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INTRODUCTION

Intro to Romans 12 Guide

The theme of our time in prayer and fasting these 21 days is a “living sacrifice.” The question for each of us is how can we present our bodies, our whole lives, as a living sacrifice to the Lord? How can we put everything on the altar this year? As we prepare for a new year and settle into regular rhythms of church life, we must be intentional to not just go through the motions. God is calling us to truly follow Him in every moment. Remember, the way to save your life is to lose it (Luke 9:24). During this season of prayer and fasting, ask the Lord how you might offer your life as a living sacrifice this year. How can you offer your life to God for the sake of His glory in your neighborhood, in our city, or to the ends of the earth? Use these daily devotionals walking through Romans 12 to help guide your thinking. I think you will find it practical and helpful to learn how to present your life as a living sacrifice every day.

Why Fast?

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/why-do-christians-fast>

It is important that we not just fast from something but for something. We fast from food and for more desperation for God. We fast from social media and for more focus on spiritual things. We fast from creature comforts and for the opportunity to be more generous. We don't just refrain but we replace. So, as we implement the discipline of fasting, let's remember this time is an opportunity for more. More of God, more impact on our city, more unity in our church.

INTRODUCTION

10 Practical Ways To Fast These 21 days

01. Fast a meal once a week
02. Fast a whole day once a week
03. Fast from social media or other phone usage
04. Fast from entertainment (tv, music, other media)
05. Fast from junk food/caffeinated drinks
06. Fast from reading any other book but the Bible in your spare time
07. Fast with your lighthouse on days you meet
08. Fast from creature comforts (Starbucks runs, eating out for lunch, random amazon purchases, etc...)
09. Fast from meat for 21 days
10. Juice Fast for 21 days

LIVING SACRIFICE

Day 1: The Appeal to be a Living Sacrifice – Nate Crew

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Romans 12:1).

This is the call of God on our lives and is what we give our attention to during this time of prayer and fasting. My prayer for each one in this church is that we would present our bodies, our lives, our resources, our hopes and dreams, our families and plans, and everything else as a living sacrifice to God. We put our lives on the altar and say, "It's all yours Lord, do with it what you will." This is our offering. It is not about 10% of our income but 100% of our life. 2 quick thoughts:

01. *It takes intentionality.* We must present our bodies to God. We give them over to God. We put it in our hands and then open our hands and offer it to God. We take a look at our lives and we ask the Lord what sacrifice looks like in this season, and we make a choice to present something to God. This doesn't happen accidentally, it takes intentionality.

02. *It takes consistency.* It is a living sacrifice. It doesn't die with one offering. It is a continual pursuit. This is not a decision we make one time but every day. Romans 6:11 says we are now "alive to God." Alive to offer a living sacrifice. This is God's mercy that though we sacrifice we still live. Let's make sacrifice a habit!

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Prayer Points:

- Ask the Lord to reveal to you what obedience to this truth looks like in your life. Pray that God would not only lead you but also many in this church to be clear and obedient with how the Lord is leading.
- Ask the Lord to do a great work in our city and world through our offering. Pray that the sacrifices we make would lead to God's glory and a great salvation for people around us. Dream big. Can you imagine the impact of all of us living this out? Pray that God would do exceedingly, abundantly, more than we can even ask or think.
- Practical steps: Think about your time. How can you offer more of your time up to God? What does your schedule say about your priorities and who you are living for? Also, encourage those you see living out this truth and offering their life as a sacrifice. My old pastor used to say, "we replicate what we celebrate," so let's celebrate those who are good examples and prayerfully replicate that lifestyle throughout our church!

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Day 2: By the Mercies of God – Clinton and Missy Wivell

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Romans 12:1).

Paul opens this chapter with a major transition. This transition hinges on the word, therefore. He is transitioning from the previous 11 chapters of doctrine to practical application. The previous 11 chapters cover numerous truths about God - wrath, sin, faith, sanctification, etc. Paul sums it all up as "the mercies of God." He says now that you know God's truths, live a sacrificial life.

For Paul "the mercies of God" were piercingly clear. As he describes in 1 Timothy 1:12-16, God showed mercy to the worst of sinners, Paul, so that "Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life." Paul understood how opposed he was to God's truths when he was persecuting and killing Christians. Justice for Paul would have been God's wrath. But out of God's infinite mercy, He showed Paul grace so that he could save souls. Enamored by God's truth and mercy, Paul chose to live a sacrificial life. Here are a few takeaways:

01. *You're here for a reason.* Every breath we take is by the mercy of God. Just as Paul deserved God's justice, so do we. But God showed us His mercy through the saving work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we can conclude that just as Paul was given mercy for a reason, so have we. Take refuge in this truth. God's infinite mercy is for you and in itself demonstrates you have a purpose in God's sight...the only one that matters.

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02. *A firm foundation.* Living a sacrificial life by definition requires sacrifice, which is counterintuitive to our sinful desires. God's mercies in Romans 1-11 combined with the mercies God has shown each of us personally, gives us a firm foundation to build sacrificial lives on. In times of weakness or doubt we can draw strength from God's mercies and be confident of the firm foundation He built for us will stand strong.

