look lonely in the broad expanse of the night sky. As I stood under that twinkling canopy, I felt a kinship with the Lonely One. A sweet yearning pulled at my heartstrings as I stood alone among the songs of cicadas and crickets. Sometimes this feeling of emptiness can be big enough to swallow me whole. The urge to fall into that well of darkness is strong at times.

In Romans 13:12, the apostle Paul says, "The night is nearly over and the day is near; so let us discard the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." He's telling us we have a choice to make. Spiritually speaking, in this tired world, it's not yet day and it's not quite night. Both are right here, within our grasp. And even though we may have chosen the way of light, the darkness is still present, clinging to our skin like the damp air of night.

I think the ancient people, with their keen awareness of the rhythms of nature, understood the dueling forces of dark and light much better than we do. I'm trying to notice the rhythms built into this earth more. I study the way of the honeybee, knee deep in the goldenrod. I watch the birds and butterflies shed a new season as they flock southerly. I am earthbound. Still, I make a choice—a choice to see this longing inside of me as something good, something made of light. It is a longing for life the way our good God intended it to be.

Daily Grace

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1828 Author Index, page 1847 Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. ²³ But whoever doubts stands condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith, ^A and everything that is not from faith is sin.

PLEASING OTHERS, NOT OURSELVES

Now we who are strong have an obligation to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, and not to please ourselves. ²Each one of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. ³ For even Christ did not please himself. On the contrary, as it is written. The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. 4 For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures. 5 Now may the God who gives^c endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, according to Christ Jesus, 6 so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with one mind and one voice.

GLORIFYING GOD TOGETHER

⁷ Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted you, to the glory of God. ⁸ For I say that Christ became a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises to the fathers, ⁹ and so that Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles,

and I will sing praise to your name.¹⁰ Again it says, Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people!¹¹ And again,

Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples praise him!

12 And again, Isaiah says,

The root of Jesse will appear, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; the Gentiles will hope in him. ¹³ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

FROM JERUSALEM TO ILLYRICUM

¹⁴My brothers and sisters, I myself am convinced about you that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. 15 Nevertheless, I have written to remind you more boldly on some points because of the grace given me by God 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving as a priest of the gospel of God. My purpose is that the Gentiles may be an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷ Therefore I have reason to boast in Christ Jesus regarding what pertains to God. ¹⁸ For I would not dare say anything except what Christ has accomplished through me by word and deed for the obedience of the Gentiles. 19 by the power of miraculous signs and wonders, and by the power of God's Spirit. As a result, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum. 20 My aim is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, so that I will not build on someone else's foundation. ²¹ but, as it is written.

Those who were not told about him will see,

and those who have not heard will understand.

PAUL'S TRAVEL PLANS

²²That is why I have been prevented many times from coming to you. ²³ But now I no longer have any work to do in these regions, ¹ and I have strongly desired for many years to come to you ²⁴ whenever I travel to Spain. ^M For I hope to see you when I pass through and to be assisted by you for my journey there, once I have first enjoyed your company for a

*14:23 Or conviction *15:3 Ps 69:9 *15:5 Lit God of *15:8 The Jews *15:9 25m 22:50; Ps 18:49 *15:10 Dt 32:43 *15:11 Ps 117:1 *15:12 Is 11:10 *15:15 Other mss add brothers *15:19 A Roman province northwest of Greece on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea *15:21 Is 52:15 *15:23 Lit now, having no longer a place in these parts *15:24 Other mss add I will come to you.



Meet *Phoebe*

A WOMAN OF Gratitude ROMANS 16

Phoebe was a servant of the church in Cenchreae and a benefactor of many, including Paul, who expressed his gratitude for all she had done to help his work of spreading the gospel. Not much is said about Phoebe in Scripture, but it's clear that Paul was thankful for her. After a long discourse to the Romans about their faith, Paul stopped to share his gratitude for his faithful friend. He commended her service as exemplary of the kind of generosity that is so invaluable in the kingdom of God. Paul also asked the Romans to welcome her in a manner worthy of the saints because her work of serving and supporting his ministry was as important as the ministry itself.

while. ²⁵ Right now I am traveling to Jerusalem to serve the saints, ²⁶ because Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷ Yes, they were pleased, and indeed are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister to them in material needs. ²⁸ So when I have finished this and safely delivered the funds^A to them, ^B I will visit you on the way to Spain. ²⁹ I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing^c of Christ.

³⁰ Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in fervent prayers to God on my behalf. ³¹ Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, that my ministry to⁵ Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² and that, by God's will, I may come to you with joy and be refreshed together with you.

 33 May the God of peace be with all of you. Amen.

PAUL'S COMMENDATION OF PHOEBE

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchreae. So you should welcome her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever matter she may require your help. For indeed she has been a benefactor of many—and of me also.

GREETING TO ROMAN CHRISTIANS

³ Give my greetings to Prisca⁺ and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life. Not only do I thank them, but so do all the Gentile churches. ⁵ Greet also the church that meets in their home. Greet my dear friend Epaenetus, who is the first convert of Christ from Asia. ⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for

A15:28 Lit delivered add of the gospel deaconess, or minis H16:5 Other mss rea	P15:31 Lit that my ter, or courier	y service for E1 16:3 Traditionally	16:1 Others inte	rpret this term in	a technical sense:	deacon, or

vou. A 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews^B and fellow prisoners. They are noteworthy in the eyes of the apostles, c and they were also in Christ before me. 8 Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our coworker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. 10 Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. 11 Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew. Greet those who belong to the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. 12 Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who have worked hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, who has worked very hard in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother—and mine. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. 15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send you greetings.

WARNING AGAINST DIVISIVE PEOPLE

¹⁷ Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned. Avoid them, ¹⁸ because such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites.⁸ They deceive the hearts of the

unsuspecting with smooth talk and flattering words.

PAUL'S GRACIOUS CONCLUSION

¹⁹ The report of your obedience has reached everyone. Therefore I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise about what is good, and yet innocent about what is evil. ²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

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

 22 I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. $^{\scriptscriptstyle F}$

²³ Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus greet you.

GLORY TO GOD

²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation about Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept silent for long ages ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic Scriptures, according to the command of the eternal God to advance the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles — ²⁷ to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ — to him be the glory forever! Amen.

^16:6 Other mss read us ⁸ 16:7 Or family members ^C 16:7 Or They are noteworthy among the apostles ^P 16:11 Or family member ^E 16:18 Lit belly ^E 16:22 Or letter in the Lord, greet you ^G 16:23 Some mss include v. 24: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. ^H 16:25-27 Other mss have these vv. at the end of chap. 14 or 15.



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