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Bible Scan - Romans 12-16

HOW TO WALK IN GOD'S WILL

Once a farmer was going through a mid-life crisis – he wanted to change professions and become a pastor. One day, while out in the fields, he saw a strange cloud formation in the sky. There was a “P” and a “C”. He was excited. It was a message from God. The heavens were saying to him “*Preach Christ*”.

The man sold his farm, went to Bible College, and took over a church. But the first Sunday it was obvious – this man was a terrible speaker. He stumbled and fumbled – and bored the congregation. Afterwards, a friend who knew his story, asked him, “Are you sure God wasn’t telling you to *plant corn*?”

Finding God’s will for your life is for many Christians, a very confusing subject – but it shouldn’t be. In reality, God has made finding His will quite simple.

In Romans 12:1-8 Paul lists six simple steps to walk in God’s will... Step One: *Present your body*. Step Two: *Renew your mind*. Step Three: *Humble your heart*. Step Four: *Exercise your faith*. Step Five: *Find your place*. Step Six: *Use your gift*. Follow these steps and your life will fall in sync with God’s good will.

Paul begins chapter 12, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God...” Remember, in the first 11 chapters of Romans, Paul has been describing the incredible mercies of God. He has given us such a lavish salvation, what can we give Him in return? That’s the question these last 5 chapters answer...

And Romans 12 begins by telling us, the only thing God lacks is you!

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” The first step to walking in God’s will is to give your body to God.

The Old Testament sacrifice was a butchered carcass, but God no longer likes His sacrifices well done. Today, He orders them rare. He wants a sacrifice that’s still alive - still mooing on the plate. God is now into living sacrifices.

The second step is in verse 2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” JB Phillips translates it... “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.” The second step to walkin’ in God’s will is to *renew your mind*.

Every Christian is either a *thermometer* or a *thermostat*. Some believers are thermometers –

they conform to room temperature. They want to “be cool”, or gravitate toward “what’s hot”. But God wants us to be a thermostat. Rather than register the temperature, why not set it? *Don’t conform... be transformed*.

The third step to walking in God’s will is to *humble your heart*. Verse 3, “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly...” Never forget the scoreboard in your life reads “God- everything, You- 0”. God deserves all the glory!

The fourth step is to *exercise your faith*. Paul says in verse 3, to think soberly “as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” One way to miss God’s will is to be *too big* - to think too *highly* of yourself. But another way is to be *too small* - to think too *lowly* of yourself... “Who am I to serve the Lord? God can never use me.”

A *false humility* provides a convenient excuse. Sure you’re a nobody... but God uses nobodies when they trust in Him.

The fifth step is to *find your place*. Verses 4-5, “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

It’s interesting that God has chosen to refer to His Church as a “body”. Our body is made up of many parts – but all the parts work in harmony and unity. This is also how the church should function. Our spiritual health and effectiveness depends on our togetherness.

The final step to walking in God’s will is to *use your gift*. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 teaches that there are 3 types of spiritual gifts: gifts, ministries, and activities. We can call them *motivations, ministries, and manifestations*. 1 Corinthians 12 lists the manifestations. Ephesians 4, the ministries. Romans 12, the motivations.

In verses 6-8 Paul lists 7 basic motivations that God puts in the heart of the Christian. Your gift colors your perspective. It’s an implanted tendency. To some of you God has given *more than one gift*, but to each of you He’s given *at least one*!

Devotion Box - Stringing Beads

Romans 12 tells us... Hate sin. Love what’s good. Be kind. Prefer the other guy. Serve God. Rejoice. Be patient in tough times. Continue in prayer. Give to other believers. Be hospitable... There’s only one thing better than southern hospitality, and that’s Christian hospitality. We can show both!

THE MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS

In Romans 12:6-8 Paul lists 7 basic motivations that God will put in the heart of the Christian. Your gift colors your perspective. It's an implanted tendency. To some of you God has given *more than one* gift, but to each of you He's given *at least one!*

First is *prophecy*. We usually associate this with *fore-telling*, but its primary meaning is *forth-telling*. It's been said, "A prophet was not known primarily for his *hindsight* or his *foresight*, but his *insight*." Here's a person who sees situations in black and white. He boldly speaks the message God gives him without fear of offending. God uses the person with this gift to remind us of His absolutes.

The second gift is *ministry*. This is a *supernatural knack* for helping others in practical ways!

The third motivational gift is the gift of *teaching*. It's been said, "A teacher's task is to take a roomful of live wires and see to it they're properly grounded."

The fourth gift is *exhortation*. Teaching instructs us what to do, exhortation encourages us to do it! The person with exhortation can best be described as the spiritual jumper cables who jump start brothers or sisters with weak batteries.

The fifth gift is *giving*. Everyone should develop the discipline of giving, but the person with the *gift of giving* has a special knack for loosening the purse strings to bless others and further God's work. I'll never forget the fellow who came to our church and gave out the \$100 handshakes. He'd come up, shake your hand, and slip you a crisp new \$100 bill. I never missed shaking his hand! He had this gift.