Prayer Points:

- Ask the Lord to reveal His mercies to you in times of weakness or doubt. Ask that His mercies would remind us of the firm foundation our faith stands on and enable us to persevere through any challenges.
- Ask the Lord to lead this church to stand firmly on His mercies each and every day and can boldly proclaim His truth to our neighbors, coworkers, and community. Ask for His mercies to well up and overflow out of this church in a way that makes our bodies a living sacrifice for His name.
- Practical steps: Write down the mercies God has given you. Put them in a place where you can regularly remind yourself of the compassion of God. Let this be your firm foundation that you draw strength from daily to be a living sacrifice.

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Day 3: Holy and Acceptable to God – John Arevalo

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Rom. 12:1).

The thought of our opportunity to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, is a great privilege. May we be comforted that our efforts to devote every aspect of our lives to the Lord is pleasing to Him. I pray that our sacrifices for God would not be driven by mere duty, but also be driven by the glorious thought the God of the universe will see our lives as holy and acceptable! A church zealous for God's holiness and precepts can spur towards the spreading of the gospel to the ends of the earth, starting in our city.

01. *Holy*. This word encompasses every attribute of who God is. It is a word that traces from Genesis to Revelation in such a way that God's Holy presence leaves godly men in deeper exposure of their wretchedness (Isa. 6:5). A Holy God who sees your sacrifices as holy is worth all your offering. Therefore, we must take a look at our lives and ask ourselves: does God see my sacrifices as holy?

02. *Acceptable*. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:9, "we make it our aim to please Him." Offering ourselves as a living sacrifice is not to make much of ourselves, but to make much of God. In the same way that Christ did not please Himself (Rom. 15:3) is the same way we need to see our sacrifices: not pleasing to our flesh but acceptable to Him.

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Prayer Points:

- Pray that our church will not fall into the legalistic norm of good works but pursue their sacrifices as holy and acceptable to God.
- Pray that our sacrifices will transform our city in such a way that God will see it as holy and acceptable.
- Practical Steps: Think about your sacrifices. What motivates you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice? What are desires that prevent you from truly giving your life's offering as holy and acceptable to God? Confess and ask God to continue to give you a desire after His own heart.

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Day 4: Spiritual Worship – Leah Arevalo

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Romans 12:1)

What is our spiritual worship? In the Old Testament, sacrificial offerings were how God's people worshiped Him under the law. A sin offering, like a spotless lamb or a young bull, was the way to be made righteous and to receive forgiveness of sin. The sacrifice (the worship) produced forgiveness. But now brothers and sisters in Christ, the forgiveness we have received by repenting and believing in Jesus' living sacrifice on our behalf is what produces our worship through the Holy Spirit. As children of God, we now live by the Spirit who dwells in us, guides us, and produces the fruits of righteousness. Our spiritual worship is not just the songs we sing together on Sunday mornings, but a daily surrender. Three takeaways:

01. *Remember Jesus and His atoning sacrifice on your behalf.* Have you truly received this gift of grace? Have you embraced His unconditional love for you? And having truly rested in this grace, are you now offering yourself to Him out of a redeemed heart or rather out of debt to God? Ask the Lord to examine the motives of your heart here, and remember He is your Father in Heaven who is abounding in steadfast love over you.

02. *Actively surrender your time, your money, your resources, your plans, and your body to Him- today.* Present yourself as an offering to the Lord, a living sacrifice, with what He has given you right now. What does your spiritual worship look like today? The way you get

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your kids to school in the morning, catch that Metro, serve that hot coffee, witness to that co-worker, or conduct that meeting can all be your spiritual worship today. Galatians 2:19-20 says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

03. *Our Sunday gathering is not a landing place but a launching pad.* Imagine if every member of the church was living each day of the week as a means for spiritual worship instead of just another hurdle towards the weekend. However monotonous or meaningless your days may feel like, remember that if we walk by the Spirit then nothing is impossible with God.

Prayer Points:

- Praise God for the wonderful news of the gospel, which from it we can see our living sacrifices as our spiritual worship!
- Pray that our church will be filled with spiritual worship on Sundays, and to the rest of the week.
- Ask God that our city will be filled with spiritual worship through the living sacrifices of our church.

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Day 5: Do not be Conformed to this World - Kristen Crew

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

My preschool aged son has decided that he is actually, in fact, his favorite superhero. The amount of time and effort he has put into conforming, or being similar in every way, to this character is either impressive or alarming, we aren't totally sure yet.

We conform to this world in a similar (albeit less cute) way, although it doesn't take nearly as much intentional effort. It is effortless to become like the world, as much of what our five senses absorb all day is of the world, but it is unsatisfying and ultimately destructive. The content we are constantly fed through our phones, those in our life, and through our own thinking is often in direct contrast to what we see will bring us abundant life, hope, and peace in God's word.

It is clear that we cannot be a living sacrifice if most of our time and effort is conforming us to this world. So, what are we to do? Galatians 5:16 tells us to "walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." Let's make it our aim to do these two things:

01. Starve the flesh.
02. Feed the Spirit.

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Take time during these 21 days of prayer and fasting to present your time, your conversation topics, what you listen to, and what you watch as a living sacrifice to the Lord. Consume the things of Jesus. Starve the flesh and the world and be unusually intentional and focused on the things of God.

