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Godliness. Reverence. Obedience. Worship.

# GR W

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growth in faith and service to God





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## From the Editors...

We hope you're doing well despite these difficult days which have come upon our world. May our conduct be according to the instruction of the apostle Paul to the church at Ephesus – may we “walk in love,” “walk as children of light,” and “walk circumspectly” (Ephesians 5:1, 8, 15). As Paul said in the previous chapter, may we “...speak the truth in love...” and “...GROW up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ...” (Ephesians 4:15)

We are thankful for our writers who have given their time, energy, and ability to author the articles found herein. These men are good, faithful servants of the Lord who desire to build others up in the faith. We count it a blessing to have such men who are willing to participate in this endeavour with us.

We appreciate you, our subscribers. If you are new to GROW, welcome! If you've been receiving our publication for some time now, we thank you for your continued interest. If you find this material useful, feel free to share it with others. Forward the notification email, point folks to our website or Facebook page, share the PDF copy of the publication, or print and share the articles. Our aim is for as many as possible to benefit from this material.

Now, come GROW with us!

Cordially,  
Sean P. Cavender, chief editor  
William Stewart, editor & designer





# The Lord's Will Doesn't Have To Be Complicated

JEREMY WOODMAN | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

*"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"*  
(Micah 6:8, NKJV)

The preceding quote from the prophet Micah is one of the most elegant quotes in the entire Bible. Like the prophet himself, it directs and delivers plain truth to a generation that had entangled themselves with sin and complicated their lives with ritualistic religion. The lessons apply to our generation as well as his.

To fully appreciate Micah's statement, we have to look at it in its historical context. Contemporary with Isaiah, Micah prophesied, "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (Micah 1:1), placing his work in an estimated range of 737 BC – 696 BC. This was a busy time for the prophets. The northern ten tribes of the divided kingdom, known collectively as Israel, had long fallen into idolatry. Calling all the peoples as a witness, the Lord invites Israel, the ten northern tribes of the divided kingdom, to repent. Unfortunately, they disregarded this call as they had all others. In 721 BC, they were carried away in Assyrian captivity, as promised by God in the Law (Deuteronomy 28, Leviticus 18). Unlike Israel, whose kings were all wicked, Judah (which included the small tribe Benjamin) had some good kings. However, as a nation, they also progressively slid into idolatry. Seeing the destruction of their northern neighbors should have been a proverbial wake-up call, and it was for kings like Hezekiah. However, much work needed to be done.

The primary sin of Judah was idolatry, but it is far from the only one. In chapter 2, we read of those who "devise iniquity and work out evil on



their bed" (Micah 2:1), reminiscent of the people of Noah's day whose thoughts were "only evil continually" (Genesis 6:6). Their machinations were covetous, focused on acquiring their neighbors' fields and houses by any means necessary, including violence (Micah 2:2). Like Jezebel and Ahab, they silenced the legitimate prophets of God (Micah 2:6). They heeded the words of the false prophets, drunkards (Micah 2:11), and diviners (Micah 3:6-7). Writing just a bit earlier, during the reign of Uzziah, Amos said, "they hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly" (Amos 5:10). Instead, they glorified in wickedness (Micah 3:1). Their princes, judges, and priests were all corrupt, readily accepting bribes and prophesying (favourably, of course) for money (Micah 3:11-12).

For these things, and others recorded in the history of the Kings and by the other prophets, God was justified in His proclaimed judgment against them. God is also longsuffering though and "sent warning to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place" (2 Chronicles 36:15). Reminiscent of Isaiah's statement, "come let us

reason together” (Isaiah 1:18), God asks Judah, “what have I done to you?” (Micah 6:3) to warrant such unfaithfulness. The answer is nothing. The fault lies entirely with Judah. Nonetheless, this is the same generation that was told, “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18) if they turned in repentance.

It is within that context that we read our quote. God tells them what they needed to do and the attitude they needed to have. It reads as a relatively simple list, one that may seem obvious today. However, this was to a group who “call evil good, and good evil” (Isaiah 5:20) to the point that they couldn’t discern between the two any longer. They needed to go back to basics.

It is easy to make the mistake of thinking that the people of Judah were not religious. From the verses preceding the text under consideration, we see this was not the case. The prophet asks, “shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil?” (Micah 6:6-7) Similarly, God, through Isaiah, commands the people to “bring no more futile sacrifice; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates” (Isaiah 1:13). From this passage, we infer that the people were religious in the ritualistic sense of observing holidays and feast days; however, their service to God was compromised by mixing it with idolatry and confusing observance with faithfulness. The Pharisees of Jesus’ day made the same mistake. The Lord rebukes them, saying, “you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (Matthew 23:23).

God’s will never been complicated or indeterminate. It is man that makes it so by adding layer upon layer of addendums, rules, creeds, traditions, etc. Paul was concerned that the Corinthians were moving away from “the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor 11:3) toward a gospel that was likely based on the wisdom of the world. They were enamoured with worldly wisdom; a major problem he addressed in his first letter to them. Simplicity does not mean easy, though. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul compares the Christian life to that of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer, all professions that require strenuous effort, focus, and commitment. The author of Hebrews builds on that analogy and instructs the Christian to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb 12:1). One of those snares is to fall into the same trap the ancient Israelites did. Regular church attendance and Bible study are among the many fruits of faithfulness when a Christian of pure faith does them. Still, when done in place of devotion in other areas of life, or worse as a shield to hide a double life, they fall into the same category as Micah condemned. James admonishes, “pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted by the world” (James 1:27).

“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning” (Romans 15:4). The people of Micah’s day had thought they could still serve God while practicing idolatry and living an unfaithful life. The Christian can commit the same folly, “if we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness” (1 John 1:6). By the grace and longsuffering of God, though, “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9) as one turns in repentance to the straight and narrow way.

# The Church as the Body of Christ

SHANE CARRINGTON | SULFER SPRINGS, TEXAS

My body used to be a well-oiled machine. I could run for miles, play full-court basketball with men half my age every week, and grasp and hold almost anything with my hands. Then I turned 50. My well-oiled machine has become somewhat rusty and creaky. This maturing body sometimes hurts and disappoints, but such is the nature of aging.

The body of Christ, on the other hand, grows stronger, more vibrant, and better equipped for the will of God regardless of how long we live in this world. This makes the “body of Christ” one of the powerful metaphors for the people connected to Jesus by faith.

## Church = body; Body = Church

In Christ, God calls us many things. In Acts 11:26 alone, we are “the church,” “the disciples,” and “Christians.” As Paul wrote, the Father “put all things under His [Christ’s, sc] feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22,23). And, “Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body” (Ephesians 5:23). So the body of Christ is the church and vice-versa, and the church/body of Christ is the family of God (i.e., the body composed of God’s saved people).

Further, the Holy Spirit describes our connectedness both to Christ and one another by using the metaphor of “body.”

*For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body,*



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*whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12,13).*

There is a lot going on there that we will not address, but as the universal body of Christ, we are in unity with both Jesus and one another. Just as your body works together with your head (mind, will, etc.) for the good of your physical body, as disciples of King Jesus, we are to work together in harmony with His will to further His work. Working well with our fellow disciples in Christ is integral to unity (read 1 Cor. 12:14-21). In fact, rather than competing with one another in the body of Christ, we honor the unique work each of us does for the good of the entire body (1 Cor. 12:22-26): “that the members may have the same care for one another” (1 Cor. 12:25b). Indeed, “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27). Paul develops this by discussing how each different body part has a unique function, yet they complement one another.

This passage emphasizes the universal body/church of Christ. But the practicalities of the body of Christ primarily reveal themselves in how a local body in Christ interacts with itself. Paul

makes this point as he describes worship assemblies of the congregation in Corinth (1 Corinthians 14).

- “Therefore if the whole church [local congregation, sc] assembles together...” (1 Corinthians 12:23)
- “...When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.” (1 Corinthians 12:26)
- “...if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church [local church worship assembly, sc]...” (1 Corinthians 12:28)

How we interact with one another as a local congregation has great importance!

### The Body of Christ is...

This powerful metaphor of “the body of Christ” resonates with us all. Your physical, human body wonderfully illustrates the strengths and weaknesses evident in the body of Christ. We need Jesus, our Head! We need each other as fellow members of the body of Christ! We only grow well spiritually with both! In this article, let’s focus on the local congregation (like Paul did in 1 Corinthians 14), emphasizing four aspects of our relationship as a local body in Christ. The local body is...

1. **Stabilizing.** A local congregation provides godly structure for each member. Just as the human body’s skeletal system stabilizes the entire human body, God designed the local congregation as a spiritually stabilizing force for each member.

Elders who shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-4), deacons who serve (1 Timothy 3:8-13), and members who work together (Philippians 1:1; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:15,16) provide structure and momentum for the stability of the body.

Working together in harmony with God’s design for the local body further provides stability. As we function under godly leadership, we participate in evangelism, edification (including worship), and giving alms to needy saints. Participating in these activities together further stabilizes us spiritually.

2. **Family.** Family intimacy and spiritual kinship form vital aspects of a local congregation. A local church differs greatly from your favorite convenience store or fast-food restaurant. Rather than participating only if we can “have it your way,” a local congregation is described as “the household [family, sc] of God” (1 Timothy 3:15). As such, God desires a local congregation to provide what all godly family provides:

- **An atmosphere of belonging.** Whether husband, wife, parent, or child, a family belongs together (Colossians 3:18-21). Being invested in one another as God wills is vital to both physical and spiritual family. “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God...” (1 Timothy 3:14,15). In 1 Timothy, Paul wrote the carefully crafted will of God for the atmosphere that should exist in a local congregation (elders, deacons, etc., 1 Timothy 3). We belong together; we need each other.
- **A spirit of unity.** Being in Christ provides a sense of spiritual unity. But as in the human body, in the local body of Christians, the different body parts must work together for a common goal (1 Corinthians 12; 14). Eyes, ears, etc. are all necessary, and each must realize this and act accordingly. Complementary body parts work in harmony toward the



well being of the body. Each local congregation must follow this same pattern. We belong together; we need each other.

- **A sense of meaning.** In a God-centered nuclear family, husband and wife are “one flesh” (Matthew 19:5), and the “children are a gift [heritage, NKJV] of the LORD” (Psalm 127:3). Consequently, they each draw some sense of meaning from their relationships with one another. Being a member of a local congregation for an extended period does the same. “To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit” (1 Peter 3:8). What a comfort it is knowing fellow Christians well and loving each other in this way. We belong together; we need each other.
3. **Strengthening.** One of the key words describing the work of disciples among one another — including in worship assemblies — is edification (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 14; etc.). Like in an earthly family, disciples are to strengthen one another. Everyone should be involved: “from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body of the building up of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16). Elders (Ephesians 4:11, “pastors”), deacons (1 Timothy 3:8ff), teachers and preachers (Ephesians 4:11), and the entire body (Ephesians 4:16) have vital roles in this work. Participating in our worship assemblies, Bible classes, etc. makes each individual — and consequently, all who are willing — stronger in Christ. None of us grows as well in isolation.
4. **Restorative.** Randal, one of my good friends, developed colon cancer, which

spread to his liver before he even knew he had had polyps. Over a few months, he had chemo and two major surgeries on his liver to remove significant portions of it — before they could even operate on his colon! Fortunately, the liver regenerates, and his did. Recently he was able to have the diseased portion of his colon removed, so hopefully, he will now be in remission!

The human body is, within parameters, restorative. When you get sick, the body begins working to heal you. In cases of body trauma, other body parts work more vigorously for the good of the body. What a blessing!

The body of Christ is the same. Withdrawing from a rebellious member is to protect the local body from their influence. “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven...” (1 Corinthians 5:6,7). But that same action is also an attempt to restore them to the Lord and the body of Christ. “...deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:5). It is to destroy (urge him to repent of) his “flesh” (carnal/sinful activities) so that his soul/spirit might meet the Lord in peace at the judgment. God designed the human body “fearfully and wonderfully” (Psalm 139:14), and He also designed the body of Christ in amazing fashion.

### Conclusion

The human body grows weary with time and begins to falter. The body of Christ, on the other hand, is ever-renewing — designed to strengthen us in Christ throughout our days. What a blessing it is to be in fellowship with Him and other members of His body. May we respond well to Him and one another as part of His body now. Then we can one day live with Him in eternity.

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# The Collection

JIM MICKELLS | LEWISBURG, TENNESSEE

*“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: on the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come”*  
(1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

There are a great number of things that you and I can learn from these two verses about giving. Let me share a few of them with you so we may be more aware of what God has said and how important our giving is to the work of the church. The Lord depends on us to carry out His work.

There is a collection to be made. Thayer defines the word “collection” as “of money gathered for the relief of the poor” (Thayer’s, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament). This word is used in both verses and is the same Greek word. Giving is required by God. Notice – “as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia.” Are these orders in Paul’s letter to the churches of Galatia? Not that I can find. Yet, at some point, he gave them the command to collect funds. Not only was it required of those churches in Galatia, he said, “so you must do also.” Paul commanded the church at Corinth, and likewise, such is required of the Lord’s church today.

The funds spoken of being collected in these verses was “for the saints.” These saints would have been Christians had needs they could not supply. Consider these verses as well Acts 11:28-30; 24:17; Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1, 12. There is no command or example of a New Testament church using funds



via William Stewart

collected to help those in poverty who were not Christians. Helping those in need who are not saints would be our individual responsibility (Matthew 19:16-22; Luke 10:25-37). Yet this is not the only reason funds are to be collected. Any work given to the church by the Lord, which requires resources, authorizes the collection of such and their use in doing the work. Paul said, “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14). He received funds from the church at Philippi, aiding him while preaching the gospel (Philippians 4:14-16). The church collected and sent those funds for such an effort.

The day when the collection is to be taken – “on the first day of the week.” When he said the first day of the week, then it would eliminate any other day. When God told Noah to build the ark out of gopher wood that excluded every other kind of wood (Genesis 6:14). He did not have to make an exhaustive list of what not to use when He specified what to use. The same is true of when the collection is taken. The New Testament church came together on the first day of the week to worship. Two of those acts are unique to the first day of the week assembly — the collection and the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7). The expression “first day of the week” is defined as

“the first day of the week; on the first day of every week, every Sunday” (A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament). So when we come together as a body of God’s people on Sunday, a collection is taken. We also partake of the Lord’s Supper, along with preaching/teaching, singing, and praying (Acts 2:42; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).

A collection means we are to “lay something aside.” In Vincent’s Word Studies of the New Testament and Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament, both say to lay something aside refers to what one sets aside at home. I find this strange, particularly when it is to be done on the first day of the week. If one were simply to put something at home, why the first day of the week? Couldn’t you do such at any time? And secondly, if one stored such at home, would that not defeat the very purpose for Paul’s command that there be no gathering when I come? The answer to this question is obviously yes! Notice this comment,

*“The usual view is that every one was directed to set aside something on the Lord’s day and keep it until Paul came. This view is sanctioned by the translations and most of the commentators. Macknight renders: “On the first day of the week, let each one of you lay somewhat by itself, putting it into the treasury.” I believe Macknight is right; for (1) there were to be no collections when Paul came. That implies that the money was to be placed in the treasury. Otherwise, it would have to be collected. (2) Thesaurizoon,*

*rendered in the Common Version “in store,” is a present participle, meaning literally, “treasury.” (3) All church history testifies that the early church took up weekly collections on the first day of the week. See Pliny’s Letter to Emperor Trajan (4) We know, from Acts 20:7, and all early church history, that the church met on the first day of the week” (Johnson’s Notes on the New Testament, p. 126).*

Our giving is to be as “he may prosper.” In his second epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle says our giving should not be sparingly, but bountifully. As we purpose and plan our giving, we should not give grudgingly nor out of necessity; instead, we should give out of a heart filled with love and devotion for the Lord. Knowing He loves the cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). Mike Willis said,

*“The Christian should not determine how much to give to the Lord on the basis of the law of tithing (a tenth of all that is earned); rather, the gift should be in proportion to how much he has been prospered with no percentage having been legislated. Therefore, one who makes a large sum is expected to give more than he who makes a little” (Truth Commentary, 1 Corinthians, p. 492).*

May God help us to understand and to appreciate the privilege given to us to return a small portion of what He has blessed us with to help in His great work of saving the souls of men, women, and children.

# Walk According To Love

SEAN CAVENDER | BALD KNOB, ARKANSAS

## Introduction

The Lord's church is a tremendous blessing to Christians. Having a sense of community, family, and connectedness encourages people in times of difficulty. However, even in our Lord and Savior's church, disruptions, disagreements, and arguments can (and will) occur. It would be nice to think the only times Christians engage in a conflict would be over matters of doctrine in defense of the truth. The reality is Christians will succumb to arguing over issues that seem petty. We might rather avoid all kinds of conflict, especially with our brothers and sisters in Christ, but avoidance is usually the worst thing we could do.

Many disagreements over opinions and personal practices can erupt and cause permanent damage. Our love for one another is tested during those periods of conflict. However, the Bible teaches us that love is needed, particularly during the conflict. Let us look at Romans 14 to instruct us on dealing with conflict properly and always walking according to love.

### Firmly Held Opinions Can Lead To Disputes

One reason Paul wrote the letter to the church in Rome was to help the church overcome deep-rooted divisions between Jewish and Gentile believers. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ brings unity to these diverse groups (Romans 15:7-12, 27). Overcoming these divisions was essential to help the church in Rome be unified to spread the gospel while also helping resolve tensions because of ethnic diversity and personal practices. Jews and Gentiles commonly held religious opinions that led to vastly different practices. Yet, in such an

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ethnically diverse place like the city of Rome, the church would have to learn to navigate these tensions and preserve peace and unity.

To understand Romans 14-15, it is helpful to "read it backward," beginning with Romans 15 and then move back to Romans 14. Chapter 14 is the foundation of Paul's objective in Romans 15. In chapter 15, Paul wants the brethren in Rome to understand God has called the Jews and Gentiles to be at peace with one another because they have been saved by the gospel of Christ (cf. Romans 1:16). Instead of using the ethnic terms in Romans 14 of "Jew" and "Gentile," Paul uses the terms "strong" and "weak." Using the words "strong" and "weak," Paul shows the roadblocks between brothers and sisters and practices concerning their personal and ethnic opinions. Paul uses two examples to illustrate the ethnic divisions which existed between Christians in Rome: eating meats and keeping of holy days and festivals. The issue of foods (eating certain meats or abstaining from meats) or observance of holy days (Gentile or Jewish) could have become a stumbling block to fellow Christians. Paul shows the gridlock in the church: the strong eat meats and treat all days equally, while the weak abstain from eating and keep certain days above the rest.

Paul's primary goal in Romans 14 is to help the strong and weak get along. The church should not hold one another in contempt or judge each



other other — each would be detrimental to the church's mission of spreading the gospel. Therefore, the strong are not to hold the weak in contempt (Romans 14:3), and the weak are not to judge the strong as guilty of sinning (Romans 14:3).

Critical to understanding this, we must notice how Paul uses terms like “faith,” “strong,” and “weak” in Romans 14. The apostle does not use “faith” regarding belief in the gospel's fundamental facts, obedience to the gospel, matters of congregational fellowship, etc. Faith, in Romans 14, refers to a personal conviction.

*Romans 14:1 (NASB95) Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.*

*Romans 14:22-23 (NASB95)  
The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God.  
Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.*

Even though this passage is speaking of differences between brethren, it is an abuse of this text to argue that any dispute between Christians is just a matter of opinion. There are moral and ethical behaviors that affect our relationship with God and our fellowship with the local church (Romans 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13). Furthermore, there is a pattern for the work of the church to which we must all submit (Hebrews 8:5; Philippians 3:17). Also, teachings by Jesus and the apostles cannot be changed, such as what Jesus says about marriage and divorce (Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). We must remain firm and steadfast on matters of truth, and we cannot change those teachings to maintain fellowship with those in error.

Paul wants Christians to move beyond gridlock and disagreement, and he wants Christians to

understand God's perspective on these issues. God accepts the strong and weak Christian (Romans 14:3). He makes both groups stand (Romans 14:4). And the Lord will judge both groups (Romans 14:10-12). When steeped in disputes about our opinions, we might not be able to see as God sees. We may see two very different sides, but God sees His people bickering and fighting.

Romans 14 is not about categorizing yourself, or others, as “strong” or “weak.” When we begin to classify ourselves, we naturally tend to place ourselves in the “strong” category and the person we are disputing with in the “weak” group. Romans 14 lays out impartial truths we must come to realize, primarily while engaged in conflict with fellow Christians: the strong and weak are both convinced they are right (Romans 14:5); both are incredibly committed to the Lord (Romans 14:6); and both belong to the Lord because the Lord died for both groups (Romans 14:8-9).

It is easy to approach Romans 14 and assign some Christians as “strong” and others as “weak.” I can imagine what it might have been like if Paul had preached Romans 14 as a sermon. Comments from a “strong” Christian might have been like this: “That's exactly right, Paul. The weak are just holding us back and tying us down, and we have to accommodate them all of the time. It's so tiresome!” Then the “weak” Christian comes to Paul: “Paul, you really told them! Those strong brothers are not valuing our opinions and our questions about this stuff. Thank you for helping them understand.” When we think of Romans 14 as a method to categorize Christians, we end up in a roadblock!

God sees one group — the church for which Christ died to save all of its members from their sins. Nevertheless, when people hold strong yet different opinions, it can lead to disputes and division that can never be overcome.

Perhaps there has never been a time of such

great debate and division among different-minded Christians as the present. Churches have not escaped the pressures of dealing with a worldwide pandemic, like Covid-19. Dealing with the pandemic has created tension among sincere and devoted Christians. We have debated back and forth over the benefits or dangers of wearing masks; there have been racial divisions and disputes and political division. Christians argue over whether it is safe and healthy to assemble. I don't bring any of these subjects up to take a side or further any divide. The opposite is my goal. I want to see Christians realize we must work to overcome these questions that may divide us! If Christ's kingdom is seen clearly in this world, unity and peace must be our goal (Romans 14:17).

### **Unity Must Overcome Division**

Since we have established that Romans 14 is primarily about bringing Christians together, helping them move beyond division over matters of personal opinions, how will unity prevail?

#### 1. We must walk according to love (Romans 14:15)

Love is the rule that we must follow. Love is not selfish and focused on self-promotion. Instead, love is the commitment of our hearts and mind upon what is pure, good, and holy (Romans 12:9). Love thinks about others first and treats other people as God wants them to be treated (Romans 12:16; 13:8-10). Paul says, "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10) because love expresses itself through submission and obedience to God. And many of the commands God gives us have to do with how we treat one another. One reason that theft is sinful is because it does not act out of love and concern for the one from whom we steal. Thievery is motivated by selfishness. Any sin could be plugged into this equation, and the result is the same. Sin is the expression of hate, not love. Gossip, deceit, lies, and arrogance are all contrary to love. Paul lists those who are "unloving" in the same list as sins

such as homosexuality and murder (Romans 1:31). If we truly love our brothers and sisters in Christ, then we must walk according to love. Promote others and encourage them. Listen to them, even when you may disagree. Learning to walk in love is the first step toward unity.

#### 2. We must have "kingdom" focus (Romans 14:17)

It is easy to get so caught up in a debate that we believe it is our mission and purpose to correct every opinion contrary to our own. Don't believe me? Check social media, and you will see people disagreeing with other people's views while vindicating their own. It is time for a reality check — the kingdom of God is more significant and much more important than our Facebook squabbles! The kingdom of God is about righteousness, peace, and joy. The kingdom of God should not be divided by doubtful disputes; instead, the kingdom should be what blazes the trail of unity, peace, and joy! It is our responsibility to live in harmony with all people (Romans 12:18). If peace is not possible, then it better not be due to our lack of effort. How much better would our life be if we focused on the kingdom of God? However, we tend to lose focus on God's kingdom amid the affairs of this world and the various conflicts we face. Our focus must be on doing God's will and helping others see the will of God done on earth as it is in heaven. Doing the will of God, living righteously, and being at peace with one another is what kingdom focus is all about.

#### 3. We must build up other Christians (Romans 14:20)

One of the many dangers we encounter in disputes with brothers and sisters in Christ is that we may end up tearing each other down. Paul warns, "Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food" (Romans 14:20). The work of God is your brothers and sisters in Christ for whom Christ died (Romans 14:8-9). While engaged in debate with others, our perspective would change if we thought less about winning the argument

over opinions and considered that Jesus died for our brothers and sisters. When we continuously gripe at each other, it will lead to disputes. Paul says biting one another through verbal attacks causes us to be consumed and destroyed (Galatians 5:15). Controversies have a way of discouraging people, even people who are not directly involved in the dispute. However, Christians must make it their mission to build one another up, not tear each other down. When we are patient with one another, it helps us focus on encouraging our brethren and building up each other. One way we edify each other is through worship. When we worship, especially in our prayers and songs, it strengthens us and gives us joy. Singing is a way we speak to each other to

teach and edify (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). When we study from God's word, it builds up our faith in God and His promises and helps us trust Him more each day.

### Conclusion

When we walk according to love, it will produce righteousness, joy, and peace in the kingdom of Christ. Loving each other will build up those who may be weak in faith. Love leads to worship and praise to God. There may be times we feel like we are divided into the "strong" and "weak," but we must remember God sees one body, the church. He expects us to show our godly attitudes and love toward each other, ultimately binding us together in unity. Unity will be impossible if we do not walk according to the principle of love.

# Using Video & Live Streaming for Evangelism

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

In January 2020, prior to Covid-19 exploding into a worldwide pandemic, we ran an article focused on [Web-Based Evangelism](#). We emphasized the importance for local churches to have an online presence, highlighting ways to make ourselves visible in a web-focused world. We had no idea how timely the article would be. Within a couple of months, much of the world was under lockdown conditions to curtail the spread of the coronavirus. The extent to which things closed differed from region to region, but things changed everywhere – including our worship assemblies.

For many congregations, in-person assemblies were suspended. Some shifted to parking lot services and others began online meetings. Some churches had already been streaming services online. Whatever the case, there was a steep learning curve for many elders and preachers to find viable solutions to an urgent problem. It was not as easy as saying, “Lights, camera, action!” Congregations had to make several decisions, such as: whether to live stream (watch only) or video conference (interaction); what software or platform to use (Facebook Live, YouTube Live, Zoom, Hangouts, WebEx, etc.), and what peripherals were needed (microphone, camera, lighting, etc.). And all this had to happen very quickly.

Our aim is not to consider the merits of one platform over another, nor to discuss the technical aspects of setting up and effectively broadcasting a live stream or video conference. Those are worthwhile topics to discuss, but they are not within the purview of this article. Let us focus on using video and live streaming as an evangelistic tool, whether streaming capability was set up to enable virtual teaching during the pandemic or it was already in place.



“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). When Jesus gave this commandment, there were not a myriad of ways to accomplish it. One could walk, ride on an animal or in a chariot, or board a ship for those far off destinations. To convey the message, one could speak directly to an audience, send a messenger, or write a letter. That was it. Yet by using these rudimentary travel and communication methods, Paul was able to say about 30 years after the command was given, the gospel had been “...preached to every creature under heaven...” (Colossians 1:23). We live in an age where travel options abound, and communication alternatives are plentiful. The desired outcome is always in-person contact – we want people to obey the gospel of Christ and unite with people of like precious faith in a local church. But how we get to that point, how contact is made, and how teaching is done can take a variety of paths. There has been a huge shift in how people pursue information in the modern digital age; more and more people want to watch and listen rather than read. Thus, it is incumbent upon us to produce and provide content that will attract and engage people. Fortunately, there are several possibilities we can pursue for our video and live stream content.



**Livestream of services.** Some churches are streaming their Bible classes and worship services. Streaming allows people to see what our services are like before attending with us, which may take away some of the apprehension or anxiety which comes with going somewhere new. Of course, though our services can be accessed online, we want to encourage people to come and be with us in person. Whatever platform is used for streaming, always record and save the video, which can be trimmed and archived into topical playlists for people to access in the future. Properly naming the live stream (and the resulting video) is also important. We want to use a title that will catch attention. