

## Romans 8:12-13

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[ 0 : 00 ] Turn with me to Romans chapter 8, Romans chapter 8, page number is found in your bulletin, page 944.

As we're continuing in our series this chapter, as I said a few weeks ago, the pastors have committed to attempt to memorize this chapter as we go through it this fall. Let me encourage you, if you are joining us in that endeavor, let me also say a word to those of you who may feel that that would be completely impossible for you, or you may have particular difficulties with memorizing anything.

In his Sunday school class this summer, John Dunlop told the story of a person with dementia who said, I feel so frustrated when I try to memorize scripture. I feel like my brain is a sieve, and the water just runs right through it.

But then she added, with a sparkle in her eye, but I've never seen a dirty sieve. You see, the word of God accomplishes its purifying power in our hearts and minds, whether or not we're conscious of the verses lodging in our long-term memory.

So let me encourage you to meditate on these words in Romans, to spend time in them. Whether or not you're seeking to memorize the whole chapter, let me encourage you to spend time praying and meditating on it so the word of God can do its work within us.

[ 1 : 24 ] Let's read this morning. I'm going to read beginning at verse 1. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

For God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do, by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin.

He condemned sin in the flesh so that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.

But those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

The mind set on the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

[ 2 : 31 ] You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of Christ dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ.

But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors. Not to the flesh to live according to the flesh, for if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for these words. We thank you for inspiring Paul to write them to the church in Rome so long ago. We thank you for preserving them for us today, for those who have faithfully translated them into our language, that we can readily understand them.

And we thank you for this time to look into them. We pray that your Spirit would guide us, teach us from them as you inspired them so long ago. Would you bring them to life in our hearts and lives and minds?

[ 3 : 49 ] For Jesus' sake we pray. Amen. Amen. So Paul begins these verses 12 and 13 with the word, so then. He's sort of summing up what he's talked about in the first 11 verses of this chapter, stepping back and drawing a conclusion.

We've seen so far in this chapter, he begins by saying, there's no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because our sin was condemned in the flesh of Jesus Christ on the cross. And now we have a right standing with God and we have the life-giving Spirit of God dwelling within us.

Last week, Pastor Nick talked about the indwelling Holy Spirit. What a blessing it is to have God himself dwelling in us. Now, in today's passage, Paul draws two conclusions.

The first one, in verse 12, Paul says, we are debtors. In other words, we owe God everything and he owes us nothing. The second conclusion, in verse 13, he says, we must put sin to death.

The only way to true life involves putting sin to death. Now, by and large, both of these conclusions are not very popular ideas in 21st century America.

[ 5 : 02 ] All right? When we hear the words, we are debtors, most of us would say, well, I don't want to be in debt to anyone. I mean, we like the motto that's on every New Hampshire license plate, live free or die.

And to be free means to be autonomous and independent and self-sufficient. I remember in college, one of my suitemates needed a ride to the airport. And since I had a car, I offered to drive him.

I said, hey, you know, my exams are over. I'm not that busy. Just let me know when you need a ride. He said, no, I'm fine. He called Connecticut Limo and paid them. Right?

Sometimes we don't want to ask for help or we don't even want to receive help from a friend who offers it to us because we don't want to feel indebted to the person as a result. We want to earn our own money and pay our own way and do our own thing and carve our own path, guard our own independence, and not be entangled or restricted by obligations and indebtedness.

Now, we might respond in a similar way to the subject of verse 13, putting sin to death. Put to death the deeds of the body? That sounds rather harsh. I mean, we like God when his ways make us more comfortable and happy and peaceful and prosperous.

[ 6 : 16 ] That sounds like good news to us. But we don't like it when God calls us to an obedience that makes our life harder and more stressful and more painful and more complicated.

We may like talking about the forgiveness of sins, but we don't talk a lot about the mortification of sin, putting sin to death. 360 years ago, a man named John Owen wrote a book based on verse 13 called *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers*.

It's still in print. We've ordered some copies. They're down in the bookstall below. I commend the book to you. It's relatively short, maybe 100 pages or less. But if you write a book on the same topic today, you might have trouble finding a publisher.

Right? These are not the most popular ideas going out in our world today and even in the church today. But they are the topic of today's passage, so they are the topic of today's sermon.