Prayer Points:

- Pray that the Lord will reveal to you ways in which you are conforming to the world. Offer up all of your thoughts, feelings, and actions to Him. Ask him to change your desires, to believe the truth in God's word, and to be transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Pray that our church would be full of people not conforming to the world but being transformed by the Lord. Pray that the Lord would move so strongly in our church, that we would be unusually focused on God.
- Pray that the Lord would move through us to help many in our city to see how dissatisfying the world is, and how much life and hope we can have through a relationship that Christ offers to all who will be.

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Day 6: Renewing your Mind – Mike Engelsjerd

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind... (Romans 12:2)

For as long as we are on this earth, we will be in the midst of a battle for our minds. The world, our flesh, and the devil strive to draw our attention away from God and change not only what we think but also how we think. Some attacks are overt, such as the blatant sensuality and materialism that surround us. Others are more difficult to recognize, such as the prevailing thought of humans as the center of the universe – the belief that we can do all things ourselves, the emphasis on individual moral freedom, and the thousands of little things in our society that often distract us from God. We cannot remain neutral in this battle against the world, and if we are not active in combatting it, we will be conformed to it. What then must we do?

01. *We must be constantly praying.* We cannot renew our minds on our own. We have been saved by God “by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5), and our own attempts to overcome the world will only lead to greater self-dependency rather than God-dependency. In recognition of our reliance on God, we must ask Him to renew our minds, that we “may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord...” (Colossians 1:9-10).

02. *We must be consistently reading the Word of God.* The world claims to have the truth, or it claims that we can determine our own truth. In reality, Jesus is truth (John 14:6), and God’s Word is truth (John 17:17), and we must be in it daily in order to be able to discern

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truth from lies, God's way from the world's way, and the path to life from the path to death.

03. Lastly, we must *be consciously placing our minds on Jesus* rather than things of the world. We have choices each day about what to think and how to think. While we cannot change on our own, we can respond in accordance with the Spirit's work to elevate Jesus in our lives (Philippians 4:8).

Prayer Points:

- For ourselves and for the church, let us pray that we may be constantly relying on God in prayer, consistently in the Word, and consciously placing our minds on Jesus. We cannot renew our minds on our own, but as we do these things, the Spirit will transform us more and more into Christ's image.
- For our community and for the world, let us pray that God will give us compassion for them and a desire that they may hear and believe the truth. Furthermore, let us pray that He may use us to reveal His truth and the saving love of Jesus to them.
- We know that Jesus Christ has overcome the world. Therefore, let us live victoriously, faithfully following Jesus each day. As we do this, we can be confident that He will complete His work in and through us (Philippians 1:6).

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Day 7: Discerning the Will of God – Dale Sutherland

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2).

Although we live in a culture that says it is all about us and what we can do, followers of Christ must resist this worldly temptation. As believers, we cannot forget the transformative work that has taken place through the gospel. By God's grace, our minds have been made new. With confidence, we can know the will of God, and we don't need to lean on the world's interpretation.

If you are wondering about God's will, Scripture is clear. We are to live godly lives, meditate on God's Word, look forward to heaven, forgive and be forgiven, and walk in submission to human authority. You don't need to be conformed to this world; you are a new creature.

Many of us spend time trying to do the will of God as though He is hiding it from us, and this is simply untrue. There are no secrets or attempts to mask God's will, and I encourage you to spend time in God's Word. Satan wants followers of Christ to see Him as unreachable and unattainable. Church; do not fall for the lies.

We serve a good God, and He has a good plan for you and me. If you are worried about which job opportunity will come next, which school to attend, or which outfit to wear, rest. Instead, with a renewed mind, focus on His will for your life, walk with Him, and look forward to when you will meet Him. Until then, enjoy each hour as you spend it with the people He has placed in your life.

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Prayer Points:

- Praise God that His will is revealed clearly in His Word!
- Pray that our church will access the wonder of His will through His Word, as we take every captive thought to obey Him (2 Cor. 10:5).
- Pray that we would all rejoice and follow God's will to live godly lives, meditate on His Word, look forward to Heaven, forgive and be forgiven, and to walk in submission to human authority.

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Day 8: God's Varied Grace (v. 3-6) – Noah and Angi Walker

"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself highly than he ought to think..." It takes God's grace, awakening our hearts to be able to look at ourselves as we truly are. As it is written, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). This weight of sin is too difficult to bear, and the lifelessness of our hearts is too great for us to recognize how truly broken we are without the grace of Jesus Christ.

"...but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." What is God's assessment of our abilities? Jesus states in John 15:5, "I am the vine and you are the branches...for apart from Me you can do nothing." Nothing! And yet, we are also called through faith the words Christ spoke in the same breath: "The one who remains in Me, and I in him, will bear much fruit." Much fruit! We are capable of an abundant harvest in Christ. May we believe these words with all of the faith that God has granted us!

"For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." God did not make us to be self-sufficient. We cannot view one another with a spirit of "I have no need of you" (1 Cor. 12:21). It's only together that we can function as God designed. Like a hand cut-off and sitting on a table, we aren't going to have any idea what we're supposed to do outside of the body.

