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KEEP GOING

Romans 12:11-12 *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Starting is easy but keeping going right up to the finish is much more difficult. Perseverance is a choice: convinced that it was right to start, and knowing it is right to complete the course, we choose to press on despite tiredness, weakness and hardship. The expression 'keep your ... fervour' translates the Greek word which means 'to boil with heat and keep hot'. In English we use the expression someone has 'gone off the boil' when their early enthusiasm has disappeared and they are no longer putting much energy into what they started.

Christians need to be re-energised every day. Like a kettle of water, we can only be kept hot if we stay close to the heat source. 'Spiritual fervour' means that we stay close to God because we are warmed by His love, inspired by His truth and empowered by His Spirit. But if we move away from God assuming that we can manage life without Him, we 'go off the boil' and lose our spiritual fervour becoming useless in God's kingdom.

Our spiritual fervour depends on the choices we make in response to our end-goal and the present difficulties. The Christian's 'hope' means our confident expectation that we will be welcomed by Jesus when He calls us home. Knowing that our eternal future is assured encourages us to keep going. On the way, there may be many trials but God will only allow what He will enable us to bear ([1 Corinthians 10:13](#)). So we need to be patient and keep going as we wait for His rescue. As we do so, we must keep talking to the Lord. Faithful prayer is prayer which believes He will answer, and therefore is willing to persist until the answer is given. So do not go 'off the boil' by wandering from the Lord, losing sight of heaven or being discouraged in hardship. Jesus is waiting for you at the end of the race; so choose to keep going today in His strength ([Hebrews 12:1-3](#)).

Prayer: *Oh God in whom I trust. Thank You for the example of Jesus who kept the joy of Your presence in His sights even during His hard sufferings. Forgive me for going 'off the boil' spiritually because I have become distracted by alternative objectives or discouraged by afflictions. I repent of wandering away from You and ask for Your forgiveness. Please help me to persevere in following Jesus so that I will not disappoint Him. In His Name. Amen.*

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LOVE MUST BE SINCERE IF IT IS REAL LOVE

Romans 12:9-10 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Western culture portrays love as a feeling. It is served up to screens world-wide as a complex emotion, an irrational driving force which redefines right and wrong. However the narrative of Jesus' life in the Gospels shows love as a sacrificial decision, worked out patiently and painfully for the eternal good of those He loved. In other words, love is a decision - a commitment and pledge which is worked out in sacrificial service.

Movies show fake love, and even the re-enactment of true love is done by actors who do not share the passion they show. In the same way, many people pretend to be friendly, caring and loving - but it is not self-giving to the point of sacrifice. Even in the church, sweet smiles may camouflage bitter and resentful hearts, service might be grudging, giving may be merely dutiful and worship can become a routine performance. If we are to love righteously, we must also hate evil with an equal intensity. Yet malicious gossip destroys some churches from the inside; personal rivalry divides loyalty, unconfessed sin weakens our prayer life and tolerating sin ruins the witness.

If we claim to be devoted to Christ, we must also be devoted to each other. There is no place for competition, malice or resentment in our Christian relationships. To dishonour a brother or sister is to dishonour Jesus Christ, for we are His body. The test of love is sacrifice. Convenient mutual affection is easy but it is not sincere love unless it grows into patient, practical self-sacrificial giving to another person out of reverence for Christ. Fake love is always found out. Sincere love may be hard but it is the only kind of love which God honours.

Prayer: *Loving Lord. Thank You for loving me and for sending Jesus Christ to sacrifice Himself as my sin-bearer. I am sorry when I pretend to love, or when I do or say loving things out of a sense of duty or habit but without really caring for people. Help me to honour my brothers and sisters in Christ, wherever I find them, and may I be willing to sacrifice my own interests for their sake. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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UNIQUELY GIFTED

Romans 12:6-8 *We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The church is not a building. It is the people who belong to God because they have put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Each believer has been given gifts by the Holy Spirit. These are spiritual tools which enable God to do His work, through His people. And He gives a different selection of gifts to different people so that they are uniquely gifted to serve Him.

These special gifts need to be used. How we use them will show the kind of relationship we have with God who has given them to us. If we have a gift of giving, we need to be generous; if we have responsibility for others we must be diligent; and if we are called to help others who are in very difficult circumstances we must cheerfully put up with things which we might not like.