The sixth gift is the gift of *leading*. We could call it "spiritual management". It's been said, "Don't agonize - organize." 1 Corinthians 14:40 instructs us to do things "decently and in order". Individuals with this gift can help us mobilize for service.

Devotion Box - Opinions

Romans 12:16 tells us, "Do not be wise in your own opinion." Set your convictions in concrete, but hold your opinions loosely. Opinions are a dime a dozen. Everybody's got one. Be open and ready to embrace an opinion that might be better than yours!

Verse 18 reads, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." At times your stand for what's truth and right - or the other person's stubbornness - might make it impossible. But make sure the problem is not your unwillingness to forgive, or be flexible... or your clutching on to a mere opinion. Hey, your opinion is not as important as "(living) peaceably with all men."

The final motivational gift is the gift of *mercy*. Mercy has been defined as "Two hearts tugging at the same load." Again, we're all called to be merciful, but this gift provides a person with a special capacity to feel and identify with someone else's hurt.

People ask, "*How do I discover my gift?*"

Here's a helpful exercise... Let's say a little tike came running down the center aisle carrying a potted plant. But half-way down he slips and drops the plant - *crash* - dirt and pottery spill all over the floor. *How would you react?*

If you jump up and start looking for a broom, you have the gift of ministry.

If you pull out your wallet and offer to pay for the broken pot, yours is giving.

If you say to the little boy, "Young man, let this be a warning. Thus saith the Lord, there will be many opportunities to stumble in life and if you don't learn to watch your step you'll live forever with skinned knees." That's the gift of prophecy.

If your reaction is to show the child a clever foot maneuver he can use to right himself the next time he starts to slip, then your gift is the gift of teaching.

If you think, "How can we rearrange the chairs so this won't happen again?", that's leading.

Or maybe you'd give him a pep talk. "It's okay, you'll do better next time!" The gift of exhortation.

Or if you ran up, began to hug and cuddle the child, and kiss his "ittle-bitty-boobos", obviously you have the gift of mercy.

But understand - there would be 7 diverse reactions among the people in this room - and all are valid, God-ordained reactions. This is why we need each other. We need all the gifts. A healthy church appreciates its God-given diversity.

Devotion Box - How To Fight Evil

Verses 19-20 teach us... "You never win by trying to even the score." Paul doesn't say we shouldn't fight back when attacked... Assert yourself. Don't just sit there and take it. Retaliate. But don't fight evil with evil - if you do, you become no better than your enemy. Learn to fight evil with good! Verse 21 tells us, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Devotion Box - Love One Another

Verse 8 is an encouragement to get out of debt... "Owe no one anything except to love one another..." That's a good goal for all of us. Cut up the credit cards. Set up a plan to become debt-free. The only debt we should have is to love each other.

"...for he who loves another has fulfilled the law." All the Old Testament laws about how to treat your neighbor's ox were a working out of what love for your neighbor would look like if practiced. Just love - and the laws become obsolete.

GOD AND GOVERNMENT

Romans 13:1, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." God has sanctioned 3 institutions on earth: the Church, family, *and government*. We need to obey the governing authorities.

Paul says in verse 2, "whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God..." That doesn't mean that God condones every decision a government makes; but generally speaking, laws are established to uphold good, not evil. Legislators and police officers aren't trying to pick on good people. They're after the bad guys. Verse 5 tells us to obey the Law, not just to avoid getting caught, but for conscience's sake. We need to show respect for law and order.

Remember, Paul wrote Romans while living under the oppressive reign of the bloodthirsty Emperor

Nero. Paul knew that when the laws of the land conflict with the laws of God, our duty is clear; we must obey God. But that's a rare situation... What's more common is to see a "*Praise the Lord*" bumper sticker sail down the freeway at 95 mph. That's a sorry witness. If a Christian can't submit to human authority, how can we tell others to submit to divine authority?

Paul even tells us to pay our taxes! Verse 6, "For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing."

Understand, I'm sure that some of Paul's tax bill went to fund Nero's lewd parties and bloodthirsty events staged in the coliseum - but he still paid what was due. Guys, once you sign form 1040, seal the envelope, and drop it in the mailbox - from then on God holds the politicians responsible for how the money is spent. Your God-given responsibility is to pay your taxes.

GRAY MATTERS

In Romans 14 Paul addresses two types of Christians... The weaker brother believes in Jesus, but leans on law. He minds his religious manners - for he expects his performance to sustain God's favor.

Whereas the stronger brother knows he's right with God by faith alone. He recognizes in Christ his compliance to custom is no longer required. What God expects now is not compliance... but reliance.

Problems result when the conformist begins to judge his nonconformist brother - and vice-versa. And that's what had happened in the church at Rome.

The city had a wholesale grocery called "*The Shambles*." You could purchase quality meat at a cut-rate price. And church members were shopping the Shambles. The shambles though, got its meat from pagan temples. The idolaters made their sacrifices, then sold the extras to turn a profit for their false prophets.

The stronger believers weren't bothered by the tainted meat. Meat was just meat. They were sure their standing with God was based on *the faith they put in Christ*, not *the food they put on their plate*. The libertarians felt free to cook-out.