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"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let use them..." God has intentionally and specifically gifted every last one of us. God did this -- not any man. Therefore, may we never compare our gifts from a place of scorn or declare to God, "Why have you made me like this?" (Rom. 9:21) Instead, may we respond, "Here I am – send me" (Is. 6:8). If we walk in these truths, we will see our whole church flourish and the world will know that we are Jesus' disciples by the way that we love each other; in action and in truth (John 13:35, 1 John 3:18).

Practical Steps:

01. Let us repent of self-reliance and throw our souls upon Christ in ongoing dependence.
02. In times with the LORD, let us ask Jesus what gifts He's given each of us (and let's not forget to take the spiritual gift assessment test if we haven't already!)
03. Out of a place of humility, let's take tangible steps (i.e. talk to someone, start something, do something, etc.) to apply our gifts in the next 2 weeks at our church.

Prayer Points:

- Please pray that God might give our church a radical, unwavering spiritual dependence directly upon the shoulders of Christ.
- Please pray that God would humble us as he shows us our gifts and that he would show each of us how to be a fully engaged, active member of the Citylight church body.

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Day 9: Prophecy – Nate Crew

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith (Romans 12:6)

The definition we have been using at Citylight is that prophecy is a “spontaneous prompting of the Holy Spirit, subjected to the authority of Scripture, who speaks for the upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation of the church.” (Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, Wayne Grudem).

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:5 that the goal of prophecy is “so that the church may be built up.” Proverbs 10:11 says “the mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.” This is what biblical prophecy does. It is a fountain of life bringing about encouragement, courage, or conviction and it comes from the mouth of the righteous, from those pursuing the way of the Lord and being sensitive to His voice. Remember in our core value 4, we are led by the Spirit, the two core things were that we should be surrendered to His Will and sensitive to His voice. The second part is our focus for today. Let us all pursue nearness to the Lord so we can be sensitive to His voice. How might He be leading you to build up the church by giving a word of encouragement at just the right time? How might He be leading you to build up the church by giving a word of challenge at just the right time? How might He be leading you to build up the church by giving a word of comfort at just the right time? Is He putting someone on your heart now to text/call/ or go meet with? Let’s be sensitive to His voice during these 21 days and see how He might lead us to build up the body.

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Prayer Points:

- Pray that God would help you live under the authority of His Word and that He would increase your desire for His Word, so you can speak on His behalf with clarity and truth. Ask God if there is something you can say to encourage someone specifically.
- Pray that God would help us be a church who exercises the gift of prophecy with wisdom and love. That it would be used to build up the body and that everyone in our church would have a mouth that is a fountain of life.
- Pray that the city would hear the Lord speaking to them as we proclaim the Gospel and communicate the word of God to them. Pray that the city would be built up as they come to faith in Christ and participate in the blessing of being a part of His church.

USING YOUR GIFTS

Day 10: Service – Asa and Amber Reini

If service in our serving... (Romans 12:7)

Congratulations! You've made it halfway through the devotional. As a midpoint check-up, ask yourself the following questions: *Do I feel like my prayer life has deepened during the past 9 days? In what ways have I grown in terms of sacrificing my life?*

For some, you may have experienced tremendous growth over the past few days. For others, you may not see as much of a difference. If you're in the latter group, don't get discouraged and remember that life-change takes time. Two roadblocks that might be hindering your growth are:

- Viewing each devotional as a separate concept, rather than connecting the verses of Scripture as a whole.
- Finding it difficult to take practical action on some of the previous concepts.

Fortunately, verse 7 starts out with the concept of serving, something that anyone can do during their unique season of life. The challenge, however, is that while anyone can do it, true serving is not easy – it is uncomfortable, inconvenient, sacrificial, and forces you to take ownership of something that wouldn't otherwise be your responsibility. Christ said that the opportunities to serve will be plentiful, but that the people willing to fill those needs will be few (Luke 10:2). We as Christians are called to be those few people and to constantly be on the lookout for opportunities to serve. Yet, you may be confused on where to begin serving because you remain unsure of what serving opportunities align well with your gifts.

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And although there is beauty in using your specific gifts to serve the Lord, this verse speaks to a general gift that is quite simple: just the gift of serving. Instead of trying to find the perfect fit, you may just need to jump into serving somewhere (e.g. children's ministry, the hospitality team, after school mentoring, etc.) and then see how God directs you from there. Many people will speak to the benefits of trying something new at work in order to grow in their careers, but people are often afraid to try something new in serving to grow in their faith. The good news is that serving isn't some dreary, monotonous task. Even in the midst of difficulty, we can experience joy through serving. This is because we're able to build community with the people who sacrifice alongside us and ultimately contribute to growing unity within the church. Most importantly though, our service is visible to Christ and brings Him glory (Colossians 3:23-24).

Prayer Points:

- Ask God to reveal the areas of your pride that are keeping you from surrendering yourself fully in service to others and to Him (e.g. your wealth, your "busyness", your comfort, etc.).
- Christ calls us to be humble in our view of ourselves (v. 3-4) and eagerly aim to serve our brothers and sisters in Christ (v. 10). He also calls us to serve those that live in our community, and even those that we consider to be our enemies (v. 20). Who do you need to be serving right now?