So first, I want to consider what does it mean that we are debtors in verse 12? And second, what does it mean to put sin to death in verse 13? So first, we are debtors, verse 12. Now, one scholar that I was reading said this in his commentary on verse 12.

[ 7 : 27 ] He said, Paul is just making a negative statement here. That we are not debtors to the flesh. Paul does not want us to think of ourselves as debtors to the Spirit, so he intentionally avoids making the parallel.

Now, this is a scholar that otherwise I highly respect. But I think he's wrong here for three reasons. First, the grammar of the verse. Now, Paul could have said we are not debtors to the flesh.

But the order of the words in the original is debtors we are not to the flesh. Paul affirms that we do have an obligation to God the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

Second reason is in other places in Romans, Paul affirms that we have obligations to other human beings. So, Romans 1, verse 14, Paul uses the same word. I'm under obligation to both to Greeks and barbarians.

He's under obligation to preach the gospel to all kinds of people. Romans 13, verse 7 and 8, Paul says, Pay to everyone what you owe them. Taxes to whom taxes are owed.

[ 8 : 34 ] Revenue to whom revenue is owed. Respect to whom respect is owed. Honor to whom honor is owed. Owe no one anything. Or let no debt remain outstanding except to love one another.

What Paul's saying there is that in Christ we have a continual obligation to love our neighbor as ourself. That's an obligation that is continually upon us.

It's a calling that we have. And third, in Romans 6, Paul has already spoken of believers in Christ as being indebted or obligated to God. He said, we're now not slaves of sin but slaves of righteousness, bond servants for life.

Paul said, you've died to the law but now you belong to another. You belong to Christ who was raised from the dead. So you see, belonging to Christ, being a believer in Christ, it doesn't just mean that every day we have an option of following Christ if we so choose.

It's not like an open-ended invitation. Hey, you know, feel free to take this up whenever you want it and leave it whenever you're not up for it. No. Paul says if we belong to Christ, it means every day we have a mission to accomplish, a summons to heed, an obligation to fulfill.

[ 9 : 49 ] You know, if you get married, it doesn't just give you a new option to be faithful to your spouse. It gives you a new obligation to be faithful to your spouse every day, whether you like it or not, whether you feel like it or not, and whether they're loving and respecting you in all the ways they should or not.

Paul says we are debtors to God. Not only because He made us out of nothing, it is God who made us and not we ourselves, but also because He saved us when all we had to offer Him was everything He had given us corrupted by our sin.

He made us out of nothing and He saved us by His grace. And so Paul says we are now debtors. We are obligated to Him day by day.

We owe Him everything we have. We owe Him our lives. Let me ask, is this how you consider your relationship to God? Do you consider yourselves a debtor to the God who made you and who saved you?

I think many of us operate consciously or unconsciously out of a different framework. Some of us think, no, God owes me something.

[ 11 : 02 ] People owe me something. I owe me something. I mean, I deserve to pamper myself a little bit here.

Now, when we look at other people, we call this entitlement. Right? The poor people are entitled because of the welfare system. The rich people are entitled because they've never had to suffer in their whole life.

Young people are entitled because of advertising and social media. Toddlers are entitled because their parents don't discipline them. The entitlement mentality is very pervasive in our society, which probably means it affects all of us more than we realize.

When we think about ourselves, we don't call it entitlement. We just say, I deserve better than I'm getting. I deserve better at work.

If I work hard, my colleagues should work equally hard. And if they don't, then I'll slack off. Or I'll resent them.

[ 12 : 09 ] Because I deserve better. Or I deserve better at home. My husband doesn't love me, so why should I respect him?

My wife doesn't respect me, so why should I sacrificially love her? Half of all marriage problems come back to that. Right? It's what Dr. Emerson Egerich in his book, Love and Respect, calls the crazy cycle.

Comes back to, I won't give what the Bible says I owe to my spouse because I'm not getting what I feel I deserve from them. And you know, we don't just approach other people in this way.

We can even approach God in this way. Have you ever been mad at God? Bitter and angry at him.

Now, I'm not just mad at the evil and injustice in the world. The Bible says God is mad at that too. And there is a kind of righteous anger that is an appropriate response when it's self-controlled.

