

ROMANS DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

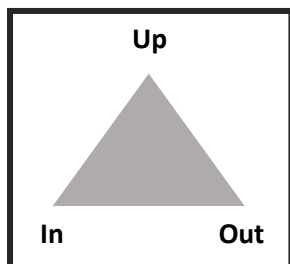
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily *walk in the ways of Jesus*, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus *taught* and *modelled* out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans from Corinth in AD 57, just three years after 16-year-old Nero had ascended to the throne as Emperor of Rome. The political situation in the capital had not yet deteriorated for the Roman Christians; Nero wouldn't begin his persecution of them until after the great Roman fire in AD 64 when he made them scapegoats. Paul, therefore, wrote to a church that was experiencing a time of relative peace, but a church that he felt needed a strong dose of basic gospel doctrine. Paul had not been to Rome when he wrote the letter to the Romans, though he often expressed his passion to go there.

Theologians down through the centuries have labelled this book as one of the clearest and best in the doctrine of salvation. Paul began by discussing that which is most easily observed in the world – the sinfulness of all humanity. He reminds us in chapter 3:23 that “*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*” However, God in His grace offers us justification by faith in His Son, Jesus. When we are justified by God, we receive redemption, or salvation, because Christ's blood covers our sin.

One of the greatest things we will pull out of this book is the truth that the believer's pursuit of God doesn't stop with salvation. We continue to grow in our day-to-day pursuit of knowing God and trying to please Him. We will run across some great words over the next 16 chapters, like *salvation*, *justification*, *adoption* and *sanctification*, to name just a few. But I promise you, you will be inspired and fuelled if you give yourself to the teachings of this great piece of work.

So, buckle in! Grab your Bible, pen, journal, and you might need an extra shot in your coffee!

Love and prayers,
Phil

Read

Romans 1

Live

By the time Paul wrote Romans, he had been a believer for many years. The church at Rome had also been around for a while as Paul says in chapter 15:23 that he had been trying to get to them for “*many years*”. In Corinth, on his way to Jerusalem, he had three months without any pressing duties. He perhaps thought this was a good time to write ahead to Rome, a church he planned to visit after Jerusalem.

The word “*God*” occurs 153 times in the book; an average of once every 46 words – this is more frequently than in any other New Testament book. Dr Allen Ross in Bible.org says of this book... *“It is the most remarkable production of the most remarkable man. It is his heart. It contains his theology, theoretical and practical, for which he lived and died. It gives the clearest and fullest exposition of the doctrines of sin and grace and the best possible solution of the universal dominion of sin and death in the universal redemption by the second Adam.”*

Romans deals with many different themes, but what I love about it is that, first and foremost, it is a book about God. This is why it’s a must read. Think about how many times a day you call out to God as YOUR Father. Interesting, isn’t it?

Pray

Father, first of all, thank You for being so welcoming and wanting of my fellowship. Not only do I have access to Your throne of grace 24/7, it’s You who greet me there. I’m never a bother, never put on hold, never have to take a number and wait. I’ll never meet a tired and frustrated You, because You’re always the Bridegroom who delights in and rejoices over His bride. I’m the one who gets tired and frustrated. I live in a Martha world of many distractions, never-ending demands, and over-stimulation. Father, help me cultivate a Mary heart in a Martha world. My problem isn’t the world I inhabit, but the heart that inhabits me. I make King David’s prayer mine, “*Give me an undivided heart that I may live in awe of Your name*” (Psalm 86:11). In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

There is much I could say about Paul's letter to the church at Rome but I will pull out just a few nuggets for us. Are you waiting for God to drive you to repentance? He doesn't work like that. According to verse 4, it is God's kindness that leads you to repentance. Notice that the Lord does not drive you to repentance. Judas went and hanged himself, being driven by an anguish of remorse because of what he had done in betraying his Lord. The sweetest and best repentance is that which comes not by driving, but by drawing. *"In the New Testament, repentance is not simply negative. It means turning to a new life in Christ, a life of active service to God. It should not be confused with remorse, which is a deep sorrow for sin but lacks the positive note in repentance."* (Morris) The truth is that when we sin, by default we run from God rather than to Him, the right way to move. May His kindness be drawing you today? Run into the arms of a Father who is waiting your return.

Pray

Father, one of the best prayers of repentance is that of David in Psalm 51.

"Generous in love—God, give grace! Huge in mercy—wipe out my bad record. Scrub away my guilt, soak out my sins in your laundry. I know how bad I've been; my sins are staring me down.