We all have these gifts, but like tools left in a box they are useless if we do not use them. Many believers think that because they are not clergy, they have no gifts; but that is not true. God has given spiritual gifts to all according to His wisdom and purpose. So we need to find out what gifts we have, and then learn to use them wisely. Other more mature Christians may help us in this. We may not use the gifts perfectly at first, but we need to keep practising and asking the Lord for His help. Also we may try to use His gifts for our own glory. That is not right but we can and must repent of self-centred serving so that we may become useful to Him and give Him the glory.

Prayer: *Father God. Thank You for giving me spiritual gifts when You included me in Your family. I am sorry when I have ignored the privilege You gave me and have not served You in Your power. I am sorry when I have used Your gifts, but in a wrong way or with a wrong attitude. I am sorry when I have made mistakes and given up because I have not trusted You to help me persevere in serving You. Please forgive me and help me to serve You as You have chosen in Your strength and with the abilities You give to me. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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DIFFERENT BUT UNITED

Romans 12:4-5 *Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Individualism is corrupt. We are all made as individuals in the image of God, uniquely precious to Him. Each has particular abilities and God gives spiritual gifts to every believer, enabling them to fulfil the purpose for which God has called them into His kingdom. However, individualism puts us at the centre of our universe, encouraging us to operate as though we were the only person who matters. Sinful pride stops us being grateful that we are uniquely special to God. We are God's gift to the world: but if we assume that is because of our own skills, merit or value, we forget that God has done it in us - so that we should be to His glory.

Paul needed to remind the Christians in Rome that individualism was a dangerous delusion. They were all part of the body of Christ, united through the head who is Christ, but performing different functions in harmony with each other. So although we are different, we are also all united together in order to represent the Lord Jesus Christ. We serve those around us by working with other believers.

When we look at each other we see many differences: that is essential so that each of us can fulfil a special role in God's kingdom. None of us can do everything; although Satan will often tempt us to believe that we are like God with all knowledge and independent authority. Let us rejoice in our differences and think creatively, pray, plan and work together as the body of Christ. That does not just mean in a church context. Wherever two or three believers are gathered together, they represent Christ in that place: whether it be the factory or college, office or farm, you will all be different as together you represent Christ.

Prayer: *Dear Lord of all. Thank You for the wonderful way in which You are bringing the body of Christ together where I live and work. I am sorry when I have failed to see the great potential to witness for You with other believers who You have placed near to me. Help me to stop being individualistic but to appreciate that I am specially made to serve You in Your kingdom. Help me to appreciate spiritual gifts You have given to others so that I may work with them to represent the body of Christ. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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DON'T GET ABOVE YOURSELF

Romans 12:3 *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Arrogance is welded into our sinful human nature. Although there is a rightful pride in using our gifts well and wisely as gifts from God (the joy of being 'fit for purpose' - [Galatians 6:4](#)), comparative pride is wicked. That error starts with a false estimate of ourselves. Usually we think that we are better than others, but some people have an inverted pride and insist that they are worse than everybody else: both are expressions of self-centred pride.

Paul says that every believer should come to an accurate view of their character, gifts and abilities - without any comparison to others. To say that we are 'rubbish' is a denial of our Saviour's grace, and to think that we are better than others is either to judge others, or to ignore our own weakness and failings. So, how do we come to a right view of ourselves? We need guidance from the Word and Spirit. However we often find that two things are true about us at the same time: we are gifted by God, but we cannot do everything. We serve because we are gifted, but often fall back on our own fleshly ability rather than relying on His strength. Understanding ourselves requires honesty about both.

The Holy Spirit will teach us how to compare our lives with the Word, which is designed to teach, rebuke, correct and train us in righteousness ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)). But we need to be willing. Every believer ought to audit their lives, checking if what we think about ourselves is true. Satan operates in the shadows of half truths and wants us to believe them. For evil to take hold, it is either necessary to have a wrong belief about our Saviour God, or a wrong belief about ourselves. Those who are confident that they know the gospel, but do not understand themselves are in serious spiritual danger. So start a personal audit today, without comparing yourself to others. Then ask the Lord what He wants you to do.

