



DAILY
DEVOTIONAL
NEW TESTAMENT



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DEVOTIONAL
NEW TESTAMENT

English Standard Version



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ESV Daily Devotional New Testament: Through the New Testament in a Year

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FOREWORD

“Give yourself to reading, exhortation, and teaching. Think on the things contained in this book. May what you learn be evident to all. Apply these things carefully to yourself and teach them to others, for in so doing you will save yourself and those who hear you.”

With these words the Book of Common Prayer affirms the absolute necessity and sufficiency of the Bible in fulfilling the responsibilities of pastoral ministry.

Although more than three centuries have elapsed since those words were written, this exhortation is arguably more needed than ever. There is a glaring lack of Bible knowledge—not only in the general population but also among those who regularly attend church. Neglecting proper biblical nourishment spoils the spiritual appetite, and the result is theological malnutrition.

If we are to avoid this condition we must have Bible-teaching pastors and Bible-reading congregations—men and women whose ready reception of the preaching is more than matched by their daily examination of Scripture.

One of the reasons for the renewed interest in the Puritans is surely because they are an example to us in this area. It is impossible to explain the strength of their character and the impact of their lives apart from their solid experiential grasp of biblical truth. Their delight was in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditated day and night. We would do well to follow such an example.

There are all kinds of devotional aids for which we have reason to be thankful. However, nothing can or should take the place of the regular, systematic reading of the Bible, which contains everything necessary for salvation. So let me commend this volume as a vital help in learning and living as a Christian.

ALISTAIR BEGG

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The *Daily Devotional New Testament* is a new edition of the ESV Bible that has been prepared specially for young and growing believers. The goal is to help Christians become familiar with the central message of the Bible through daily reading of the New Testament.

By reading the daily selections in this edition, you will be taken through the entire New Testament in one year. Each day provides two readings from the New Testament—one from the first half of the New Testament (Matthew through Acts), and one from the second half (Romans through Revelation). Following each Bible reading is a “Reflection” that guides the reader in considering the meaning of the passage—showing especially how each passage relates to Jesus Christ and the gospel message that forms the heart of the biblical story line. Along with the Bible readings and Reflections, each day concludes with a verse or two from the Psalms that ties thematically into the day’s Bible reading, as well as a “Thought for Prayer” to guide personal prayer and meditation.

In these ways you will read through the New Testament during the year—shepherded along in your reading by wise reflections and encouragements regarding God’s grace and his great purposes for good in the world and in your own life. You can start at any time during the year. And in 15 minutes or so a day, one year later, you will have read the whole New Testament.

We trust that the Lord will draw near to you as you draw near to him through your time in his Word.

ABOUT THE ESV

The Bible

The words of the Bible are the very words of God our Creator speaking to us. They are completely truthful;¹ they are pure;² they are powerful;³ and they are wise and righteous.⁴ We should read these words with reverence and awe,⁵ and with joy and delight.⁶ Through these words God gives us eternal life,⁷ and daily nourishes our spiritual lives.⁸

The ESV Translation

The English Standard Version® (ESV®) stands in the classic stream of English Bible translations that goes back nearly five centuries. In this stream, accurate faithfulness to the original text is combined with simplicity, beauty, and dignity of expression. Our goal has been to carry forward this legacy for a new century.

The ESV is an “essentially literal” translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the meaning and structure of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer. We have sought to be “as literal as possible” while maintaining clear expression and literary excellence. Therefore the ESV is well suited for both personal reading and church ministry, for devotional reflection and serious study, and for Scripture memorization.

The ESV Publishing Team

The ESV publishing team includes more than a hundred people. The fourteen-member Translation Oversight Committee has benefited from the work of fifty biblical experts serving as Translation Review Scholars and from the comments of the more than fifty members of the Advisory Council. This international team from many denominations shares a common commitment to the truth of God’s Word and to historic Christian orthodoxy.

To God’s Honor and Praise

We know that no Bible translation is perfect or final; but we also know that God uses imperfect and inadequate things to his honor and praise. So to God the

¹ Ps. 119:160; Prov. 30:5; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18 ² Ps. 12:6 ³ Jer. 23:29; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:23 ⁴ Ps. 19:7–11 ⁵ Deut. 28:58; Ps. 119:74; Isa. 66:2 ⁶ Ps. 19:7–11; 119:14, 97, 103; Jer. 15:16 ⁷ John 6:68; 1 Pet. 1:23 ⁸ Deut. 32:46; Matt. 4:4

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and to his people—we offer what we have done, with our prayers that it may prove useful, with gratitude for much help given, and with ongoing wonder that our God should ever have entrusted to us so momentous a task.