You're the One I've violated, and you've seen it all, seen the full extent of my evil. You have all the facts before you; whatever you decide about me is fair. I've been out of step with you for a long time, in the wrong since before I was born. What you're after is truth from the inside out. Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life.

Soak me in your laundry and I'll come out clean, scrub me and I'll have a snow-white life. Tune me in to foot-tapping songs, set these once-broken bones to dancing. Don't look too close for blemishes, give me a clean bill of health. God, make a fresh start in me, shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life. Don't throw me out with the trash, or fail to breathe holiness in me.

Bring me back from grey exile, put a fresh wind in my sails! Give me a job teaching rebels your ways so the lost can find their way home. Commute my death sentence, God, my salvation God, and I'll sing anthems to your life-giving ways. Unbutton my lips, dear God; I'll let loose with your praise." (Psalm 51:1-15 The Message)

In Jesus' strong name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

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Read

Romans 3

Live

In the passage from verses 10 to 16 Paul looks at the human condition from top to bottom. He begins with the head and moves all the way down to the feet. Warren Wiersbe calls this passage, *“An X-ray study of the lost sinner, from head to foot.”* This look at the human condition is kind of depressing and one could think, ‘What’s the point?’ The Apostle Paul wants us to understand our complete inability to save ourselves. It makes me realise my utter dependency on the finished work of Jesus. Both your and my little self-atoning plans fail miserably because the Fall touches every part of man’s being, as our passage today demonstrates. The reason God can find none righteous is because there are none. It isn’t as if there were some hiding and God couldn’t see them. There has never been a truly righteous man apart from Jesus Christ. Give thanks today that we stand on no self-merit but on the completed work of the cross of Christ the solid Rock.

Pray

Father, thank You that it is on Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. I pray that You will not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions. Please think of me according to Your mercy and for Your goodness' sake, O Lord. Lord, I turn from all of those sins that I committed and I ask for Your help in washing the memory and thoughts of that sin completely from my mind. Please restore me to faithful obedience to Your Word, and fill me with Your Holy Spirit anew, so that I may keep Your commands all the days of my life. In the strong and holy name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Paul makes it clear that Abraham's righteousness did not come from his performance of good works, but from his belief in God. It was a righteousness obtained through faith. Remember that righteousness is more than the absence of evil and guilt. When we are saved, God declares us not only innocent, but righteous. A distinction is made between grace and works. The idea of grace stands opposite the principle of works. Grace has to do with receiving the free gift of God; works has to do with us trying to earn it. The longer I live the more I realise that faith is the believer fuel. I need faith to live like my car needs fuel to drive. How easy it is to forget that faith is needed not only for salvation but also for the Christian life to be lived in abundance. I am so glad that where sin abounds, grace much more abounds, aren't you?

Pray

Father, thank You for Your amazing grace. I know You are merciful. I've been taught that You provide grace and mercy in spite of my behaviour and in spite of my sins. You are a good God who comes to those who need You, no matter what. And Lord, I need You now in my life more than ever. I know that I'm not perfect. I know that my sins are not hidden from You. At times, I sin knowing it's a sin. I'm human, Lord, and while that's no excuse, I know You love me despite my human nature. Lord, I need You today to provide for me. I need Your grace in my life to provide strength because I am weak. But in my weakness, You are strong, Father. In Jesus' strong and faithful name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Up to this point in the book of Romans, Paul has convinced us all that the only way of salvation is to be justified by grace through faith. Now he will tell us what the practical benefits of this are, explaining that it is more than an interesting idea. We have peace with God. We have gained access by faith. We stand in grace and we boast in the hope of His glory. And as if that weren't enough, he then tells us that we are justified through Christ's blood and reconciled unto Him. This is an incredible chapter that warrants some praise today. Go on, you know you need to!

Pray

Father, I face temptations every day, and I wish I could say that I always walk away. I cannot do it alone any more. I just can't. I need You to give me the strength and provide me with the guidance to overcome these desires to sin. I need You to give me direction in darker times when I wonder if I can even face the next day. You can move the mountains that block my way in life. You can give to me what I need in my life. Please, Lord, I ask You to come into my life and offer Your grace. I am open to it and ready to accept it. Allow my heart to always be focused on You and make my desire to live for You.

Lord, I know from this Scripture today that Your grace is bestowed no matter what, so I just ask for it today. I may not always be perfect, but I strive to be better. Help me be better. Help me see the clear, narrow path in front of me so I can walk in Your ways and in Your glory. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Paul introduced the idea that “*where sin abounded, grace abounded much more*” (Romans 5:20). Now he wonders if someone might take this truth to imply that it doesn’t matter if a Christian lives a life of sin because God will always overcome greater sin with greater grace. From a purely natural or secular viewpoint, grace is *dangerous*. This is why many people don’t really teach or believe in grace and instead emphasise living by law; they believe that if you tell people that God saves and accepts them apart from what they deserve, then they will have no motivation to be obedient. For Paul, the idea that anyone might continue in sin that grace may abound is unthinkable. “*Certainly not*” is a strong phrase. It might also be translated, “*Perish the thought!*” or “*Away with the notion!*” How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Paul establishes an important principle. When we are born again, when we have believed on Jesus for our salvation, our relationship with sin is permanently changed. We have died to sin. Therefore, if we have died to sin, then we should not live any longer in it. It simply isn’t fitting to live in something you have died to. This is incredible teaching.

Pray

Father, thank You for all You do in my life. I know that I am an imperfect person living in imperfect times, but Lord, some of us need Your grace in a mighty way. Please protect me against the things that pull me away from You. Let me live in You as You desire. Give me the strength during this time in my life. Let Your desires be my desires.

Father, please provide Your grace through protection from the harm that seems to come to me physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Please give me the strength to get through each day, because You are my Jehovah Jireh, the Lord my provider.

Father, I ask that You cover me in grace for healing and for direction. Let me be more like You by providing unconditional love – something I so need in my life. Give me a path and let me see clearly what needs to be done. I ask You to provide as You always do, to move the mountains of doubt and pain that fill my life at times. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Paul makes the point that death ends all obligations and contracts. A wife is no longer bound to her husband if he dies because death ends that contract. Our death with Jesus sets us free from the law. Paul carefully explains that we died with Jesus and we also rose with Him. However, we are free from the law not so we can live unto ourselves; we are free so we can be 'married' to Jesus and bear fruit to God. How's that 'marriage' going in your life today?

Pray

Father, I know that I have broken Your laws and my sins have separated me from You. I am truly sorry for hurting You and I ask for the Holy Spirit to empower me to overcome my past and steer my heart toward You.

Thank You, Jesus, for dying for my sins, for rising from the dead. You're alive and You hear my every prayer. You rule and reign in my heart and I love Your Holy Spirit who pumps in my veins. I am dedicated to do Your will for the rest of my life. In Your strong name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

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Live

What a beautiful chapter. It starts with no condemnation, ends with no separation, and in between there is no defeat. If you needed encouragement in the Scripture then this is a chapter of chapters. The simple declaration of no condemnation comes to those who are in Christ Jesus. Since the Father does not condemn Jesus, neither can He condemn those who are in Him. They are not condemned, they will not be condemned, and they cannot be condemned.

Spurgeon speaks of the confidence great men and women of God had in God's love in ages past: *"They did not speak of Christ's love as though it were a myth to be respected, a tradition to be revered; they viewed it as a blessed reality, and they cast their whole confidence upon it, being persuaded that it would bear them up as upon eagles' wings, and carry them all their days; resting assured that it would be to them a foundation of rock, against which the waves might beat, and the winds blow, but their soul's habitation would stand securely if founded upon it."* Wow.

Pray

Father, help me to forgive myself and to look straight ahead with honest confidence, not hanging my head in shame. When my past failures come to mind, instead of coming back and begging You again to forgive me, help me to remember that I've already been forgiven. I just need to forgive myself. Every time that memory returns, instead of me feeling guilty, Lord, I will feel grateful. Let that memory remind me that You are a God of forgiveness and grace, and that I am forgiven. When that memory comes to my mind, let it cause me to praise You and say, 'What a great God You are! You've forgiven me. I'm a trophy of Your grace.' In Jesus' strong and astounding name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In Romans chapters 1-8, Paul thoroughly convinced us about man's need and God's glorious provision in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Now, in chapters 9-11, Paul deals with the problem associated with the condition of Israel. What does it mean that Israel has missed its Messiah? What does this say about God? What does it say about Israel? What does it say about our present position in God? The ultimate question goes something like this: 'How can I be secure in God's love and salvation when Israel was once loved and saved but now seems to be rejected and cursed? Will God also reject and curse me one day?' Rejoice today, oh chosen one, rejoice.