[ 13 : 20 ] But have you been mad at God? God, I deserve better. Why did you let this happen to me? Why do you let him be promoted and I'm passed over?

Why do you give her a happy marriage and I'm just miserable? And if someone criticizes us for being self-pitying, we lash out at them and say, no, I deserve better.

You don't know what my situation is like. Now, maybe we don't quite go that far. But maybe you say, you know, I don't want my relationship with God to be characterized by obligation or duty or indebtedness.

I just want it to be characterized by freely given love. I don't want to obey God because I have to. I want to obey God because I want to.

And you may have some reasons for thinking this way. Right? Maybe you came out of a church background where it was all about duty and rules and obligations.

[ 14 : 25 ] Half of which couldn't be found anywhere in the Bible. And you obeyed out of fear. Fear of punishment from God. Fear of disapproval from church leaders.

You did all kinds of spiritual exercises to try to gain favor and honor before God and others. And you did all these things without understanding what Paul says in chapter 8, verse 1.

You know, the gospel of Jesus Christ is a liberating message. It's a message of freedom from enslaving guilt and debilitating shame.

It's a message of freedom from the looming threat of being justly punished for our sins. It's a message of freedom from the futility, from the hamster wheel of trying to justify ourselves by our own accomplishments.

But knowing this liberating power of the gospel of Jesus Christ does not leave us without any obligations to God at all. Consider what kind of relationship you have with somebody if you don't owe them anything and they don't owe you anything.

[ 15 : 38 ] It's actually a relationship that's characterized by indifference and distance and distrust. Not closeness and mutual commitment and belonging.

It's a relationship where people use one another without actually being committed to one another's good. This is the lie of casual sexual relationships.

Relationships that offer the option of intimacy without the obligation of permanence. They may seem alluring and gratifying at first, but in the end they are not fulfilling.

You see, sex by its very nature was designed by God to have a bonding effect. It was designed to foster and deepen and signify a relationship of mutual obligation.

Of self-giving till death do us part. You see, in a healthy relationship between human beings, whether it's a marriage or whether it's a friendship, intimacy and obligation go together.

[ 16 : 50 ] Mutual obligation, mutual respect and commitment provide the safe context for intimacy. And intimate sharing reinforces that mutual obligation. They're meant to go together.

And a healthy relationship with God works the same way. Psalm 25, 14 says, The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear Him. As human beings, we find our greatest fulfillment not in being obligated only to ourselves, but in living lives of rightful obligation to God and our neighbor before the God who has made us in His image and saved us by His grace.

You see, if we actually take to heart the first 11 verses of this chapter, that there's no condemnation in Christ Jesus, because Christ Jesus took the condemnation our sin deserved, that we have freedom in the Holy Spirit from the power of sin and death, we can only conclude with gratitude.

I owe Him everything. He paid the blood price for me. Now I'm His and He's mine. How can I say I deserve better? In light of all that Christ has given to me, everything else pales in comparison.

How can I limit myself to obeying only when I feel like it? My feelings change every day. I don't know what I want half of the time, if I'm honest with myself. Paul talks about that in Romans 7.

[ 18 : 25 ] He says, I don't do what I want to do, but what I do is the very thing I hate. We're all scrambled up. Our desires are fickle. But knowing that we belong to Christ and that we have obligations to Him, it frees us from constantly evaluating our fickle desires and saying, what do I want to do today?

Who do I want to be today? We can start every day by saying, whoever I am, Lord, I'm yours. That's the foundation that we can build on.

That because of what Christ has given to us, we are debtors, not to the flesh, but to the Spirit who dwells in us. That's the first point. And it leads us on to the second point.

Paul says in verse 13, because we owe everything to God, we must put to death the deeds of the body. Now, you might say, well, what are the deeds of the body that Paul is talking about here?

Now, usually, Paul uses the word body to refer to our physical nature. And he usually uses the word flesh to refer to our sinful nature, our corrupt desires, motives, affections, propensities, and purposes.

[ 19 : 45 ] But here, Paul may be using the terms interchangeably. The deeds of the body are the same as what he calls elsewhere the works of the flesh. Or Paul may be highlighting sinful deeds, practices, actions carried out in and through our bodies.