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Day 11: Teaching (v.7) – John Arevalo

The one who teaches, in his teaching (Romans 12:7)

Paul expressed his satisfaction to the church of Rome because they are “filled with knowledge and able to instruct one another” (Rom. 15:14). This is my prayer for Citylight Church: that the ministry of the Word would continue to extend from the pulpit towards all our ministries, and in our city. We pray that our pastors and servant leaders would immerse themselves in teaching God’s Word with love, clarity, and faithfulness so that our church will be filled with the knowledge of God’s love and equipped to teach one another. Think about the difference we can make in our city if every member of our church is able to teach God’s word in different capacities! We let the Word do the work, as we occupy ourselves with the Word to make disciples of all nations. Three contexts we need to study as we aim to teach:

01. *The Context of the Word.* Knowing the context of the passage is vital in teaching God’s Word. As living sacrifices, we need to expose God’s Word faithfully by knowing the author’s original intent. We study how the passage fits into the overall framework of the book and to the rest of the Bible, in such a way that Jesus Christ is exalted in our teaching!

02. *The Context of our People.* Not only do we need to know the context of the Bible, but we need to be acquainted with the contexts of the hearts of our own people. Biblical teaching that is out of touch to the daily realities of its local body often becomes void. But the teaching of God’s Word, communicated to address the intricacies,

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passions, struggles, and convictions of our people leaves the church equipped to do the work God has called them to do.

03. *The Context of Ourselves.* A biblical passage taught, must first be taught to our own hearts. Like a cook tasting the meal first before serving it to the guests, so does the bible teacher must first taste and see the goodness of God's Word (Ps. 34:8) before it is served to the church. As we prepare to teach God's Word, we evaluate how the passage has cut us to the heart (Acts 2:37) – how did it convict us? How did it help us? How did it spur us to action? How did it lead us into greater praise and awe of Him?

Prayer Points:

- Pray that our church will be occupied with the word, as we pursue to teach the Word.
- Pray earnestly that we would fill our city with the teaching of God's Word (Acts 5:28)!
- Consider the three contexts that we need to study (Word, people, & ourselves) as we teach. What do you need to study the most? Pray for God to enlighten your hearts and minds as you strive to teach His Word.

USING YOUR GIFTS

Day 12: Exhortation – Cindy Abell

The one who exhorts, in his exhortation... (Romans 12:8)

I had come home from a tough day at work ready to vent to my ever-patient roommate about the heartaches of the day and wondering how to navigate a situation that the Lord had placed in my life. She listened as I talked and talked and waited until I was done to say, “okay, go get your Bible and turn to Proverbs 4.” For the next 20 minutes she pointed me to multiple scriptures about seeking the wisdom of God and wrote down the references for me. I still have the post-it notes on my desk. I came into that conversation burdened and weary. I left that conversation reinvigorated and encouraged. No questions about it, my roommate has the gift of exhortation (also called the gift of encouragement). She has the capacity to urge, encourage, and comfort people towards the application of Biblical truth. And praise God, she uses her gift often!

Now you may be thinking, “Well, my spiritual gift isn’t exhortation, so I’m just gonna skip over this.” But just because my gift (or your gift) is not exhortation, doesn’t mean we get a pass on encouraging others. Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Consider how you can go out of your way to encourage people around you. How do you think our church, our community, and our world would be impacted if we were all constantly considering ways to encourage other people? How do you think your own personal walk would flourish if you were taking this simple step of obedience to encourage others? Here are 5 ways to get you started:

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01. Take time to point a friend to the Word like my roommate did
02. Write an encouraging note to a co-worker who's having a rough day
03. Share an encouraging scripture you recently read with someone
04. Go out of your way to sit next to somebody new at church and welcome them into our congregation
05. Open up your home for people to gather in fellowship

Prayer Points:

- Pray that the Lord would reveal more about His character to you as you seek to obey Him
- Pray that the Lord would bring people into your life that are in need of encouragement.
- Pray for opportunities to encourage the people that are regularly a part of your life.
- Pray for boldness and obedience to exhort one another and stir up one another to love and good works.
- Maybe you are the one in need of encouragement. It's okay to pray that the Lord would bring people in your life to lift you up! I encourage you to go to HIM. Start in His Word.

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Day 13: Giving and Leadership– Dale Sutherland

The one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness (Romans 12:8).

When I was a police officer, I worked with narcotics; I was certified as an expert in undercover operations in the United States Federal Courts. Several times throughout my career, the Chief of Police asked officers like me to put together a team that would focus on a particular crime issue.

I was a part of the team because of my skill of undercover work. However, without someone to arrest the bad guys, my skill was useless. Our team needed officers that could investigate the bad guys. We also needed experts to handle the very important communication that would take place. Lastly, we needed arrest teams to get the criminals off the streets. All of us were needed, but none of us were enough alone.

Now, imagine that Christ has lined up our whole church, and we are standing in front of Him. As He walks by, He inspects our hearts. As the One who knows all, including how He has gifted each of us, He selects some to be encouragers, some to contribute to the “needs of others,” some to lead and govern diligently, and some to be merciful.

Yes, we are all called to live out these qualities when given the opportunity. However, by God’s grace, we have also been given individual gifts – all for His glory. This may sound similar to the structure of a sports team or in families, but our church family is working together for the eternal, supernatural, and divine task of changing lives, bringing us closer to Jesus, and glorifying God.