Pray

Father, I want to walk in Your grace. I want to take off the yoke of guilt and put on the yoke of grace today. Help me to eliminate the negative self-talk in my life. I know now that when I put myself down, I am really questioning You because You made me the way I am, the way I look, with the talents and abilities I have and the ones I don't have. You made me just to be me.

Lord, help me to relax in Your grace, to realise that You don't expect perfection. You know what I'm made of. There is no condemnation in Christ. You'll never love me any more and never love me any less because of what I do. Help me to quit trying to please everybody. I know it's an impossible task and it only causes anxiety in my life. Instead, let me focus only on doing Your will and knowing if it's Your plan and purpose for my life.

Thank You, Father, that through Your grace I can get out of the rat race of unresolved guilt and unrealistic expectations – those things that push me to do more. Instead, may I relax and do the things that really count. I pray this in Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

“Zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” is a perfect description of Paul himself before his conversion. Paul was a notorious persecutor of Christians before Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus. It’s remarkable that Paul found something good to say about the Jewish people who persecuted him so mercilessly. Their lack of knowledge is reflected in the fact that they are ignorant of God’s righteousness and they want to establish their own righteousness. People cannot come to Jesus without the right information about the gospel, but information alone is not enough to save anyone. There must be a radical submission to the righteousness of God, putting away our own righteousness. Again, we cannot neglect the emphasis on personal responsibility. All Paul’s teaching of God’s election and right to sovereign choice does not diminish man’s responsibility.

Pray

Father, thank You for not despising my weaknesses and for never showing me disgust, wondering when I’m finally going to ‘get it’. Thank You for always being compassionate, forbearing, and patient with me.

Father, by Your Holy Spirit, please give me the same gift You gave Paul. In my heart of hearts, help me be certain that the throne of heaven is presently occupied by You – my mighty and merciful Abba Father. Sovereignty is happening all the time. Nothing takes You by surprise and nothing catches You off guard. Help me be constantly reminded of my own responsibility to make right decisions and choose right pathways. In Jesus’ strong and loving name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The evidence that God has not cast away His people is found in Paul himself. Whenever we want evidence of God's work, we could, and should, look to our own life first. This is what Paul did and what we should do. We often think that God needs a lot of people to do a great work, but He often works through a small group or through a group that starts out small. Even though not many Jews in Paul's day embraced Jesus as Messiah, a remnant did and God used that small group in a big way. Sometimes we think our little bit couldn't make much of a difference, but little with God can often be a lot. Think of your five loaves and two fish that you could place into HIS hands today.

Pray

Father, Thank You for the gospel. Thank You that though each of us matters, Jesus is the point. Thank You for rescuing me from dreams that didn't include You, religion that didn't require Jesus, and from anything that kept me allergic to grace. Thank You for the freedom I now enjoy in Christ. Thank You for promising to complete the good work You began in me.

Now that You've freed me from all guilt and condemnation, free me for more engagement and serving in my community. Help me place my little into Your hands and watch it become much. In Jesus' strong and powerful name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

“Present your bodies” means that God wants YOU, not just your work. You may do all kinds of work for God yet never give Him yourself. The previous appeal to the will – *“I beseech you”* – means that the will is to be the master over the body. The thinking of our age says that our body tells the will what to do, but the Bible says that our will must bring the body as a living sacrifice to God. The body is a wonderful servant but a terrible master. Keeping it at God’s altar as a living sacrifice keeps the body where it should be. In Paul’s day, a Greek person would never think of presenting their body to God. They thought that the body was so unspiritual that God was unconcerned about it. Paul shows here that God is concerned about our bodies. 1 Corinthians 6:20 reminds us that God has bought our bodies with a price.

Pray

Father, the current aches and pains in my body give me an unavoidable opportunity to either gripe or worship. And since I know where my griping usually takes me, I think I’ll stay with worshipping You. Thank You that this chapter tells me how You are interested in my body. I’ve learned the hard way that if I’m unwilling to grieve my losses then my compassion for others will be significantly stunted. I don’t like pain, but if it tunes my heart to care for others, grant me grace, Father, to rejoice in suffering. That being said, I also rejoice in the hope of the new body I will receive when Jesus returns. My healing will be complete.

