



GOD Pleasers

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On Tuesday, if you follow the daily devotional plan I am sending to your email inbox, you will read Romans 15. It is really the summary chapter of the lessons Paul presented to the church in Rome, even though there is a significant epilogue in chapter 16.

The devotional guide I have prepared takes a different slant, but examines the same passage as I present to you today. I find it is a vibrant challenge for our time. This challenging time we are living through.

There is nothing new under the sun. Yet, memory being weak as it is—and knowledge of history being weaker still—it often *feels* new—so new, like no one anywhere ever went through what I’m going through. Our mind wants to reject that, telling ourselves that others have gone through (and some are presently going through) much worse. Yet the feeling persists.

“Why am I going through this? What are You doing? Why me, Lord?”

Perhaps God’s words can help us, give us hope, guide our steps. Let’s see...

15:1 But we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not just please ourselves. 15:2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good to build him up. 15:3 For even Christ did not please Himself, but just as it is written, “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” 15:4 For everything that was written in former times was written for our instruction, so that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures we may have hope. 15:5 Now may the God of endurance and comfort give you unity with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus, 15:6 so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Pain in the...

Someone said, “The more I get to know people, the more I like my dog.”

Pet dogs are so steady, aren’t they? So patient. So forgiving. So resilient. Unlike many people.

The Holy Spirit faithfully warns us of the variety of difficult people we will meet in life. Unrighteous people. Foolish people. Wicked people. Contrary people. Wounded people. Maimed people. Hurting people. Hopeless people. Sick people. Demon-possessed people. Dying people. Lost people.

If it wasn't for people, life would be a breeze, sweetheart. Except, there's something of each of them in us. We, too, are people. You have been, or are now, or will be, someone else's irritant and grief.

So, how should we treat one another? "Treat one another as you want to be treated." The rule is still golden! But it's so much more than a quotable maxim. In fact, it is not, and never was, a saying; it's a command. From the lips of the Christ. It's a rule of life.

It's not separate from the Gospel. If you want to follow Jesus as Lord, it is part of the cross you must take up and carry. And to do so, to practice His command, often feels like a death. It's supposed to. You needn't complain about that, and you shouldn't imagine that it could be different. Accept it. Bear it. Submit to it.

Pleasing Yourself

"Even Christ did not please Himself." This is put forth as our example, our model, our guide. We are to be like that. Because He did not, we should not.

"Never mind. I'll do it myself." When I fail to "bear with the failings" of others, because I just want to get away from them, or I just want to "get it done," I may please myself, but I won't please the Lord.

Here are a handful of Biblical examples of the struggles we have and the Kingdom ways of resolving them...

One time, John reported, *"Master, we saw someone using Your name to cast out demons, but we told him to stop because he isn't in our group."* But Jesus said, *"Don't stop him! Anyone who is not against us is for us."* (Mark 9:38-40)

Some time later, when the people of one village did not welcome Jesus and His entourage, James and John asked Him, *"Lord, should we call down fire from heaven to burn them up?"* Jesus' rebuked them and said, *"You don't know what kind of spirit is moving you. The Son of Man didn't come to destroy people's lives, but to save them!"* (Luke 9:54-56)

Another day, His disciples, began to chase away the young mothers and their "bothersome" children. *"Leave them alone! Let the children come to me."* (Matthew 19:14)

Paul asked, *“Who are you to condemn someone else’s servant? Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall.”* (Romans 14:4)

Jesus said, *“Let the weeds and grain grow up together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds, tie them into bundles, and burn them, and to put the wheat in the barn.”* (Matthew 13:24-30)

Paul instructed, *“So, you have faith? Have it to yourself before God”* (Romans 14:22). Not, keep it to yourself. But you don’t need others to agree with you in order to follow the Lord faithfully.

“Be convinced within yourself.” Don’t do what you think is wrong, and don’t press others to do what they think is wrong, just to satisfy your own conviction.

Written for Our Instruction

“Everything that was written in former times was written for our instruction.” Real-life examples encourage us. We see in them similar challenges. We recognize in them similar weaknesses, similar complaints, similar fears. And then, we see that the Lord brought them through (often, we know not how). We are encouraged to endure.

Faith grows—not by magic, but like a muscle—by stretching. Endurance is required. Endurance is demanded as one challenge is layered upon another. Consider the beginning of the story of Job.

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. And that man was pure and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. 1:2 Seven sons and three daughters were born to him. 1:3 His possessions included 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys; in addition he had a very great household. Thus he was the greatest of all the people in the east.

1:13 Now the day came when Job’s sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, 1:14 and a messenger came to Job, saying, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing beside them, 1:15 and the Sabeans swooped down and carried them all away, and they killed the servants with the sword! And I—only I alone—escaped to tell you!”

1:16 While this one was still speaking, another messenger arrived and said, “The fire of God has fallen from heaven and has burned up the sheep and the servants—it has consumed them! And I—only I alone—escaped to tell you!”

1:17 While this one was still speaking another messenger arrived and said, “The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and carried them all away, and they killed the servants with the sword! And I—only I alone—escaped to tell you!”

1:18 While this one was still speaking another messenger arrived and said, “Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, ^{1:19} and suddenly a great wind swept across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they died! And I—only I alone—escaped to tell you!”

1:20 Then Job got up and tore his robe. He shaved his head, and then he threw himself down with his face to the ground. (The posture of defeat is also the posture of worship; it all depends on what we say in those moments.) ^{1:21} He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will return there. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. May the name of the Lord be blessed!” ^{1:22} In all this Job did not sin, nor did he charge God with moral impropriety.

Any one of those events could ruin your day, but Job received all four devastating reports, one on top of another, all within minutes!

Frankly, it’s exhausting just to read about it (even though it happened thousands of years ago to a person and a family and a community we didn’t know).

We share in his exhaustion, his shock, his breakdown, his pain, his weariness, his struggle to maintain (against his own well-meaning family and friends), his unanswered and unanswerable questions. Yet he persisted. And God spoke. Job discovered God all over again. He DID “come forth as pure gold”! He was doubly blessed in the end.

Could he have seen it ahead of time? No.

Could he have prepared himself? No.

Could he have handled it better? No.

Could he have trusted more? No.

The stretching, the pain, the exhaustion, the uncertainty—were all part of the process. Without them there is no growth. Without them there is no discovery. Sometimes, these are the way of blessing.

“In the world you will have trouble. But take courage, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). The hidden, but understood message is, “I have overcome the world, so you can overcome the world.” Better yet, “I have overcome the world, so you will overcome the world also, for I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”

The world’s troubles have an END. Jesus, His love for you, and His life within you, do not!

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever trusts in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

And what is the purpose of such instruction, selected for us by the Holy Spirit from the lives of God's people in the past? To produce in us "endurance and encouragement," so we may "have hope."

15:4 For everything that was written in former times was written for our instruction, so that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures we may have hope.

We want hope *in order to endure*. We want hope to arise *in order to find courage*. But God's Word flips that order; the divine process is this: endurance and courage *first*. Courageous endurance *leads us to hope*.

Biblical hope is NOT the power to imagine good coming from difficulty. Biblical hope is not imagination at all. Biblical hope is not a daydream, not a positive thought, not an affirmation.

Biblical hope is the *result* of pressing through what is difficult, before you can see its end—before you know *when* it will end, or *how* it will end. Biblical hope is the *product* of trials. It is a solid, radiant assurance that comes when you've *seen* how faithful God is through a storm. Hope is how you come out *on the other side* of your challenge.

One Voice

15:5 Now may the God of endurance and comfort give you unity with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus, 15:6 so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't you know that when you go through trials *with* others, you become closer to one another? You have shared memories, sure. But more than that, you have shared duress, shared pain, shared grief—and shared relief. You have shared your weakness. You have shared your fear. You have shared your faith. And now you share your victory.

This kind of friendship—what the Bible calls "fellowship" (*koinonia*: participation together)—divides your griefs and doubles your joys. Yet, even that is only a prelude to what is to follow (a means to a greater end).

God has called us to this life together—this life of mutual, extravagant love—in order to create in us a triumphant song of praise that we will lift together in unison, in unity. *One voice*. To the glory of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

We're not there yet, but we're moving toward it! Every worship service is a rehearsal. That's why the church *must sing together!* Because the heavens are singing! Many songs... with one voice. All glory to God!

With this—the unity of His people, who have forsaken pleasing themselves, in order to encourage one another (to the glory of God)—hope is born and God is pleased.

Come along with me, as we become God pleasers.