



LIFE GROUP

RESOURCE GUIDE

for the week of October 23

"You also must help us by prayer... For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses." (2 Corinthians 1.11; 10.4)

I do not know a single follower of Jesus, who takes his faith seriously, who does not want his or her whole life to count for Christ. Each of us wants to be used by God to influence people and impact our world. We want to participate in the eternal legacy of Jesus Christ. We, who have been magnetized and empowered by His love, naturally want to magnetize and empower others. Let me suggest one method that is tried and true—it has changed individuals, transformed whole families, demolished walls of racism and ethnic strife, and it has even toppled civilizations. I shall call it the “subterranean” method—you know it more simply as prayer.

There is a fascinating verse in Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians where he invites their prayerful support for his evangelistic work. In 2 Corinthians 1.11 he literally says: “You also helping together over and above us in prayer.” What could such a phrase mean to Paul? I believe that he is thinking of the fortresses that were such common structures in the ancient world. Evangelism involves storming strongholds like that in people’s lives. But a frontal assault is often useless. What is needed is a way to soar over and above the walls that hold loved ones in bondage. This will require hard work, sustained work, and team work. Such work is unseen and unsung. But it is crucial if the fortress is to be taken. Prayer is like that. It assails the inner recesses of a person’s will in a way all our talking cannot.

J. I. Packer writes: “However clear and cogent we may be in our presentation of the gospel, we have no hope of convincing and converting anyone. Can you or I by earnest talking break the power of Satan over a man’s life? No! Can you or I give life to the spiritually dead? No! Can we hope to convince sinners of the truth of the gospel by patent explanation? No! Can we hope to move men to believe the gospel by any words of entreaty that we may utter? No! Our approach to evangelism is not realistic until we have faced this shattering fact, and let it make its proper impact upon us.”

Now let me confess to you at once that all of this is counter-intuitive for me. By temperament I would much rather storm walls through speech, debate, and action than fly over through prayer. But time and experience continue to confront me with the reality that it is the “flight of prayer” which counts and prevails.

Foolish is the Christian—and I have been the fool—who does not remember that reality exceeds the yardstick of the scientist. There are natural laws for the realities of nature and there are spiritual laws which are natural to the realities of the Kingdom of God. In the natural realms gravity can exert a force which causes things to fall. In spiritual realms prayer can exert a force that, while unseen in the natural, has the capacity to cause “things” to fall.

The movement of God always begins in “spiritual places.” The call to Abraham, the Exodus, the selection of David, the prophets’ vision, the coming of Jesus, the day of Pentecost—from where did these come? From the realms of nature or the realm of the Spirit? Prayer is the one tool that God has given us to impact the fallen spiritual realm which buttresses the bastions of evil, sin, and brokenness in and around us.

So, if, like me, you feel like you are banging your head against a wall that will not budge perhaps its time to start flying over it... Your LifeGroup can be God’s redemptive SWAT team to release and rescue souls.

Enjoy your LifeGroup!

Mark

Getting to know one another better...

If you sat next to Jesus on a bus, what would you want to talk about?

Romans 12.1-2

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Commentary

12.2. If 12.1 exhorts us to **present our bodies as a living sacrifice**, 12.2 tells us how we can surrender our bodies to God holy and acceptable to God. Paul's worldview is radical. He urges this Christian community in Rome to be distinctly Christian in a world that is definitely not! **Do not be conformed to this world** because the Christian should not identify with a world pattern that is broken, conflicted, indifferent/hostile to God's rule, and ultimately on a trajectory towards obsolescence. Instead the Christian is to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. But how shall we think about transformation that occurs by minds renewed? The word, "**transformed**", occurs here, in Matthew and Mark's Gospel's where Jesus is "transformed" (Matthew 17.2 and Mark 9.2) and one time in 2 Corinthians 3.18 where Paul refers to this same incident. This means that the transformation and renewal advocated by Paul is not a call to "think harder" or exchange a "worldly" task list for a "spiritual" one. Renewing minds is not about rules. It is the result our proximity to God's transforming presence. Our minds have a different framework for living because the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life has inspired, influenced, and engaged us. A "renewing mind" is alive to God and longs to see the world as He sees the world.

Yet personal transformation that comes by **the renewing of your mind** is not the goal. The goal of the transformed life catalyzed by the Christian mind is missional. Here is the goal: transformation will release a counter-cultural missional community that will **prove that the will of God is good and acceptable and perfect**. A Christian community will live in a manner that will allow this world to see **the will of God is good, acceptable, and perfect**. The description of the **will of God** is instructive. **Good** is more than moral and virtuous. **Good** is composed of and expresses a kindness that is enduring and excellent. It is not situational or fleeting. **Acceptable** in our 21st century context sounds limp and average. **Acceptable** is something that fully fills us with a satisfaction that gratifies and pleases the soul. Some Bible translations use "well-pleasing" or "pleasing" instead. Using the word, "**acceptable**" does bring out an important aspect of "pleasing" -- there is no authentic experience of pleasure if that pleasure is not acceptable to God. Finally the word, **perfect**, describes something that is whole, thoroughly good, complete, unlimited, complete, and pointing towards fulfillment.

The **renewed mind** is alive to the limitless love and unlimited possibilities that belong to followers of Jesus Christ because the **renewed mind** can know, experience, and express the dynamic life-changing and life-giving will of God that excels in kindness, fulfills the soul, and embraces life with God's wholeness. **The will of God**, in this context, is first a deeply held understanding that flows from a relational recognition of God's love and grace before it is a moral vision. The Christian life expresses the blessings and benefits of the **will of God** that is part of our testimony of the "Good News" of Jesus Christ. Changed lives are living and **attractive** proof that God's will IS good, pleasing, and perfect. The **will of God** is not the possession of a people whose moral obligation is to judge the world and Church around them.

Reflecting on Romans 12.1-2...

Why do you think Paul uses the imagery of living sacrifices to describe our proper response to God's mercy?

If transformation occurs through "mind renewal", how do you think God wants to renew your mind? Are there particular areas where you would welcome God's "mind renewal"?

Romans 12.1-2 implies that obedience is an authentic expression of the worship and transformation Paul describes. What is the "next step" of obedience that you believe God is calling you to?

Paul describes the will of God as good, acceptable, and perfect. Can you recall one or two examples where you have experienced God's will in this way?

How do we experience or encourage others that God's will is good, acceptable/pleasing, and perfect when circumstances create disappointment, grief, or suffering?

How might Paul's understanding of the will of God empower you to have spiritual conversation about God's will with those around you?

How can your LifeGroup express and experience the will of God Paul describes in Romans 12.2?

My prayer requests (write in advance what you want your group to pray for...)

Praying for my group...