Soli Deo Gloria!—To God alone be the glory!

The Translation Oversight Committee

THE NEW TESTAMENT

JANUARY 1

Matthew 1:1–17

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. ²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

¹⁷So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

REFLECTION

Matthew begins his book with a genealogy to show that Jesus continues the Old Testament story of God's grace to his disobedient people. To show this connection, the "family tree" begins and ends with three great names in Israelite history: Abraham, David, and Jesus (1:1, 17).

The ancestry of Jesus also reminds us that God accepts sinful and outcast people. Five women appear in the list: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, "the wife of Uriah" (Bathsheba), and Mary. These women faced great social difficulty,

but God treated them mercifully and used them in his plan to save his people. Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba were involved in sexual sin (Genesis 38; Joshua 2; 2 Sam. 11:1–12:23). Ruth was a desperately poor immigrant field-worker (Ruth 2:2), and Mary, although innocent, was falsely thought to have been unfaithful to her fiancé, Joseph (Matt. 1:19).

Despite lives made difficult by poverty and sin, God helped these women and gave them important places in his plan to “save his people from their sins” (v. 21). This reminds believers that God powerfully saves those who have faith in him (Rom. 1:16) and that “God shows no partiality” (Rom. 2:11). He saves ungodly people (Rom. 4:5) and uses outcasts for his saving purposes (1 Cor. 1:26–30; 2 Cor. 12:9).

Romans 1:1–7

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

⁷To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

REFLECTION

God fulfills his promises. In a world that worships hundreds of gods, there is only one God who sends “the gospel” (Rom. 1:1). The word “gospel” means “good news.” When the Bible uses the word it is specifically referring to the good news of a Savior who conquers sin, destroys death, and will rescue the creation from its decay (8:18–39). This gospel was promised in the Old Testament (1:2). The Scripture pointed to David’s Descendant, God’s Son, who was raised from the dead to demonstrate God’s power and affirmation of Jesus’ saving work on the cross (v. 4). To proclaim the message of salvation, God graciously set apart messengers (apostles) like Paul (vv. 1, 6). They announced a message to be received “among all the nations” (v. 5), in fulfillment of God’s promise to bless the world through Abraham (see Gen. 12:1–3). That message and blessing continue to spread throughout the world today.

Psalms 96:7–9

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
 bring an offering, and come into his courts!
 Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
 tremble before him, all the earth!

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

God is graciously spreading the gospel throughout the world, offering the only true remedy for sin and death. Take a moment to thank him for bringing the gospel into your life, and ask him to use you to bring that same blessing into the lives of others.

JANUARY 2

Matthew 1:18–25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
 and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

REFLECTION

The angel’s message to Joseph is good news. Mary’s Son will bring the salvation of the Lord. He will save people not merely in the physical sense (Matt. 8:25; 10:22) but in the most important sense because he will bring salvation from sins. Everyone has sinned against God, failing to worship him and causing tragic harm to others (Rom. 1:18–32; 3:9–20, 23), but God sent Jesus to clearly show us that he is a merciful and forgiving God (Ps. 130:3–4, 7–8).

Jesus, who is God, came to earth and fulfilled the promise in Isaiah 7:14 that “Immanuel” would come (Matt. 1:23). When Jesus was among his

people, God himself was with them (8:23–27). In the Old Testament, the greatest blessing to God’s people was when he actually lived among them (Ex. 29:46; Lev. 26:11–12), but the relationship was spoiled by their rebellion against him. In Jesus, God has provided salvation from sin and has healed the broken relationship between himself and his people. When God sent his Son Jesus, he made it possible for God to be “with” his disciples “always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

Romans 1:8–15

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. ⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — ¹²that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine. ¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

REFLECTION

Those who know God through faith in Christ deeply desire to make him known to others. Paul longs to visit Rome “to preach the gospel” there (Rom. 1:15) and through mutual encouragement (v. 12) to take the gospel to even more distant lands, like Spain (see 15:24) — which is a reminder to all who receive the gospel of our need to share the gospel with those still unreached.

At the same time, the gospel message is not merely intended to produce new converts. It is also vitally relevant for those who already believe in Christ in every area of life. Notice that Paul says he is “eager to preach the gospel” to the Roman church — those who already knew the message (1:15). We are told that the good news is actually “the power of God” (v. 16). Paul viewed the gospel as the daily food for every human heart.

Psalms 46:7

The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

Remember that God sent Jesus to be with you (Matt. 1:23) so that you don’t have to live in isolation from God. Draw near to him now; he is with you today, and he is for you.

JANUARY 3

Matthew 2:1–12

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ²saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

⁶ “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

⁷Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” ⁹After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

REFLECTION

The “wise men” would have been pagan astrologers from the areas east of Israel. They remind us that there is only one God, the Creator of the universe (Rom. 1:18–21; 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:6), and that he desires all people to worship him from the heart (John 4:23). Although God chose Abraham’s descendants as his special people, they were supposed to communicate God’s merciful and forgiving character to the rest of the world (Ex. 19:6). Here Matthew is showing us that the fulfillment of this blessing to the nations has begun.

As the church reaches out with the gospel to every culture and ethnic group, it continues to fulfill the plan of God to bring his blessing to the entire world (Eph. 3:7–10). The Wise Men who experienced an overwhelming joy in finding someone worthy of their worship (Matt. 2:10–11) are just a glimpse into God’s ongoing mission of making worshipers of Jesus from all the nations of the world.

Romans 1:16–17

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

REFLECTION

Paul speaks of the power of the good news of Jesus’ life, his saving death, and his resurrection. Through the proclamation of this message, Jesus’ words and work save “everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16), regardless of their identity, social location, or ethnicity. In the gospel, “the righteousness of God” (God’s righteous judgment of our sin by putting Christ to death for us) “is revealed” to those who believe in Christ (v. 17). In Habakkuk 2:4, which is quoted here in Romans 1:17, the Old Testament Scripture foretold that God’s people would obtain life through faith.

Psalms 37:39

The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD;
he is their stronghold in the time of trouble.

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

Even though we can do nothing to earn our salvation, we have reason to hope. Offer your thanks and praise to God for providing his saving power to you through the gospel (Rom. 1:16).

JANUARY 4

Matthew 2:13–23

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁶Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

¹⁹ But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” ²¹ And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. ²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

REFLECTION

Jesus did not enjoy the social status of a typical king. After fleeing threats from King Herod and his son Archelaus, Joseph eventually settled his family in Nazareth, raising the Son of God in a small Galilean village with a negative reputation (see John 1:46). As predicted by the Old Testament, Jesus would be called a Nazarene—his entire life would be marked with insults and rejection (see Ps. 22:6; Isa. 49:7; 53:3). From the standards of the world, therefore, Jesus seemed unimpressive and even foolish (cf. 1 Cor. 1:22). However, in this modest disguise there was “secret and hidden” wisdom (1 Cor. 2:7). Jesus had gladly embraced this humble calling because he knew that his rejection was ultimately for the sake of our acceptance.

Romans 1:18–32

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

REFLECTION

The gospel message is urgent in the light of God's verdict on humanity. Our transgression deserves God's wrath (Rom. 1:18). Verses 21–27 include a wide range of transgressions, all of which are dreadful in God's sight (vv. 26–27). We are all guilty of multiple sins described in this passage (see vv. 28–31). Even if we do not practice every sinful deed found here, we may secretly approve and even envy when others cross God's moral boundaries. Because of this, we fail to love God (because we break his commandments) and to love our neighbor (because we support our neighbors in their sin). The outcome is God's rightful judgment.

Behind the good news of the gospel lies the tough news that all people are guilty of acts and attitudes that God has promised to punish unless we embrace his grace. The gospel is the antidote to our sin, because it tells us that God is willing to forgive us. When we believe God's promise, our lives grow in the richness of knowing and being known by Christ.

Psalms 86:4–5

Gladden the soul of your servant,
for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.
For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

Because of the forgiveness that Christ has purchased, Christians can be open with God about our sin without the fear of being rejected by him. Be honest with God, confessing to him any known sin in your life, and believe in his promise to graciously forgive you (1 John 1:9).

JANUARY 5

Matthew 3:1–12

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,
2“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” 3For this is he who was spoken
of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.’”

4Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist,
and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all
the region about the Jordan were going out to him, 6and they were baptized by
him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

7But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his bap-
tism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the
wrath to come? 8Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9And do not presume
to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able
from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 10Even now the axe is laid
to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut
down and thrown into the fire.

11“‘I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is
mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you
with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will
clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he
will burn with unquenchable fire.”

REFLECTION

John the Baptist explains what it means to truly repent. Repentance involves a heart-change that leads to a transformed life. Those who repent, confess their sin (Matt. 3:6). In other words, they admit they have not been obedient to God. They have failed to love and worship him as he deserves and they have failed to love others as he desires. Those who repent also understand that they deserve God’s punishment for their sins (vv. 2, 7, 10–12). They come to God trusting only in the mercy of God. Furthermore, repentance leads to a change in our lifestyle, so that we turn from sinful behavior to behavior that honors God and acts lovingly toward others (vv. 8, 10).

People often mistakenly believe that repentance begins with changing our behavior so that we can gain God’s acceptance. In truth, repentance begins when the Holy Spirit graciously creates an internal change in our

perspective about ourselves, God, and the consequences of our sin. This change of heart is what actually fuels the change in our behavior (cf. Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23–24).

Romans 2:1–11

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ²We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. ³Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

⁶He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹For God shows no partiality.

REFLECTION

Paul continues to explain humanity's desperate situation. People condemn themselves by hypocritically doing the very things they say others shouldn't do (Rom. 2:1). Paul's questions expose the guilt of us all (vv. 3–4).

God kindly gives us time to repent and change, but some refuse the opportunity and continue to invite God's anger, which he will someday release when he comes to judge the world (v. 5). Others will seek God and receive eternal life (v. 7) through faith in Christ's finished work (cf. 3:22). One way (2:9) or the other (v. 10), people's choices will position them before God in ways that will bring either great joy or bitter regret, in this life and the next.

Psalms 19:13

Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

We must be careful not to allow ourselves to become comfortable with sin in our lives. Ask God to give you a desire for his ways so that you will have strength to turn quickly from sin when you see it in your life.

JANUARY 6

Matthew 3:13–17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

REFLECTION

Baptism is how Christians demonstrate that they identify themselves with Jesus and his kingdom. John was surprised to see Jesus coming to him for baptism because, as John had just said, he was baptizing those who needed to turn away from their sin (Matt. 3:11). However, even though Jesus never sinned, he came to John to be baptized in order to show his followers the importance of this symbolic action.

Romans 2:12–24

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God ¹⁸ and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light

to those who are in darkness,²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—²¹ you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. ²⁴ For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

REFLECTION

Paul continues to explain humanity’s separation from God due to their sin. There are two kinds of people on earth: those “without the law,” known as Gentiles (non-Jews); and those “under the law,” the Jews (Rom. 2:12). Gentiles have an inner awareness of God’s moral demands (v. 15) but do not live up to their own sense of right and wrong. Jews are descendants of Abraham and of Moses, who received the law from God. But God is not pleased with people based on their lineage: he wants his people to obey what he told them to do (v. 13). Paul charges the Jews (his own people; see 9:3; 10:1; 11:1) with dishonoring God by violating the law he gave them (2:23). This gives God a bad name among the Gentiles.

Paul will eventually turn from his focus on sin and judgment to talk about the gospel (see 3:21). But this portion of Romans helps us understand the true sinfulness of humanity. Readers and hearers of Romans can be confident that all this bad news will help us more clearly see the beauty of the good news that Paul will begin sharing in the next chapter.

Psalms 138:6

For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly,
but the haughty he knows from afar.

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

Because we are all guilty of sin, our hearts should take a humble posture before God, admitting our need for his salvation. Cultivate this humility by openly sharing with God several ways in which you are aware of your need for Christ today.

JANUARY 7

Matthew 4:1–11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.³ And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”⁴ But he answered, “It is written,

“‘Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple
⁶and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

“‘He will command his angels concerning you,’

and

“‘On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

⁷Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

“‘You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve.’”

¹¹Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

REFLECTION

Matthew is helping us see that Jesus is without sin, and that he is able to resist Satan’s temptations. Out in the wilderness, Satan attempts to persuade Jesus to rebel against God. The scene reminds us of Israel’s experience in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt. However, unlike the Israelites, who were punished for their rebellion against God (e.g., Exodus 32; Num. 11:1–3; Numbers 16), Jesus successfully obeyed God in the wilderness.

This should make us profoundly grateful for the sacrifice of Christ, which cleanses our sin only because Jesus himself was perfectly sinless (Rom. 3:21–26; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 9:11–28; 1 Pet. 3:18; see also Isa. 53:9, 12).

Romans 2:25–29

For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

REFLECTION

The gospel of grace (the good news about God's grace) transforms us from the inside out. When we are changed at a heart level, we begin to live differently; the order can never be reversed. It is impossible to act in a certain way in order to become changed at a heart level. If the heart is not right with God, nothing we do can please him.

In Romans 2:25–29, Paul scolds his fellow Jews for thinking that ritual (circumcision) and ethnicity will please God. God's acceptance or "praise" (v. 29) requires that he change our hearts "by the Spirit" (v. 29). Paul (like John the Baptist; Matt. 3:9) knew from experience that too many of his fellow Jews had lost sight of this truth. It is equally true today—no ritual can save us, only faith in Christ.

Psalms 119:111

Your testimonies are my heritage forever,
for they are the joy of my heart.

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

Don't be content with good behavior if your heart isn't in it. Ask God to change your heart so that your actions will flow from a genuine desire for his will and his glory.

JANUARY 8

Matthew 4:12–25

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

- ¹⁵ “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

¹⁸ While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³ And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. ²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

REFLECTION

Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming the coming kingdom (Matt. 4:17). This is a merciful reminder that the heavenly kingdom will one day arrive in all its glory, though we must realize that this kingdom is available *only* to those who repent (v. 17). For now, Jesus brings an initial taste of the kingdom of God with him everywhere he goes, and God’s rule is clearly seen in his ministry. In the presence of Jesus, disease, affliction, pain, demonic oppression, and disability all begin to disappear. Additionally, Jesus does good to people from many lands (v. 25), not merely to his own people. He is fulfilling ancient promises that said the Messiah would heal his people and make them a light to the nations (Isa. 19:16–24; 35:5–6; 49:6).

Having received this mercy, the church today is called to be a place where the people of God extend mercy to others from all backgrounds and nations in the name of our merciful Savior.

Romans 3:1–8

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? ² Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

³What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,

“That you may be justified in your words,
and prevail when you are judged.”

⁵But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) ⁶By no means! For then how could God judge the world? ⁷But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? ⁸And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

REFLECTION

God’s “oracles,” the Old Testament Scriptures, are one of his greatest gifts to his people (Rom. 3:2). Since Christ’s coming, “Scripture” now includes two Testaments, Old and New, and they are crucial for our faith. In fact, Paul will remind us that, “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (10:17).

The Scripture forms the people of God, and in all ages this is a priceless gift. The Old and New Testaments are the divinely inspired words of God to his people, regardless of whether they have been faithful to obey his Word (3:3–4). God and his words are entirely true, faithful, and righteous.

Psalm 145:9

The LORD is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he has made.

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

The God of mercy has called us to show others the same mercy he has shown to us. Pray that God would continue to use you and your church to reflect his heart of mercy to the world around you.

JANUARY 9

Matthew 5:1–16

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

¹³“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

REFLECTION

Jesus has called his first disciples to follow him (Matt. 4:19, 21), and now, in his famous “Sermon on the Mount” (chs. 5–7), he teaches them what the kingdom of God will look like.

It is important to avoid two errors in interpreting the “Sermon on the Mount.” First, Jesus was not teaching the disciples about the requirements for *entering* the kingdom of God. This message is for those who have already begun following him (4:18–22; 5:1). Second, this is not a description of life in heaven. In heaven, there will be no need to turn the other cheek (5:39). Rather, these teachings are a description of what life looks like for Christians as they try to follow Jesus in a broken world. Jesus is showing us what life should look like for a heart that has been humbled and transformed by the gospel of grace. Living this kind of life is possible only because of the One who has done it perfectly in our place. Only by the grace we receive in Jesus can we find favor with God and begin to walk in his ways.

The sermon begins by describing what Christians look like, as those who understand their weakness and need for God's mercy. Christians are "poor in spirit" (v. 3) because they know that they are sinners who do not have the spiritual strength to perform God's demands perfectly. They are "those who mourn" and who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (vv. 4, 6) because they have experienced the disaster that sin has brought to the world. Because they understand their true weakness before God, the "meek" (v. 5) have humility, and that enables them to treat others with kindness. Christians are "merciful" because they understand their own need for God's mercy (v. 7).

Those who exhibit such qualities are like salt and light in the world around them. Jesus calls them to demonstrate the character of God and his kingdom through the character of their lives so that others will glorify God as a result of their influence (vv. 13–16).

Romans 3:9–20

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,¹⁰ as it is written:

- "None is righteous, no, not one;
¹¹ no one understands;
 no one seeks for God.
¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
 no one does good,
 not even one."
¹³ "Their throat is an open grave;
 they use their tongues to deceive."
 "The venom of asps is under their lips."
¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."
¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood;
¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,
¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known."
¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

REFLECTION

Humanity faces a dilemma. "The whole world" (Rom. 3:19), every single person, fails to live up to the moral standard God requires. We are all "under sin" (v. 9). This is the conclusion of everything Paul has been saying since he

began his critique in 1:18. Now he uses quotations from the Psalms to help him summarize his point (vv. 10–16). The evidence leaves us speechless; all mouths are stopped (v. 19). Deep down, people know that they are sinful and guilty, but we have no ability to cleanse ourselves and avoid God’s judgment. As long as we are relying on our own performance, we will never be declared righteous (“justified”) in God’s courtroom (v. 20).

Psalm 51:1–2

Have mercy on me, O God,
 according to your steadfast love;
 according to your abundant mercy
 blot out my transgressions.
 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
 and cleanse me from my sin!

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

Because of pride, we are often reluctant to confess our sin to God and others. Ask God to give you the courageous humility to be honest with him about your failures and the state of your heart.

JANUARY 10

Matthew 5:17–20

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

REFLECTION

When Jesus says that he came to “fulfill” the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17), he means that both the Mosaic law (Israel’s national contract with God that was first given to Moses at Mount Sinai) and the Prophets pointed forward to his teaching. They brought the purposes of God to a certain point in the salvation story, and now Jesus picks up their message and completes it.

Unlike the Mosaic law, the Sermon on the Mount is not giving specific instructions on how to run a government or a nation. The law was just a seed, but Jesus is the mature blossom—the fulfillment. The eternal principles that were at the core of the law come into full bloom as Jesus teaches his disciples what it looks like to live as a citizen of God’s kingdom within a sinful world.

Christ wants his people to live a life of doing what is right (“righteousness”; v. 10), but it is different than the so-called “righteousness” of the rule-keeping scribes and the Pharisees. Their basic problem was that their hearts didn’t match their claims or actions (23:3–7). They said and did many of the right things, but their hearts were far from God (15:8). What Jesus wants from his disciples, therefore, is obedience that flows from a changed heart.

Romans 3:21–26

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

REFLECTION

After three chapters of brutally exposing our sin, at last Paul gives us a reason to rejoice. Jesus Christ has made it possible to have a right standing before God “for all who believe” the gospel (Rom. 3:22). Yes, the sinful human condition is universal and deadly (v. 23), but believers are declared righteous (“justified”) by God’s “grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (v. 24).

The term “redemption” (v. 24) brings up the idea of slaves being purchased and freed. Paul also says that God sent his Son to be a “propitiation” (v. 25); this word means that Jesus endured the wrath of God in our place when he died on the cross. Because of the cross, our sin was punished, and yet we are simultaneously declared “not guilty” in God’s courtroom. This is what Paul means when he says that God is both “just” and the “justifier” (v. 26). Because of Jesus, both justice and salvation have been accomplished.

Our hearts are moved as we marvel at a God whose wisdom provided a way to rescue guilty sinners without compromising his justice and holiness. We marvel, too, at a God whose love is so gracious that he would send his own Son to accomplish this salvation.

Psalm 119:32

I will run in the way of your commandments
when you enlarge my heart!

THOUGHTS FOR PRAYER

Jesus wants us to have a humble heart that beats with a genuine love for God and compassion for others. Ask God to give you a heart for the things he loves.

JANUARY 11

Matthew 5:21–32

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

³¹ “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

REFLECTION

The Mosaic law (Israel’s national contract with God that was first given to Moses at Mount Sinai) forbids murder and adultery, but Jesus explains that these sinful behaviors are rooted in sinful desires. If we want to live like citizens of God’s kingdom, we cannot merely focus on external behavior. We must give significant attention to the motives that drive our actions. God is