

explore

Oct-Dec 2024

For Your Daily Walk With God

“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.”

Romans 13:12

Romans

Timothy
Keller

Joel

Jonathan
Griffiths

Christmas

Tim
Thornborough

How to use *explore*

Issue 108

The 92 daily readings in this issue of *Explore* are designed to help you understand and apply the Bible as you read it each day.

It's serious!

We suggest that you allow 15 minutes each day to work through the Bible passage with the notes. It should be a meal, not a snack! Readings from other parts of the Bible can throw valuable light on the study passage. These cross-references can be skipped if you are already feeling full up, but will expand your grasp of the Bible. *Explore* uses the NIV2011 Bible translation, but you can also use it with the NIV1984 or ESV translations.

Sometimes a prayer box will encourage you to stop and pray through the lessons—but it is always important to allow time to pray for God's Spirit to bring his word to life, and to shape the way we think and live through it.

We're serious!

All of us who work on *Explore* share a passion for getting the Bible into people's lives. We fiercely hold to the Bible as God's word—to honour and follow, not to explain away.

1

Find a time you can read the Bible each day

2

Find a place where you can be quiet and think

3

Ask God to help you understand

4

Carefully read through the Bible passage for today

5

Study the verses with *Explore*, taking time to think

6

Pray about what you have read


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Welcome to *explore*

Being a Christian isn't a skill you learn, nor is it a lifestyle choice. It's about having a real relationship with the living God through his Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that this relationship is like a marriage.

It's important to start with this, because it is easy to view the practice of daily Bible reading as a Christian duty, or a hard discipline that is just one more thing to get done in our busy lives.

But the Bible is God speaking to us: opening his mind to us on how he thinks, what he wants for us and what his plans are for the world. And most importantly, it tells us what he has done for us in sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It's the way that the Spirit shows Jesus to us, and changes us as we behold his glory.

Here are a few suggestions for making your time with God more of a joy than a burden:

- ☛ *Time*: Find a time when you will not be disturbed. Many people have found that the morning is the best time as it sets you up for the day. But whatever works for you is right for you.
- ☛ *Place*: Jesus says that we are not to make a great show of our religion (see *Matthew 6:5-6*), but rather, to pray with the door to our room shut. Some people plan to get to work a few minutes earlier and get their Bible out in an office or some other quiet corner.
- ☛ *Prayer*: Although *Explore* helps with specific prayer ideas from the passage, do try to develop your own lists to pray through. Use the flap inside the back

cover to help with this. And allow what you read in the Scriptures to shape what you pray for yourself, the world and others.

- ☛ *Feast*: You can use the "Bible in a year" line at the bottom of each page to help guide you through the entire Scriptures throughout 2024. This year, the passages each day are linked, showing how God makes and keeps his promises. We're grateful to Katherine Fedor of treasureinthebible.com for her permission to use this Bible-reading plan. You'll find passages to read six days a week—Sunday is a "day off", or a day to catch up!

- ☛ *Share*: As the saying goes, *expression deepens impression*. So try to cultivate the habit of sharing with others what you have learned. Why not join our Facebook group to share your encouragements, questions and prayer requests? Search for *Explore: For your daily walk with God*.

And enjoy it! As you read God's word and God's Spirit works in your mind and your heart, you are going to see Jesus, and appreciate more of his love for you and his promises to you. That's amazing!



Carl Laferton is the
Editorial Director of
The Good Book Company

ROMANS: Free

We return to the book of Romans, and to one of the best-loved chapters in the whole of Scripture...

Through Christ Jesus

Read Romans 7:25b – 8:2

- ❓ *What does 8:1 tell us about being “in Christ”? Why is this wonderful news?*
- ❓ *What else has happened to Christians (v 2)?*

TIME OUT

The phrase Paul uses in verse 1 is much stronger than simply saying we are not condemned; it is that there is no condemnation at all—no possibility of it. Not only are we not condemned, we can never and will never be condemned.