Either way, I think we can get a picture of what Paul is talking about if we look at Galatians 5, 19 to 21. If you turn there briefly, it's page 975. Galatians 5, starting at verse 19, Paul lists several works of the flesh.

And if you look at this list, the works of the flesh fall into four main categories. The first category is distorted expressions of sexuality.

Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality. The second category is corrupted forms of worship. Idolatry, sorcery. The third category is discord in relationships.

The longest category. Enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy.

And the last category is unrestrained indulgence in pleasures, drunkenness, orgies.

[ 20 : 57 ] So we have four categories. We have sex, worship, relationships, and pleasures. All good things created by God. But they can all be distorted and corrupted by our flesh, by our sinful desires.

And Paul says we must put to death these corrupt deeds of the body, these works of the flesh.

What does that mean, put to death?

Well, it's a very strong word. The word means to hand over to execution, to kill, to take away the life and vigor and power to cause to cease. Paul's saying believers in Christ must make a continual all-out total assault on the sin that dwells within us.

Declare unceasing war on the deeds of the flesh. Don't compromise with them. If you find sin dwelling in your house, don't shove it under the couch so it's slightly less visible to guests.

Don't put it in the closet with all the other junk that you don't need right now but want to keep on hand in case things change in the future. Get it out of the house. If you belong to Christ, sin doesn't belong there at all.

[ 22 : 18 ] Don't compromise with it, Paul is saying. When I was in high school, I went on a missions trip. And I remember a conversation.

I remember listening to one of the older guys on the trip talking about how much he loved golf. Now, we were in Paraguay. And he was even trying to look for a golf course in Paraguay near where we were staying.

And he said, I know it's sort of become an addiction for me, but I justify it because it's better than the other kinds of addictions out there.

Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with playing golf or going to Paraguay to play golf. But if you admit that golf has become your addiction, it will dull your passion for Christ and lead you away from Christ just as much as any other addiction.

And isn't that how most of our sins continue to grow? We justify and minimize and compare and excuse them. My sin isn't quite as bad as other sins.

[ 23 : 23 ] I can manage it. But sin is never content to be managed. Sin is like a weed, an invasive species weed.

Unless you pull it up by the roots, its aim is always to take over your garden and to choke out the life of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit within you. Jesus said in Matthew 5, if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.

For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Now, this verse is not promoting literal self-mutilation. John Stott rightly reminds us that this is not masochism. It's not taking pleasure in self-inflicted pain.

Nor asceticism in the sense of rejecting the body and its desires as a whole. But it's setting our minds on the things of the Spirit and doing whatever is necessary to put to death the works of the flesh.

[ 24 : 33 ] Hebrews 12 says we should throw off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles us. To run the race with perseverance.

Looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. We must put sin to death. Do whatever is necessary. Cut it off.

Flee temptation. How do we do this? This is important. Paul says we do this by the Spirit.

We do this by the divine power which God has given to us. Not simply in our own strength. You see, the logic of this chapter goes like this.

We can put sin to death because Christ has already condemned our sin to death. When he died for it on the cross. A lot of this chapter goes back to verse 3.

[ 25 : 37 ] God condemned our sin in the flesh of Jesus Christ. He condemned it to die forever. And God made a way to kill our sin without killing us.

And now in the Spirit what we're doing is we're executing the sentence that God has already pronounced on our sin. God has already said at the cross. Your sin is paid for.

And your sin is destined to die forever. And so when we're putting sin to death. We're carrying that out. Isn't that encouraging?

That God has already condemned your sin to die forever. So that when you're fighting against sin. You know that you're not fighting a hopeless battle. You're fighting a battle that in Christ and because of him you are ultimately going to win.

So don't despair. Never despair. In the fight against sin. Practically, what does that look like?

[ 26 : 39 ] Well, James chapter 5, verse 16 gives a very practical instruction. It says, confess your sins one to another.

And pray for one another so that you may be healed. You see, sin thrives in the dark. And it begins to wither when it's brought out into the light.

When it's named for what it really is. When a believer in Christ confesses sin. And determines to forsake it in Jesus' name. And a fellow believer hears that confession.

And pronounces over him or her that word of forgiveness. If we confess our sins. God is faithful and just to forgive our sins. And purify us from all unrighteousness.

The Holy Spirit is at work. That's a blow to sin right away. When it's brought out into the light and confessed. Not excused. Not defended.

[ 27 : 41 ] Not justified. But confess for what it is. And if someone confesses a sin to you. Assure them of the promise of forgiveness that is in Christ.

In his word. That Christ has paid the price for our sins. That there's no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Now maybe you have wronged someone.

Maybe you need to work toward repairing that relationship. Did you notice in Galatians 5 how many of the works of the flesh had to do with broken and discordant relationships?

It's the longest list. Envy, anger, rivalry, strife, etc. You know there are a lot of ways that we can apologize. Without really acknowledging that we've done anything wrong.

How about this? I'm sorry for how you felt. That may be a genuine expression of sympathy. But it takes absolutely no responsibility.

[ 28 : 50 ] It is not an acknowledgement of wrong. And if you've wronged someone, that's not an adequate apology. Or how about this? I'm sorry for what happened.

Well, I've said this. Well, what exactly happened that you're so sorry about? How about this instead? I was wrong.

I should not have spoken, acted, thought in the way I did. I neglected to do what I should have done.

Please forgive me. I want to change. Or even this. I know our relationship isn't what it should be. I realize I've caused harm probably in many ways that I don't even realize.

I want you to know that I care for you and love you. As a brother or sister in Christ. That is fighting against sin.

[ 29 : 53 ] That is seeking to put sin to death and not let it fester. And not let it continue to divide believers in Christ. Now, these are not easy words to say and mean.

Putting sin to death is no easy task. And that's why we constantly need to lean on and draw on the power of the Holy Spirit. But you know, Paul says there are ultimately only two ways to live.

He says, if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. You see, some of us want to think there are three ways to live.

We can live in the flesh without ever turning to Christ. The end will be death and eternal separation from God. Or we can believe in Christ and live according to the Spirit.

And sometimes that will be very hard, but we will enjoy close fellowship with Jesus now and forever. But then we want to put in a third category. You can believe in Christ, but still live according to the flesh.

[ 31 : 08 ] You can enjoy the short-term pleasures of sin in this world. You won't have quite as much peace and joy in your relationship with Christ. But you can still be assured of eternal life in the end as long as you believe.

Or say you believe. But Paul does not say there are three ways to live. He says in the end, ultimately, there are only two.

Paul does not want us to put ourselves and sit comfortably in that last category because it's a walking contradiction. Living according to the flesh leads to death in this life and ultimately in the life to come.

And putting sin to death through the Spirit leads to life now and forever. Now, Paul's very clear in Romans. Eternal life is a free gift of God, he says.

We're justified by God's grace as a gift, not by our works. There's no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. But Paul is also clear. We who have died to sin must not live, continue to live in it.

[ 32 : 16 ] The book of Hebrews says, without holiness, no one will see the Lord. In other words, there is no path to eternal life in Christ and in the power of the Spirit that bypasses what verse 13 is talking about.

Putting sin to death. It's absolutely necessary. And yet, putting sin to death can be excruciatingly hard and painful.

Maybe because of your natural constitution or the particular circumstances you find yourself in, you're particularly vulnerable to the deceptions and allures and overwhelming passions of sin. Maybe you've tried and failed to fight this battle before, and you feel like you can't resist any longer. Putting sin to death feels like enduring death itself.

And you say, how can God ask this of me? Let me share some words from a sister and two brothers in Christ who've wrestled with this very question.

[ 33 : 30 ] How can God ask this of me? The first is someone who was part of this church for several years. Some of you know her, Rachel Gilson.

She came to faith in Christ as a Yale undergrad. She had always felt attracted to other women. She had dated women in high school and in college.

And then she came to be convinced that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, who had died for her sin on the cross. She wrote this in an article that was published in Christianity Today this week.

She wrote, choosing Jesus didn't answer all my questions. In particular, how would I deal with my natural, unshakable attraction to women? I knew the Bible was clear.

What I wanted was off limits. But I didn't understand why. How could love, intimacy, and companionship be forbidden by this loving, intimate, companion-seeking God?

[ 34 : 31 ] Thus, I had to learn my first lesson of the Christian life. How to obey before I understood. My whole life had taught me to master a concept before I could assent to it.