Prayer: *God of all truth. Thank You for knowing the truth about me and for revealing Yourself to me in the Bible. I am sorry when I have lived in a fog of lies, either not knowing You or what I am really like. I really do want to live in the light with You and so ask You to show me what I need to know about myself, and also how Your wonderful grace can cover my sin and lead me in righteousness. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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IT'S TIME TO CHANGE

Romans 12:2 *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

J B Phillips translated this verse, "*Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remould your minds from within so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all His demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.*" By nature, our mindset wants to please the world rather than God; and glorify ourselves rather than Him. That is why believers in Jesus are called to change their pattern of life.

However, we are creatures of habit and, without much thinking, we continue to do things in the way we have always done them. We are also subject to peer pressure and easily copy the people around us. But this verse tells us to be aware of the habits which have formed our past life and decide to change. We do so by starting to think and place our lives against God's standard rather than the world's. The more we try to do so, the more the world will try to force us back into yesterday's behaviour. That is why we need God's help to change our minds, showing us that His way is right and enabling us to prove by experience that His commands are good.

Red, amber and green traffic lights have specific meanings - stop, think and get ready, and go. This verse gives us the same sequence. Stop allowing the world to dictate your life. Think about what God has said in His Word, meditate on it and allow it to sink into your heart. Go: do what He says, put His Word to the test and prove that He is right. Following Jesus is not just about spiritual thoughts and comfortable feelings. It is an active, conscious and thought-through decision to change, even though the world around will not understand. When we make that change and put it into practice, it puts us into the middle of His Will which is always the very best He could possibly arrange for us.

Prayer: *Holy God. Thank You that You call all Your people to change from their worldly ways so that they can prepare for eternity in Your presence. I am sorry when I have worked against You by holding on to my old habits and behaviour patterns which have not come from You. Please help me to have a new hunger for Your Word and look to You to speak truth into my life so that I may want to change and learn Your new way of life, for my blessing and Your glory. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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WHY SACRIFICE FOR GOD?

Romans 12:1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Most religions have a common theme: sacrifice yourself for your god and your god will reward you. But true followers of Jesus do not think like that because it is not true to the Bible. Yes, we do understand that we are not to live for ourselves, and that sacrifice is an essential part of our discipleship ... but not in order to gain God's approval. We are already accepted by Him when we believe in Jesus Christ and receive His mercy. This new relationship is a privilege, freely given and gladly accepted: nothing we do can add to our security in God.

However, in the same way that children need to be taught how to respond to parental love, learn to please their parents and how to take a responsible place in the family, so do Christians. So Paul urges those who have been saved by the precious blood of Christ (who gave everything for them), to re-orientate their lifestyle. Instead of being self-pleasing, they were to be God-worshipping. But their worship was not to be restricted to church meetings. Every part of their lives should show that they belonged to Jesus, by living as He did - sacrificially pleasing Father God.

It is easy to talk about being holy and pleasing God, but our old nature keeps calling us back into self-centred thinking and living. That is why believers need to ask, "How can I best live sacrificially, like Jesus, in this situation?" Then we have to do it! Always, the instinct of our flesh will try to find 'what is in it for me', but the Holy Spirit will be urging, 'what is in it for Jesus' reputation?' That battle is so strong that the Apostle has to urge the believers in Rome to serve rather than be served by others; to work hard rather than slack off; to give rather than receive, as an expression of God's love to others. None of this is easy, but it is the proper way to express our relationship with God who has given us a free pardon for all our sins although at great cost to Christ. Put simply, sacrifice is an essential part of the normal Christian life: anything less is ungrateful disobedience.

Prayer: *Merciful God. I want to thank You for saving me: thank You for the precious blood of Christ which has paid for my sins and made me fit for Your presence. I am sorry that I keep putting my interests before Yours. I am sorry for enjoying worship services in church but being a hypocrite because I refuse to sacrifice my time, energy and money in Your service. Please help me to understand the importance and urgency of changing my pattern of life so that it will become a holy and pleasing thank-offering to You, because You have been so merciful to me. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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HOW BIG IS GOD?

Romans 11:33-36 *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?" "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

This passage is one of the Bible's big statements about the limitless character and power of God. It is well worth using as a screensaver on your computer, printing it or translating it into your mother tongue and displaying in your bedroom, kitchen or office. Christians so easily forget the magnificent and awesome immensity of God. Because of this, we limit our faith, which limits our prayers, which limits are actions, which shrivels our souls.

Paul uses different analogies to describe God's personality and activity. A mining analogy: the riches of God are an inexhaustible seam of gold; an academic analogy - God knows everything and how to apply that understanding to make everything work according to its design; a legal analogy - every verdict is 100% accurate, fair, just and righteous; an astrophysics analogy - the way He works is more complex than the mechanisms in the universe. Nobody can teach God anything. Nobody can claim that God owes them anything. He is the reason behind everything, the means of everything and the destination of everything. He is the focus point of glory for all eternity.

The wonder of the gospel is that we can know this God as a loving Father and faithful friend; as we trust in Christ. The lying work of Satan is to make God seem small and make us seem big - in the same way that Eve was tempted. But the work of the Holy Spirit is to give us a big view of Jesus Christ and show us how great God is. Alas, our view of ourselves and the world is often distorted because we see God distantly against the perspective of our own (supposed) greatness. Instead, we need to see God in the way the Bible reveals Him to be. The truth is that the greatness of God engulfs everything; and we are small, but loved, and grateful subjects in His kingdom. In that perspective our hopes and fears, our prayers and ministry will find their answer in His sovereign authority.

Prayer: *Almighty God. Thank You for being such an amazing Person. Forgive me for my blasphemy when I have thought You are too small for my problems, too distant for my encouragement and too uninterested in my life. Help me to see You as You truly are, and may I find my true place in Your world and Your kingdom. Help me to be bolder in prayer, more trusting in faith, more eager in service and more humble in spirit - because I am secure in Your love and confident of Your power. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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GOD KNOWS HOW TO SAVE (PART 2)

Romans 11:28-32 *As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The story behind these verses is straightforward. God had chosen Israel to be His special people; however they did not respect the privilege He gave them, and they hated His Son Jesus. So God left them to their own devices, and allowed the Gentiles (non-Jews) to hear about Jesus, believe in Him and receive mercy - while the Jews were apparently treated as enemies and outcasts. Thus, all human beings were proved to be disobedient to God's law and all equally in need of His mercy.

However God never abandons His promise. He never recalls His command to repent, and He never changes His mind. He always planned that the whole world should have the opportunity to be saved, first the Jews and then the Gentiles. The hardness of Israel's heart was God's opportunity to send the gospel to the rest of the Roman world. It was not that He hated His people but that they needed to realise that, although they knew the law, none had kept it perfectly. They needed as much mercy as the first generation of Gentile believers.

When God gives gifts, He honours the people He gives to; and expects a loyal response. When He calls, He expects that people will answer. Those who do not respond are not accepted but that does not mean that God has withdrawn His call. No, all have been disobedient; but the call of God is to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who was fully obedient in His sacrificial death. And that is open to everybody. So when God calls, be sure to answer! And never assume that He will not call your friends or family, however disobedient they may have been previously. Whatever God has chosen to do He will do it! So keep on sharing the gospel and keep being surprised at the way in which God is amazingly merciful!

Prayer: *Sovereign God. Thank You that You keep all Your promises and do not withdraw any invitation to come to know Jesus Christ. Help me to realise that Your understanding is so much greater than mine, and that while I may think some things You do are unfair to my logic, You always know how to win those You love and restore those who have been disobedient to Your call on their lives. Help me to work with You so that Your kingdom will come. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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GOD KNOWS HOW TO SAVE (PART 1)

Romans 11:25-27 *I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Today's passage contains a puzzle, because Paul writes that "all Israel will be saved". Clearly, God's ancient people had become hard against Jesus. As they continued in their resistance against the gospel, God allowed their hardness of heart; but He also extended His promises so that Gentiles might believe and inherit eternal life. At the same time, God had pledged Himself to fulfil His covenant to Jews and purge their sins. How can this be?

In the same way that ancient Israel could not understand how God could welcome Gentiles, some Gentile believers in Rome did not think that He would be gracious to Jews any more. They could not see the end of the story or how God would fulfil His covenant to His people. But we cannot apply human reason in order to predict God's activity. Neither can we exclude what we think is impossible, because God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours ([Isaiah 55:7-9](#)). One thing we do know: only Jesus is the great deliverer, as this passage quotes ([Isaiah 59:20](#)).