- ❓ *How does this affect our response to sin?*
- ❓ *How does this affect our view of our future?*

In chapter 7, Paul showed us that Christians still wrestle with remaining, indwelling sin—“what I hate I do” (7:15). Yet at the same time, Christians now experience a real disgust over sin—“what I hate I do”.

Although they sin, for those who are “in Christ Jesus” there “is now no condemnation”—first, not because of their own obedience (chapter 7 has shown that no Christian obeys as they should), but because of the work of God’s Son and God’s Spirit (8:2). And second, because the Spirit now works to do what we cannot—overcome sin. The work of the Spirit is what chapter 8 is about.

His own Son

Read Romans 8:3-4

- ❓ *Why couldn’t the law free us from death (v 3)?*
- ❓ *How did God achieve it (v 3)?*
- ❓ *He did this in order to achieve what?*

In his Son, God has defeated the legal penalty of sin—death. But this is not all: through his Son’s work, God now sends the Spirit to his people, to wipe out sin in our lives. “The righteous requirement of the law” can now “be fully met in us” (v 4). How can this be? Because we “do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”.

Verse 4 is telling us that everything Christ did for us—his incarnation, life, death and resurrection—was “in order that” we would live a holy life. Jesus’ whole purpose was to make us holy, and able to live holy lives. This is the greatest possible motive for living a holy life. Whenever we sin, we are endeavouring to frustrate the aim and purpose of the entire ministry of Christ Jesus. If this doesn’t work as an incentive for living a holy life, nothing will.

Apply

- ❓ *In what part of your life do you need to let this truth change you today?*

Minding the mind

What we dwell on in our minds will shape the way we live our lives. What you set your mind on shapes your character and behaviour.

Setting our minds

Read Romans 8:5-8

- ❓ *What are the two things people can “set” their minds on (v 5)?*

To set your mind is more than simply thinking about something. It means to focus intently on something, to be preoccupied with it, to let your attention and imagination be totally captured by something. Wherever your mind goes most naturally and freely when there is nothing else to distract it—that is what you really live for.

TIME OUT

- ❓ *What do you do with your solitude?*
- ❓ *What does this suggest your mind is set on?*

The realm of the Spirit

Read Romans 8:9-14

- ❓ *Who is controlled by the Spirit (v 9, first sentence)?*
- ❓ *Who has the Spirit (v 9, 2nd sentence)?*
- ❓ *What is true of the Christian...*
- now (v 10)?
 - in the future (v 11)?
- ❓ *What do Christians therefore have an obligation to do (v 12)?*

Christians are not those who live by the sinful nature (or “flesh”) and therefore die (v 13); we will, and must be, those who “put

to death the misdeeds of the body”. Paul is saying that we have been made alive (v 10), and we will one day have renewed bodies (v 11); and for now, we put to death the sinful nature, in the power of the Spirit.

This means a ruthless, full-hearted resistance to sinful practice. “Put to death” is a violent, sweeping phrase—it means to declare war on attitudes and behaviours that are wrong. A Christian doesn’t play games with sin—they put it to death.

This also means applying the gospel to our hearts, rather than simply resisting sin in our behaviour. We need to remember our obligation to the one who has given us spiritual life now and will give us perfect bodies in the future. Sin can only be cut off at the root if we expose ourselves constantly to the unimaginable love of Christ for us. Sin grows when we think we deserve something from God, or life. Godliness grows when we remember we are debtors to God, throughout life. Putting sin to death is part of what it means to have our “minds set on what the Spirit desires” (v 5).

Apply

Write down a sin pattern you struggle with.

- ❓ *How can you put it to death? Think of a “mini-sermon” you can preach to yourself about Christ, and your debt to him.*



Adopted heirs

These few short verses are a wonderful summary of the relationship you and I, as Christians, enjoy with God, by his Spirit.

Read Romans 8:14-17

Children of God

❓ *Who are “children of God” (v 14)?*

Verse 15 tells us that this sonship is a “received” status, not a natural one. We are not born as God’s children; we are adopted into his family when we receive his Spirit.

In the Roman world, a wealthy, childless man might adopt someone as his heir. (This heir would be male, and so Paul describes all Christians—men and women—as “sons”.) The moment adoption occurred...

- the new son’s old debts were cancelled.
- he got a new name and became heir of all his new father had.
- his new father became liable for all his actions.
- the new son had an obligation to please and honour his father.

.... **TIME OUT**

❓ *Why is it amazing to have been adopted in this way by God?*

Privileged children

❓ *What are the privileges of being an adopted son of God?*

- v 15a
- end of v 15
- v 16
- v 17

In verse 15, Paul draws a distinction between two “Spirits”—two ways of thinking about and relating to God. The first is an attitude based on “fear”; the attitude of a slave. A slave obeys because he has to; he fears punishment and is insecure. It is the view that says, “I must perform well in my work for God, and then he will pay me my wages—he will answer my prayers, protect me and so on. But if I perform poorly, he might fire me.”

But Paul says we did not receive this kind of relationship to God. “The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.” The Spirit gives us the ability and confidence to approach God as Father, not as a slavemaster or boss. A child obeys out of love for his daddy; he knows the security of ongoing forgiveness and unconditional love. It is the view that says, “I am a child of God, and he loves me and will give me more than I deserve. My performance doesn’t change my position in the family—but I want to work hard for him, because he’s my loving Father.”

Pray

One of the privileges of sonship is that the Spirit enables us to “cry, ‘Abba, Father’”. Abba means “Daddy”.

Pray to God as your Father now. Enjoy this intimacy with him. And cry out to him for help in areas where you are struggling or sad.

Looking forward

This world, and each of us, are not what we were meant to be. But one day, we will be. This certainty is what Paul calls “hope”.

Read Romans 8:18-25

Where nature’s heading

- ❓ *What does Paul tell us about nature?*
 • v 20 • v 22

The creation is in “bondage to decay” (v 21). It is caught in a continuous cycle of death and decomposition. Life always ends in death.

- ❓ *What does Paul tell us about nature’s future (v 21)?*
 ❓ *When will this happen (v 19)?*

When the full glory of our status as God’s children and heirs is revealed, we will bring nature with us. The glory that is coming will be so blindingly powerful that when it falls upon us, it will envelop the whole created order and glorify it along with us.

TIME OUT

Some people see the material world as inherently bad—we should withdraw from the world, and be suspicious of physical pleasures. Others see the material world as all there is, and inherently good—we should enjoy, and live for, creature comforts, physical pleasure and beauty.

- ❓ *How does the view of the created world in these verses differ from these views?*
 ❓ *What difference will a Christian view of the world make to how we treat it?*

Where we’re heading

- ❓ *What does Paul tell us about believers?*
 • v 19
 • v 21
 • v 23

We saw yesterday how wonderful it is to be Spirit-filled sons of God. Yet all this is only the “firstfruits”, a foretaste of the incoming harvest that we will enjoy in the future.

We will be completely, totally free from the effects of sin and death in our bodies and spirits.

- ❓ *How do we wait for this day (v 23, 25)?*

How the Spirit helps

Read Romans 8:26-27

- ❓ *As we wait, how does the Spirit help us?*
 ❓ *How does this encourage us when we suffer, and when we struggle to pray?*

When we are too weak to act like children of God, the Spirit helps us.

Pray

Are there issues in your life that you don’t know how to pray for? Bring them before God now, trusting the Spirit to take your thoughts and emotions and to pray on your behalf. Ask for an eager patience about the new creation.

Confident Christianity

Christians can be confident people—but not in ourselves, or in our circumstances. In the last part of chapter eight, Paul shows us the way to deep, unshakeable confidence.

Where confidence is

Read Romans 8:28

- ❓ *What does Paul say “we know” (v 28)?*
- ❓ *What people is this answer true for, according to verse 28?*

Christians are not shocked by the tragedies and hardness of life—we don’t expect things naturally to work for good. When something works out for good, it is all and only because of God’s grace, working for us, his children, who love him. When something goes “wrong”, we still know with absolute certainty that God is working good for us. This means we are positive about life, but we’re not saccharine or unrealistic about it.

Apply

- ❓ *How does verse 28 give us confidence in...*
 - good times?
 - bad times?
 - times of failing?
- ❓ *How do you particularly need to remember that verse 28 is true today?*
- ❓ *How could it cause you to rejoice over an aspect of your life that you would instinctively only grieve or grow anxious about?*

What good is

Read Romans 8:29-30

- ❓ *How do these verses lay out God’s ultimate purpose in history?*
- ❓ *What do you think each word in verse 30 means?*
- ❓ *What is God working to “conform” (or shape us into) (v 29)? How does this tell us what our ultimate “good” (v 28) truly is?*

TIME OUT

- ❓ *Can you think of a hard time in your life when things went “wrong”, but which, as you look back, you can see that God used to make you more like his Son?*

Verse 30 is breathtaking. God foreknew his people—before the beginning of time, he knew us in a relational, loving sense. He set our destination, planning for us to be with him in glory. Then, at a particular point in time he called us to have faith in him. As we believed, he justified us—declared and treated us as righteous and blameless. And one day, he will glorify us—make us perfect in body and soul. This lies ahead of us—but because it relies on God’s action, not ours, it is so certain that Paul speaks of it in the past tense, as though it has already happened.

Pray

Use each clause in each verse we’ve looked at to fuel your thanks to God for what he has done, is doing, and will do, for you.

Our Almighty Father

It is easy, unthinkingly, to view God as almighty but as unconcerned with our lives; or as intimate and very concerned, but too pocket-sized to be able to truly help.

This psalm teaches us to pray to God as the almighty Creator, who “spoke, and it came to be”, and the one whose “eyes ... are on those who fear him”.

Praise God...

Read Psalm 33:1-3

The first three verses encourage us to praise God. But the psalms are always calling us to praise God! The question is, what truths does this psalm reveal that should drive us to praise God?

... for his mighty word

Read Psalm 33:4-9

Astronomers estimate that there are 7 septillion(!) stars in the universe. Physicists tell us that there are more atoms in a single grain of sand than there are stars in the universe. And the Lord God made them all. Every atom of every grain of every planet and star of every galaxy in the cosmos bears his stamp of ownership. He created it all, and he did it through his powerful word.

? *What is a right response to our mighty Creator, according to these verses?*

Verse 6 pairs God’s word with the “breath of his mouth”. The word for breath is the same word as the Bible always uses for the Spirit. God’s word and Spirit always work together. So Galatians 3:2 tells us that we receive the Spirit by believing the word—the gospel

message. We should never separate the work of the Spirit and the work of the word.

... for his unstoppable plans

Read Psalm 33:10-12

- ?** *What encouragement do these verses give us in a frightening and chaotic world?*
- ?** *How do verses 4-9 help to convince us that the plans and promises of God that we read in the Bible will be fulfilled?*

... for his watchful eye

Read Psalm 33:13-19

Verses 13-15 sound a bit “Big Brother” to us. Actually this is very different. God’s eyes are not on us to catch us out. Look at v 18-19. God is watching us like a loving parent watching a young child splashing about in a swimming pool—his eye is on us to make sure we are okay, ready to help us if we get into trouble. In the light of that, the final verses encourage us to put our trust in him.

Read Psalm 33:20-22

Apply

- ?** *What promises of God’s word do you want to praise him for today?*
- ?** *How would it change your attitude to daily life if verses 10-19 really took root in your heart?*



If God is for us...

God is working for his children's good. He has foreknown, predestined, called and justified us, and will glorify us. "What, then, shall we say in response ...?" (v 31)

Q+A

Read Romans 8:31-34

- ❓ *What are the four questions Paul asks here? (Put them in your own words.)*
 - v 31b
 - v 32
 - v 33
 - v 34

- ❓ *What are the answers to each of these?*

Notice that the answers depend on the truths of verses 28-30. If the God who has purposed our glory is all-powerful, why be afraid of any opposition? If the God who has purposed our glory has already given us his most precious possession—his own Son—why worry about our needs? If the God who has purposed our glory has declared us righteous, and if the Christ who lived perfectly and died sacrificially for us is standing before the Father on our behalf, why listen to anyone (including ourselves) who suggests we are guilty, or unforgiven?

Apply

- ❓ *Who is opposed to your Christian faith and lifestyle? How does verse 31 give you confidence?*
- ❓ *What do you find yourself worrying about? Do you ever worry you won't reach glory? How does verse 32 give you confidence?*
- ❓ *What causes you to feel that you are too guilty to be forgiven? How do verses 33-34 give you confidence?*

No separation

Read Romans 8:35-39

- ❓ *What final question does Paul ask (v 35a)?*
- ❓ *What is his answer (v 37-39)?*

All the other questions are really just other versions of this one. The only thing that we really need to fear, the only thing that could really harm us, is to be separated from the love of Christ. And Paul is saying, *Friend, have you been called? Have you found the gospel coming to your soul with power? Have you asked God to justify you? Then realise this—that would not and could not have happened unless the great God of heaven had set his love upon you in eternity before time, and is now unstoppably working out his plan to live with you for ever in his family.* God's love for us does not depend on our attitudes or actions—if it did, we couldn't be certain about life and the future. It rests entirely on his decision and plan. So nothing can separate us from it. We can live with overwhelming assurance.

Pray

Pray through your answers to the apply section. Then spend time thanking God that nothing—nothing—can separate you from his love.

God's merciful election

Chapters 9 – 11 are some of the most difficult, and controversial, in the entire Bible. Before we begin, ask God for understanding of his word and humility before his word.

Read Romans 9:1-5

- ❓ *How does Paul feel (v 2)?*
- ❓ *Why (v 3-4a)?*

God has done so much for Israel, his people (v 4-5). Yet most of Israel has not put their faith in Christ, and so are not saved. The message should be clearest to them—so why doesn't all Israel believe?

God chooses

Read Romans 9:6-13

- ❓ *What does v 6b-7a mean, do you think?*

Paul turns to two Old Testament examples. Abraham had two children, Ishmael and Isaac; only one was part of God's people (v 7-9). Rebekah (Isaac's wife) had twins, Esau and Jacob; only one was part of God's people (v 10-13). Here, we learn three things:

1. The only difference between Esau and Jacob was God's "purpose in election" (v 11). God chose Jacob, rather than Jacob choosing God.
2. That choice was made prior to birth, "before the twins were born" (v 11).
3. That choice wasn't based on performance—it was made before they had done anything, and not on the basis of any works they would do (v 11-12).

This is the doctrine of election. The only reason Jacob received God's promise—and the only reason anyone has saving faith—is

because of God's gracious choice. So, the reason not all Israel is saved is because God has not chosen all Israel to be saved.

Is God just?

Read Romans 9:14-18

- ❓ *What objection does Paul raise (v 14)?*
- ❓ *What does salvation depend on (v 15-16)?*

Paul's point is that—as God told Moses—God is free to give mercy to whoever he chooses. Mercy can never be an obligation. No one deserves salvation, so God is entirely fair to give it to all, some, or none.

- ❓ *What did God say to Pharaoh (v 17)?*

Pharaoh is a helpful example of how God "hardens whom he wants to harden". In Exodus 4 – 14, God hardened Pharaoh's heart (11:9-10). Yet also, Pharaoh hardened his own heart (e.g. 8:15). Both are true—God hardened Pharaoh's self-hardened heart. It is what we saw in Romans 1:24—God gives people over to what they have chosen. His mercy is never deserved; his hardening is always deserved.

Apply

- ❓ *How does this passage make you more grateful that you are saved?*
- ❓ *Imagine someone says, "God is unfair to save some and not others". How could you use 9:16-18 to answer them?*