How could I possibly agree to something so costly without grasping the reason? In the end, it came down to trust. I knew Jesus was worthy of trust because he had made a greater sacrifice.

He had left the bliss, the comfort, the joy of loving, and being perfectly loved to live a sorrowful life on earth. He took the pain and shame of a criminal's death and suffered the Father's rejection all so I could be welcomed.

Who could be more deserving of my trust? She says, the obedience of faith only works when it's rooted in a person, not just a rule. Imposed on its own, a rule invites us to sit in judgment, weighing its reasonableness.

But a rule flowing from relationships smooths the way for faithful obedience. When a child doesn't understand her mother's command, the mother's character plays a strong role in what happens next.

[ 35 : 44 ] A cruel, capricious mother is likely to meet resistance. But an affectionate, nurturing mother inspires trust because you know she's on your side, profoundly.

In one of Scripture's most dramatic tests of trust, God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. If Abraham had considered this command in isolation, surely he would not have obeyed. Abraham, however, was a friend of God.

When tested, he did not hesitate because he knew God's character. God had shown up for Abraham. I knew he would show up for me, but how? Would he remove my attraction to women? Those first years of Christian faith included relationships with women that were spiritual, freeing, and intimate, but not erotic.

But in other cases, personal and sexual chemistry lured me back into old patterns. Why wouldn't God just fix me? Slowly, I came to understand that making me straight wasn't the answer.

There is no biblical command to have heterosexual desires. Through study, conversations, and prayer, I eventually arrived at a crucial truth. Sex wasn't something God discovered, then fenced about with arbitrary restrictions, but something he made to teach and bless us.

[ 36 : 58 ] When his teachings went against my instincts, denying my desires became a profound way of saying, I trust you. Brothers and sisters, where is God calling you to say, I don't totally understand you, but I trust you?

Second person I want to share some words from is Nabeel Qureshi. Some of you may have heard of him. He's a Christian author and speaker. He died this week at the age of 34 from stomach cancer.

He had been raised in a devout Pakistani Muslim family. But in his second year of medical school, after much study and conversation and prayer, he became convinced of Jesus' divinity.

But he also knew that there would be a great cost if he publicly professed his faith in Christ. He was a Qureshi, a descendant of the tribe to which the prophet Muhammad himself had belonged.

For generations, his family had been guardians of the legacy of Islam, pillars and respected leaders in the Muslim community. He wrote, By becoming a Christian, not only would I lose the friendships and social connections I had built from childhood, my family would lose their honor as well.

[ 38 : 14 ] My decision would not only destroy me, it would also destroy my family, the ones who loved me most and sacrificed so much for me. Jesus, he said, accepting you would be like dying.

I will have to give up everything. He was reading through the Gospel of Matthew and he came to these verses. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

He who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. He who has found his life will lose it and he who has lost his life for my sake will find it. He writes, I knelt at the foot of my bed and gave up my life.

To this day, my family is brokenhearted by the decision I made and it is excruciating every time I see the cost I had to pay. For I love them.

But Jesus is the God of reversal and redemption. He redeemed my suffering by making me rely on him for my every moment, bending my heart toward him. It was there in my pain that I knew him intimately.

[ 39 : 24 ] It was there that I found Jesus. To follow him is worth giving up everything. You see, these two people understood the words of the Apostle Paul, who wrote, Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things. I count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.

Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

That by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Brothers and sisters, whatever Christ is calling you to lay down at his feet, whatever sin he is calling you to forsake, however painful it may seem, however much it may feel like death, it is all worth it in the end.

Because the way of the cross is the way to life. Let us pray. Father, we thank you for your Son who has led the way for us.

[ 40 : 55 ] who has blazed a trail for us to enter your presence through his very own death on the cross. Through his humility and taking on the form of a servant for our sake and in obedience to you.

We thank you that nothing that you ask of us is something that you have not already been willing to sacrifice for our sake.

We pray that you would strengthen us by the power of your Spirit. We pray that you would give us a deep well of gratitude in knowing your love for us.

We pray that you would strengthen us to daily fight against sin by humbling ourselves, by looking to you, by standing upon the truth of your word.

Lord, give us the joy that comes from knowing intimate fellowship with you. Give us the anticipation of that joy that we shall have with you eternally.

[ 42 : 16 ] Lord, give us the joy we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.