The wonder of the gospel is that God welcomes everybody who puts their trust in Jesus. The Lord, and not us, is responsible for the content of the message, sending out messengers, softening people's hearts, giving them faith to believe, and filling them with His Holy Spirit. It is not for us to determine whose hearts God will soften. Neither is it for us to predict the people God will not save and transform by His power. Our task is simply to make the Good News about Jesus available wherever God sends us, and trust the Lord to bring His Word to life in people's hearts. It does not matter who they are: Jews or Gentiles, educated or illiterate, travellers or settled people, young or old, healthy or sick, whatever their ethnic or religious background ... all who believe in Jesus will be saved.

Prayer: *Redeeming God. Thank You that You always keep Your promises. Thank You that everybody who comes to Jesus will be saved; irrespective of their background. Forgive me when I have made judgements about who can or cannot be saved; and when I have failed to spread Your Word because I thought it would be ineffective. Help me to see people through Christ-like eyes, share the gospel freely and pray for Your Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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KINDNESS AND STERNNESS

Romans 11:22-24 *Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Some think that God is only kind to people; while others think that He is only stern. The Bible says that He is both kind and stern at the same time, depending on our response to His promises. Those who believe experience His kindness, as He grafts them into the promises of Israel, and includes them in the family of God. Those who continue to disbelieve experience His sternness, as He cuts them off from God's family inheritance.

True faith is not about passively accepting our cultural background, but actively believing the Word of God. The Lord takes no delight when His people rebel, and He is still willing to receive back those who repent and believe His promise of salvation.

The Apostle Paul was convinced about the importance of responding actively to God's Word. So he took great trouble to teach, explain, urge and persuade people to understand God's promised salvation in the gospel, to believe it and then be willing to take action upon it (the first action was usually baptism). The task of the disciple-maker includes making it clear that God demands an answer. His kindness is waiting for those who believe and His sternness for those who persist in unbelief. The Christian gospel is useless if it merely affirms the delusion that God loves everybody and therefore all will be saved. The gospel divides people according to their response; so its message must include a call to respond, along with its promise and warning.

Prayer: *Almighty God. Thank You that You never speak in vain. Thank You that every promise You issue demands a response of faith. I know that You always take action to bless those who believe Your Word. Forgive me for my passivity when I hear Your Word. Forgive me also when I do not grasp the seriousness of Your gospel promises or the sternness with which a refusal to believe is met. Help me to have a proper relationship with You and encourage my family, friends and colleagues to do the same. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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UNBELIEF IS DANGEROUS

Romans 11:17-21 *If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Paul wrote that ancient Israel was like an olive tree stump, and the Gentile believers were like branches from wild olive trees that have been grafted into the 'root' of Israel. Those Jews who rejected Jesus were like branches which were broken off from the original tree. Paul then appealed to Gentile believers not to be proud. They were only grafted into the promise of Israel because of God's grace. They have no right to think they are superior; they were not the reason the church existed; for Jesus Christ is the life of the church.

The original 'branches' were broken off because they refused to trust in Jesus Christ. But that was no reason why Gentiles should look down on Jews; they were not in God's kingdom on their own merit but because of God's grace. Applying the same reasoning, Paul says that the Gentile believers should be in awe of God (who has proved that He can and does remove 'unbelieving branches'). The challenge was to stay true to the faith, keep receiving spiritual life from Jesus and stop being spiritually proud, or risk God's wrath.

Pride is the endemic disease of sinful humanity. It is the pretence that we are better than others and have more value because of our work, wealth or status in society or the church. But it is a lie. The truth is that only God's grace can lift us out of our sin, and only His mercy can keep us away from His wrath. If the Apostle Paul should say, "*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature ...*" (Romans 7:18) - then which of us has any reason to be proud? But more than that, if God did not spare Israelites who disbelieved and refused to fully trust in Jesus, should we not take our faith much more seriously? Unbelief is dangerous because it takes us outside of the blessing of God and exposes us to His wrath. If that was true for the Jews, will it not also be true for us?

Prayer: *Gracious and merciful God. Thank You for grafting me into Your ancient family. I am sad that so many who have received the sign of Your promise have not believed it, and are excluded from Your grace. May I never be so arrogant as to believe that I have gained a place in Your family by my own merit. Forgive me when I have looked down on others with spiritual pride, and keep me mindful that it is only by grace that I am saved. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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THROWING SALVATION AWAY

Romans 11:13-16 *I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Most people can remember the anguish of realising that something precious has been thrown away. It was not intentional, but careless. Either it was accidentally thrown away along with other things, or it was carelessness because attention had been focussed somewhere else, or its value had not been understood at the time. That was the Apostle Paul's concern for his own people, the Jews. Salvation in Christ had been offered to them, but they did not recognise Jesus as the Saviour and threw away their promised salvation.