USING YOUR GIFTS

One thing to note: Regardless of your gift, be sure to remember your responsibility to use the gift God has given you. It is a great joy to give generously, and this is a special encouragement for all of us, but especially to those of you who have been given the gift of giving. While being merciful, Paul reminds us to be cheerful. If we have been gifted to govern, we should serve with diligence.

While serving with the police department, I enjoyed my work because I learned to serve in a way that was best for the team. When you look through this verse, ask God to help you obey His Word and find the thing He has asked you to do for His team.

Prayer Points:

- Praise God for the pastors and leaders of our church. Pray that you would give them wisdom to equip the body, as they recognize the variety of giftings each member possesses.
- Ask God how He would like you to consider in giving during this new year. Think about the difference we can make in our city through the generous giving of our members. Ask Him to give you the heart to sacrifice financially that you may gain treasures in heaven and see His name be further proclaimed through our church.

USING YOUR GIFTS

Day 14: Mercy – Anna Martinez

The one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness (Romans 12:8).

In the verses before, it says that each member of the body has different gifts according to the grace given to us. God in His wisdom and in His mercy created us with different abilities. All of these different gifts are reflections of God and His power. By knowing our gifts and pressing into them, we begin to know more of God's character. Taking it one step further, not just knowing, but acting on our gifts. Leading – with zeal, doing acts of mercy – with cheerfulness. It is often in the action that we encounter God. Acts of mercy teach us about God and His character. The cheerfulness involved in doing acts of mercy teach us about God's compassion and generosity. How freeing it is to know that our acts of mercy can reflect God's tender mercies! Two quick thoughts:

01. Every person has been given a gift that is meant to be used. Engaging with our gifts will teach us about God's character.
02. Our gifts are meant to be engaged with – acted upon. We are all invited into action. Into full participation. If we are going to give – then have it be generously, if we are leading, then full force with zeal, when we do acts of mercy – with cheerfulness and eagerness. Living out God's gifts is not a burden but an act of freedom. Though we may feel that we lack in any one of these areas, we grow these muscles through exercise. We may feel far from giving mercy, but as we act in mercy, we grow in mercy.

USING YOUR GIFTS

Prayer Points:

- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what your gifts are. Sit with the Lord; ask to hear what He has to say about your creation and His character lived out through you.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to give your eyes to see when you can act with your gifting. There are acts of mercy that you can engage in every single day.

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

Day 15: Let Love be Genuine - Rachel Anderson

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor (Romans 12:9-10).

Let love be genuine. Let love be real, sincere, and authentic. Today in our time of prayer and fasting, we seek to offer up our lives and bodies as a living sacrifice by pursuing a genuine love for one another. We know that the opposite of genuine is counterfeit. If our love is not genuine, then it is not really love at all, rather a fake or counterfeit love. Paul urges us to let our love be genuine because we can't offer our whole bodies as a living sacrifice while having a counterfeit love. Two steps to produce a genuine love:

01. *Brotherly affection.* To love with a brotherly affection means to have a devoted love. We are going out of our way, and above the minimum to love those in our lives, giving our time, energy, and resources to this brotherly love. Note that this is a self-sacrificing love that requires intentional action. We are all in, willing to love when it is not easy or convenient in our own lives.

02. *Showing honor.* If we are seeking to outdo one another in showing honor, it postures our hearts and minds in a position expecting to serve and not be served. The idea of outdoing one another keeps us actively searching, not passively waiting, for opportunities to honor others above ourselves.

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

Prayer Points:

- Pray for the lost in our lives and in the Falls Church community to know that we are followers of Christ because of our genuine love for one another and those around us. *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”* (John 13:35).
- Ask the Lord to reveal areas in our lives where you might be settling for a self-seeking or fake love. Repent in these areas and ask for opportunities to show honor and brotherly affection, producing a genuine love where there was once a counterfeit love.
- Practical Steps: Ask the Lord for his power to produce a genuine love in your life today. Think of someone right now who you will cross paths within the next 24 hours who you can honor and serve above yourself.

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

Day 16: Be fervent in Spirit - Shalom Montero

Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord (Romans 12:11).

This call in our lives to never lack zeal, and keep spiritual fervor is not out of our own strength. Our commitment to the word of God has nothing to do with our strength in keeping His rules, but our love for a God that has loved us first. When we intentionally live for the glory of God and make His works in our lives known (by sharing our testimony or life with others), we see the Holy Spirit provide us gifts that keep our spiritual fervor. God has shown me that it is not the strength by which I share or serve, but the boldness of my prayers. God gives us this great love for the lost and I've asked that His eyes help us see. Let us serve through prayer, so that our spiritual armor is ready upon showing up. Here are some personal prayer points:

01. *God's presence.* God, thank you for your presence in my life and in my family's life. I thank you that you have let me know you and receive your Son. Thank you for the assurance that your word provides, that you hear our prayers, that you answer them, and that you are a good father. Please forgive me of my sins and help me forgive others. Thank you for your holy spirit, who is our counselor, and dwells in our hearts.

02. *His healing hand.* God, I pray for my heart. Let me never forget that you are the one that has done all things. I pray for (names) and ask that you please heal them. Heal them of (disease) and ultimately of their sins. I pray that your word many be as real in their lives as it is in mine, that they may come to repentance and accept Jesus as your son. You say, 'you have not because you ask not' (Habakkuk 2:2).

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

I pray that you use this to bring them closer to you and glorify your name. I pray that they may be able to profess your glory.

03. *Against the Enemy.* I pray against my own doubt, my insecurities, and against the schemes of the devil. He comes to kill and to destroy, but you come that I may have life. I pray against the enemy in my home and against his schemes in my family. I pray for (by name) and I pray that you may command your angels to guard them, and that your holy spirit may begin to work in their lives. I pray against him in our church, that you may keep us from scandal, let your name be glorified is us and through us.

04. *Salvation.* I pray for people to hear the word of God and be saved. I pray for Falls Church and the community we serve to be changed because of your word. Let us reap the harvest that others have planted, that entire families may come to know Jesus in a personal way. Let us also plant seeds of trust and your word, that many might come to faith. I pray for the faculty in our schools, let them hear your word and be saved, and let generations rise up in faith because of our obedience. Let all of this be done for your glory God, that others may know that Jesus is the Son of God, and through him there is eternal life. In Jesus name, Amén!

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

Day 17: Rejoice, Be Patient, Be Constant – Adam and Edis Valenti

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer (Romans 12:12).

We all go through hardships in our lives. The realities of our walk with Jesus in the midst of a broken world truly creates challenges and struggles. But in n Romans 12:12, Paul teaches us three things we should do in our everyday lives in light of our hardships.

01. *Rejoice in Hope.* This is referring to Christ's return and our ultimate redemption (Rom. 8: 23-24). No matter what the Lord gives us (good or bad) we should always have hope. This life is not the end for us. (Matt. 25:21, 1 Cor. 15:58, 2 Tim 4:8). Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection gives us true hope in Him. Therefore, we rejoice!

02. *Be Patient in Tribulation.* Life can be unpleasant and not all moments are happy moments. But the struggles of life on earth are not worth comparing with the glory to come (Rom 8:18). So, we wait with patience (Rom. 8:25). We look to Jesus, who trusted the will of His father before being crucified on the cross.

03. *Be Constant in Prayer.* When Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane He exemplified being in constant prayer during tribulation. God tells us plenty of times that we should pray (Acts 2:42, 1 Thess. 5:17, 1 Tim. 2:8). We shouldn't just pray in bad times; we should also pray in good times by giving thanks for all He has blessed us with. Praying gives us the intimacy with God that we need daily.

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

Prayer Points:

- Pray and give thanks for the hope that He has given us in Christ Jesus. Pick a person in your life and ask the Lord to reveal the hope He has given us and share it with them.
- We live in a fast pace world and it's easy to forget to be patient and to pray. We look for fast results whenever we do pray but that is not how God works. God's timing is always perfect. Take some time out of your busy day no matter where you are or what you're doing to pray. It could be in your car while driving to work or walking your dog; God is always with you (Read Psalm 139:7-12).
- Pray that we may see the purpose that God has laid out for us and know how we can use our unique gifts to impact our community.

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

Day 18: Seek to Show Hospitality – Steve and Grace Kaczowka

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality (Romans 12:13)

As we pray and fast together, focusing on the Lord's call for us to live sacrificial lives, we see the Lord calling us specifically to provide for the needs of others and welcoming them into our lives through hospitality. Hospitality is the ability to unselfishly meet the needs of others by receiving and welcoming visitors into your home in a way that creates a safe and a comfortable atmosphere for them.

01. *Pursue Jesus' Example:* Many times, throughout His ministry, Jesus gave specific commands to care for the poor, the sick, the widow, and the vulnerable children. (Proverbs 14:31, Psalm 41:1, Deuteronomy 10:18, James 1:27.) But we also must care for our fellow believers as part of God's church (John 13:34-35).

02. *Consider Your Resources:* Generosity in our resources and time means we sacrifice spending our resources and time how we want to for the good of someone else (Acts 2:45, Exodus 36:5).

03. *Put Others First:* Intentionally putting another first follows the command of Jesus in Matthew 20:16. Remember Jesus' upside-down view He shares with his disciples in how we should approach our responsibility to care for others.

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

We don't need to be perfect to show hospitality; our homes do not need to be bigger, nicer, or cleaner to show love to those God has placed in our lives. We just need to be there and open our lives to them... mess and all. Everything we have is from the Lord, it is not ours to begin with, so let us give willingly from the overflow of our hearts in what He has done for us (James 1:17-19).

Prayer Points:

- Ask the Lord to show you the needs around you, and for a heart to give sacrificially in the ways He calls you to. Ask Him for wisdom in how you can specifically help.
- Ask the Lord to create margin and time in your days, weeks, and months to care for others out of the overflow of what He has given you. Spend extra time in prayer for those in our community and church.
- Practical Steps: The needs we met during the holiday season do not disappear in the new year. Seek out ways to help the community with those in your lighthouse: have a meal in your home and share the Gospel with neighbors!

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

Day 19: Rejoice and Weep – Michael and Sherri Dezort

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15)

Wait! What? On first appearance this can seem contradictory. Are we rejoicing or mourning? And how is rejoicing and mourning “love in action?” This is all part of God’s plan for unity within the body of Christ – the church. What’s important to note here is that the church body will not be without pain, nor will it always be in a state of suffering. There will be times of joy and pain. That is the human condition on this earth. But the bible instructs us to join together as a body of believers and share in each other’s triumphs and sorrows. When you have a literal blood family member, aren’t you happy for them when life is going well for them? Of course! And when a child or a parent is hurting, doesn’t it hurt your heart as well and don’t you try to lessen the pain? Of course, you do. In the same way, we are to treat our church family in this manner. We rejoice with them when special events in their lives provide happiness, and when they go through a trial, we stand with them, we cry with them, we hold them close and love on them. Why? Because the same love Jesus showed us, is in our hearts and we are moved to do the same for others. And while we do this for other church members, we must also remember to reach out and share this love with those not in the church. In this way, they will know that our love and faith is authentic and will be drawn to Jesus.

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

Prayer Points:

- Ask the Lord to show you who you can reach out to each day. You don't have to "save" the world in a single day, but I guarantee you there are people in your sphere of influence who are hurting. Others are celebrating a momentous event and just need someone to join them in their joy. Will it be you?
- Ask the Lord to reveal to you what difference this would make to those around you. Ask Him for courage to step out and share His love with no thought for yourself or how you might look to others. I assure you; your love will be appreciated. If not in the immediate, it will be in eternity.
- Practically speaking, look for an opportunity TODAY (and every day after) to see with God's eyes someone near you who is rejoicing or mourning. That may look like happiness or depression. You may see it in their eyes, their facial expression, slumped shoulders, whatever. The point is, take notice and act! Life is not a spectator sport and everyone around you needs Jesus' love, even if they don't know it yet.

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

Day 20: Associate with the Lowly – Brian and Esther Nolton

Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight (Romans 12:16).

Paul calls believers not to be self-righteous, but to be gentle with those in need or those you think are of lower circumstance than yourself. In Philipians, he reiterates, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (2:3). True association with the lowly abandons all arrogance, self-righteousness, and elitism that is contrary to how God designed His church.

God calls us to love one another as Jesus loves us (John 13:34). He calls us to follow Jesus’ example, who associated Himself with the lowly (us!) by lowering Himself to the point of a servant and being born in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:7). There are no qualifications in His command. This kind of love is impartial and without judgment (Romans 2:11). For God says, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

Prayer Points:

- Ask the Lord to show you times in your life where you can give impartial love to others. Maybe they are people you encounter regularly, maybe it was someone who walked by on the street. Pray that God would lead you to be impartial and open your heart to associate with those people.
- Ask the Lord to remind you of times in which you have been shown mercy and grace when you were “lowly”. Thank God for His love, forgiveness, and provision in such a time. Pray that God will use you to reflect that kind of love in another’s time of need.
- God was intentional about placing us in an area where the community is in great need, among people others might consider lowly. Imagine how we can make an impact on the community if we associate with the lowly and love them as Jesus loves us. Pray that God provides us with the courage and ability to serve those in and around our church.

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

Day 21: Overcome Evil with Good – Emily Rector

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them [...] ¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom 12:14;17-21).

Because our world is tainted by sin, evil inevitably exists. In these verses, Paul tells us that we should not repay others for the evil that is shown to us. However, that does not mean we should passively endure suffering in the face of evil. Rather, the call is to bless those who persecute us, live peaceably with all, and actively love our enemies. What impact does this have? When we intentionally work to overcome evil with good:

01. We set ourselves apart from the corruption that is in line with worldly standards. We are usually tempted to combat evil with evil rather than good, even when we know that two wrongs don't make a right. When confronted by our enemies, our first reaction is typically fear, anger, frustration, vengeance...the list goes on, but none of these responses are particularly "good". Let's strive then to respond with love, joy, compassion, and understanding (or other responses in line with God's character). That is what sets us apart.

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02. We are used by God to stop the spread of evil. As followers of Jesus Christ, we have the power of the Holy Spirit living within us, who equips and enables us to combat the evil we face. It's not only that we have this incredible power, but we also need this power; we need the Holy Spirit in order to respond to evil with good because we cannot do it on our own.

03. We demonstrate the love of Jesus and his character to those around us. Jesus loved those who hated him, so much so that he died a painful death on the cross to save them. In arguably the most evil event that has ever taken place here on this earth, God's love was poured out for all people. Good overcame evil!

Overcoming evil with good is a response that is not always natural or normal or even of this world. However, let's live in this way, confidently knowing that although evil permeates the earth, Jesus has overcome evil once and for all through his death on the cross, so we don't have to live in fear! "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves (Col. 1:13)."

PRACTICING YOUR FAITH

Prayer Points:

- Ask the Lord to reveal to you the people in your life that you view as enemies. Write those names down and pray that God would help you determine practical ways of how you can actively love and serve them, then do it! Let's follow in Jesus' footsteps, "for even the Son Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)
- Pray and ask that the Lord would work in our city and world to combat the problem of evil, using his children to accomplish his kingdom purposes here on this earth as He sees fit. Evil can come in many forms, but nothing is too hard for the Lord (Jeremiah 32:17, 27). Boldly ask that our world would be restored and that our enemies would come to know the one true God, who poured out his love for all through Jesus' death on the cross.