Father, thank You that Jesus not only secured the perfection of my spirit, but also the resurrection of my body. Even as Jesus was raised, so shall I be. I may groan now, but I will be whole forever, praise Your name! These *“light and momentary troubles”* are incredibly inconvenient and bothersome, but my rejoicing will be eternal. In Jesus’ strong and triumphant name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Paul's idea is that Christians should be the best citizens of all. Even though they are loyal to God before they are loyal to the government, Christians are good citizens because they are honest, give no trouble to the state, pay their taxes, and – most importantly – pray for the state and the rulers. I read this today, *“Remember your Saviour suffered under Pontius Pilate, one of the worst Roman governors Judea ever had; and Paul under Nero, the worst Roman Emperor. And neither our Lord nor His Apostle denied or reviled the ‘authority!’”* (Newell). Since governments have authority from God, we are bound to obey them – unless, of course, they order us to do something in contradiction to God's law; then, we are commanded to obey God before man (Acts 4:19). Who could you pray for in government today?

Pray

Father, thank You for a morning that promises new mercies in light of the Day of no evil. As surely as the waters cover the sea, so the knowledge of Your glory will cover the earth one Day, according to Habakkuk 2:14. When I look at many of today's politicians, leaders and their systems, it's hard to imagine a world of perfect peace and *'shalom'*, but that's what You promise, Father, through the finished work of Jesus. May this hope encourage me to engage, not retreat; show up, not disappear; be filled with missional hope and neighbourly love as I seek first Your kingdom and long for that Day. I pray, with desires and longings, in Jesus' strong name. Amen.

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“Receive the one who is weak in the faith.” These are words to take seriously. Paul warns us not to make spiritual maturity a requirement for fellowship. We should distinguish between someone who is weak and someone who is rebellious. I think it’s quite funny that the subject of vegetarianism was a debate in the Rome of Paul’s day. In Paul’s mind, the weak brother is the stricter one. It wasn’t that they were weaker in their Christian life because of what they ate or didn’t eat; they were weaker because of their legalistic attitudes and lack of love towards others. Let us try and not be legalistic as it leads to being judgmental.

Pray

Father, I’m so thankful for the friends You’ve woven into the fabric of my life – the brothers and sisters who pursue me. Thank You for those who reach out to bear my burdens, who comfort me when I’m down. I can struggle at times to be emotionally honest in the presence of others, but thank You for friends who know how to encourage me with their presence and words, those who remind me of the gospel and help me get a better perspective on disappointments and hurts. Thank You for those who know how to confront me and call me out from self-pity and weak faith to strong faith and hope. Make me the same kind of friend to them. Help me to be better at giving my full attention to people rather than quick answers. In Jesus’ kind and strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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What am I going to do about it?

Live

Paul points the way to true happiness and fulfilment in life – get your eyes off yourself, start building up others and you will find yourself built up. Let each of us please his neighbour. It is a simple yet challenging call to put our neighbour first. All too often Christians find it easier to tear each other down instead of building each other up. This is a classic strategy of Satan against the church that must be resisted. Who could you call and encourage today?

Pray

Father, it is so easy to go down the route of self-dependency. It seems my default mode is to turn my eyes inward and look only to my own issues, wants, and moans. I'm stirred today by the Apostle Paul to look out for others. He writes in other places about this subject, like in Philippians 2:3-4 *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."*

So, Father, help me today to be more considerate, more loving, and more thoughtful. All of these things make me a whole lot more spiritual, which makes me more like You. In Jesus' strong and sacrificial name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In this final chapter of Paul's letter to the church at Rome, he comes up with a list of names – women, married couples, politicians, business people, etc. Paul certainly knew the value of what women could do in serving the church. Apparently, Phoebe was on her way to Rome and was probably entrusted with this precious letter. Spurgeon says of Priscilla and Aquila: *"When two loving hearts pull together they accomplish wonders."* Paul finds something wonderful to say about almost every one of the rest of these names, noting their labour, his special regard for them as he calls them *"beloved"*, and their standing in the Lord – *"approved in Christ"*, *"in the Lord"*, *"chosen in the Lord"*. Beautiful recommendations. How do you speak of your brothers and sisters in Christ to others?

Pray

Father, in full view of the instability of world politics and the complexities of human relationships, the unpredictability of the world economy and the ever-pressing needs that stress me, this I can say without flinching or doubting, *"Your love, O Lord, endures forever."* The most certain, stable, dependable, and inexhaustible reality in my life is Your love. I could never have deserved it or earned it, and now I can never lose it or reduce it. You love all of Your children as much as You love Your only Son, Jesus, and there's nothing we can really do about it but enjoy it and rely on it. Father, You fill my life with good things and with good people; help me to honour You by honouring others. In Jesus' strong and loving name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