Paul wanted to stir his own people into realising that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah. Some of the Gentiles had understood and now valued Jesus very highly. But Paul did not want his own people to miss the grace of God. The root of faith had been planted in Israel. New Gentile branches had been grafted in but he wanted Israelites to receive the new life of Jesus as well.

Paul is specifically talking about his missionary zeal for the Jews, and that remains a special concern for those who love Jesus. However, the principle also applies to everybody who has had some background teaching in God's Word, been brought up in a Christian family, or even who have started to serve in the Christian church. It is right that believers should care about their family, friends and colleagues who have known about Christ, but have disregarded His value and separated themselves from His love. True hearted believers will painfully long that they will receive His grace they once heard about; even though they have now become careless and reject His promises. It is right to grieve over such people. Don't stop speaking the truth to them. Some will want to turn and be saved.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for Your patience, even with those who turn away from You. Even though they may carelessly reject Your love, help me to be faithful to Your Word and not secret about Your love. Forgive me when I have been reluctant to be open about You with those who protest their indifference. Help me to be bold. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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THE RICH PRIVILEGE OF SALVATION

Romans 11:11-12 *Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The gospel gave equal rights to both Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. The Jews should not try to displace the Gentile believers, and the Gentiles should not look down on the Jews. However the inclusion of non-Jews into the family of God was intended to make the Jews wake up. They could no longer presume that their heritage gave them greater rights of access to God than the Gentiles: both needed to embrace the grace of Christ. So they should not be legalistic, demanding that the Gentiles should keep Jewish religious rules.

The free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus was just so wonderful: now even Gentiles could be forgiven and made children of God. And the same rich privilege was true for Jews too, but only if they would also believe the Gospel. However, as the Apostle Paul found, when he obeyed the call to believe in Jesus, he was greatly enriched as he realised that the purpose of the Old Testament law was to point to Jesus.

Galatians 3:28 sums it up, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* However there is still a great advantage when believers understand the Old Testament. It is still the best 'picture gallery' to help us understand the character and work of Christ. God wants everybody to learn from the Old Testament narrative so that we can fully grasp the gospel of salvation in Jesus. So do not despise the ancient Scriptures; they contain great riches of knowledge and wisdom which help us to understand how to follow Jesus better.

Prayer: *Ever wise God. Thank You for the Old Testament with all its pictures of how You relate to people, and how Jesus would fulfil the law. I am sorry when I have not bothered to invest time in understanding the Old Testament. Please help me to appreciate the great privilege You gave to the Jews by entrusting Your Word to them. May I also learn from them so that I can grow stronger in my faith and be better able to teach others. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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THE BITTER END

Romans 11:7-10 *What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling-block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent for ever." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

For centuries, the Children of Israel had resisted God's Word. They pretended to be self-righteous by keeping little rules, but failed to love God with all their heart and soul and strength ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#)). Such disobedience was costly because they could no longer hear God's voice or see what He was doing. God confirmed their desire, hardening their hearts more. He demonstrated that if they did not want a relationship with Him, their religious rules would end up entrapping them, and He would close their minds to truth.

On the other hand, God chose some to have open eyes and ears. They put their trust in Him and carried the light of truth through the generations until Jesus came. The Jewish believers in Rome needed to understand that God had not included them because they were better at keeping the Jewish law, but because He had enabled them to see that salvation came only through faith in Jesus. The Gentiles came the same way. They were equal because of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

It is a habit of religious people to think that they are better than others. That must never happen in the church where everybody is a sinner saved by grace. The wonder is that God should want any of us! But when He sets His love upon us, it is such a privilege; because we are really no better than the worst sinner. However this verse warns us against unbelief and God's right to reveal His grace to whoever He chooses ([Hebrews 3:12](#); [12:14-17](#)). God is patient, but not for ever ([Genesis 6:3](#)). So let us not harden our hearts by unbelief and disobedience ([Psalm 95:7-11](#)).

Prayer: *Gracious God of justice and power. Thank You that You always do what is right. I am amazed that You should love anybody, especially me. Thank You for this reminder that I am only in Your kingdom because You have been gracious to me: it is no credit to my good works. Help me to remember that access to Your throne is a privileged gift and that I must never harden my heart against Your love or despise Your grace. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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AMAZING GRACE

Romans 11:1-6 *I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah - how he appealed to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

In one way, the Old Testament narrative is sad: God's law is rejected, His people wander from Him and the hope of a Messiah fades. But God had not abandoned His people: in every generation there was a remnant who believed God's Word, and faithfully anticipated His Messiah. The Apostle Paul said that he became one such person; although he had been rebellious towards the gospel, God gave him grace to believe the truth and be born again.

Elijah had despaired. He could not see anyone else who trusted God, and thought that the salvation of Israel was his sole responsibility. But God knew better; He had seven thousand more believing and faithful prophets waiting to be used. It is a mystery how God calls people to trust in Him; but we may be sure that God never leaves Himself without witnesses. He gives grace to even the weakest and the worst so that they can repent and believe the gospel.

Paul wrote this to assure the Christians in Rome that God would not reject Jews from Christ's church; they could receive the grace which had been extended to everybody else (Gentiles). This is still good news for those of our Jewish friends, as well as those who come from a wide variety of faith backgrounds - the gospel is God's call for everybody to receive grace through Jesus Christ. In addition, those who are spiritually lonely can be comforted that they are not the only believer. Other Christians might not have identified themselves, but God has His people everywhere: He knows how to keep the light of Christ alight in even the darkest of communities. So do not think that anybody is outside the scope of His grace; and do not despair that you think you are the only believer. God keeps His secrets well until they are ready to be revealed. And when they are revealed, rejoice and glorify God for the gospel of His grace.

Prayer: *Eternal and ever-wise God. Thank You for not abandoning Your ancient people, the Jews, but for extending to them the gospel of Your grace. Thank You too that no one who believes in Jesus will ever be eternally shamed. Forgive me for making wrong judgements about people, for respecting their background more than the hope You are offering them in the gospel. And forgive me for despairing when I feel spiritually lonely. Please help me to understand that in the same way that I have received Your grace, so too can many others. Help me to trust You and be willing to work with You until You reveal more of Your plan. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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GOD'S GOSPEL PATIENCE

Romans 10:18-21 *But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The gospel message should not have been new to the Jews in Rome. It was found throughout the Old Testament scriptures. Indeed, salvation through Jesus Christ is the real story behind all of Israel's history. The prophets saw Christ by faith, and Simeon and Anna recognised the "hope of Israel" as they held the baby Jesus ([Luke 2:25-38](#)). St Augustine is quoted as saying "Christ is in the Old (Testament) concealed; Christ is in the New revealed".

Religious people, who respect the Old Testament, should be reminded that it points to Jesus. The Jewish people in Rome had therefore already heard the essence of the gospel message, but not understood it and were not seeking the Lord. Nevertheless, God revealed Himself to those who were not seeking Him and offered the hope of salvation to people who refused to obey Him.

It is the same today. God does not only speak to the faithful. His gospel is for everybody. He does not only speak to Christians but to people of every religious and ethnic background. That is why we should not be afraid or ashamed to tell the gospel even if they don't listen, understand, or seek the Lord; and even if they refuse to submit to Him - because that was how God treated Israel. So we must never write off people who are uninterested or unresponsive to the gospel; it is still the power of God to salvation for everybody who believes ([Romans 1:16](#)). The fact that they have not yet believed is not a good reason to exclude them from hearing the gospel! It is only through the gospel that they will know who and what to believe. If God did not give up on Israel for 1,500 years, why should we give up on our friends?

Prayer: *Gracious Lord. I am amazed at your patience. In so many different ways You have presented the gospel, all over the world, for thousands of years. You do not abandon any generation to stay in the darkness but have set hope before the world in the person of Jesus Christ. I am sorry when I have assumed that those who do not immediately respond to Your Word will never do so. I am sorry when I have deprived my family, friends and colleagues because I have hidden Your Word. Please help me to learn the gospel patience which is in Your heart and neither be afraid nor ashamed of letting people know that Jesus Christ is Lord. In His Name. Amen.*

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