The weaker believers were appalled at the thought of eating desecrated meat. This was guilt-by-association. To them, eating the meat was equal to participating in the idolatry. To these vegetarians - the ground round was *out-of-bounds*.

First, Paul tells them- who are they to judge each

other. You are not my lord, and I am not your lord. There is one master, and His name is Jesus Christ.

The Lord is faithful to grow each Christian at that person's own individual pace, and in the way that's best for them. Verse 9 tells us, Jesus "died and rose and lived again to be Lord." Don't you try to usurp His place in somebody else's life.

When it comes to meat sacrificed to idols - and other gray matters - what should we do? If the issue is in the Bible, it's easy - follow the script. Black and whites are easy, but what about the gray matters...

For us, a gray matter might be whether it's okay to watch a certain movie - or go dancing - or have a glass of wine with dinner.. Each of us must make our own decisions before the Lord - and invariably some of us will feel at liberty, while others will refrain.

In the case of meat sacrificed to idols, Paul comments in verse 14, "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself..." Meat is just meat. What makes an object good or evil is how it's used or abused.

There are two limitations God places on our freedom in Christ. First, it shouldn't cause *me to fumble* - and second, it shouldn't cause *my brother to stumble*. Eugene Peterson paraphrases verse 15, "Don't you dare let a piece of God-blessed food become an occasion of soul-poisoning."

To sum up chapter 14, what have I accomplished if I *make a point*, but *lose a brother*? What matters to God is our unity. The weaker brother needs *to grow in understanding* - the stronger needs *to grow in love*.

Bible Scan - Romans 12-16

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - Ladies Night Out, Tuesday, May 14th at 6:45 PM

Men's Raft Trip, Sunday, May 19th—Monday, May 20th

High School/Middle School Retreat: Sunday, July 14th-Sunday, July 21st

Kid's Camp: 1-2nd grade, Tues, 7/16—Thurs 7/18; 3rd—5th grade, Thurs, 7/18—Sun, 7/21

Next Bible Scan - May 12, 2002 - 1 Corinthians 1-10

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." - Romans 12:1-2

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Devotion Box - Kingdom Matters

Romans 14:17, "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Meat and drink are of little consequence in God's scheme of things. What matters in the Kingdom are matters of the heart!

Phil Taylor grew up in a white church in the Deep South during the 1960s. I can identify. He recalls, "I don't know how we missed it. While King marched on Selma and an entire race cried out for justice, I heard sermons against rock and roll, the Beatles, mini-skirts, and long hair – but I never heard them mention racism, injustice, intolerance, hatred, and bigotry. Those are the things God hates."

So often Christians... "Major on the minors and minor on the majors".

Devotion Box - Tolerance

Romans 15:1, "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves." Be patient towards each other, and give each other room and space to grow spiritually.

Tolerance is the most underrated Christian virtue. We like friends who come already assembled. When we find that a friend has idiosyncrasies that irritate, or aggravate, or agitate us - we tend to move away from them. Paul tells us we're to bear with each other. Remember that God is not finished with your friend. You should show the same patience towards him that God has shown towards you.

Devotion Box - Admonish One Another

Romans 15:14, "...admonish one another". *"Or remind and caution".*

It's our responsibility to speak into each other's life instruction and correction when it's needed. Don't sit back and watch a believer *go astray* or *walk away*. Don't say, "Well, it's none of my business." It is your business to admonish another brother.

If Paul had not taken this responsibility seriously most of the New Testament would've never been written. Romans is Paul's effort to get involved in the lives of the believers at Rome. Paul was no sideline Christian. He was willing to risk rejection and misunderstanding to admonish other people.

PAUL AND HIS PALS

Romans 16 proves that Paul was not only a *soul winner*, but a *friend maker*. In these closing comments Paul mentions 35 different names. What's amazing is that Paul had never been to Rome, yet he knew many of the church's members.

When Paul wasn't busy winning the world for Jesus, and writing most of the New Testament, he spent his time keeping up with his friends. Hey, when Paul became your friend you had a forever friend. Paul was a faithful friend.

Paul was a people person – as every Christian should be. He loved the people Jesus died to save. He never got too busy for people. When you get too hurried, or feel too important for personal relationships your priorities are out of kilter!

In verse 1 Paul calls Phoebe "a servant of the church in Cenchrea". The Greek word translated "servant" can be translated "deacon". This is why I believe women served as dea-

cons in the early church.

Verse 3 mentions a married couple – "Priscilla and Aquila". They were committed to Paul. In verse 4 he says, "they risked their own necks for my life." If you're a faithful friend, folks will be a faithful friend to you. Which reminds me of the friendship vitamin..."B-1".

Verse 12, "Tryphena" means "dainty" and "Tryphosa" means "delicate" – yet "Dainty" and "Delicate" were rugged servants who tirelessly labored for the Lord.

Verse 15, "Greet Philologus". If you're an expectant parent here's a great name for the baby... *Philologus*...or "lover of the Word". We all need to be a *Philologus*.

Here's a closing thought. Of the names mentioned in Romans 16, all we know about most of these people are the brief comments here... *If a description of your life were rolled into one sentence what would it be?*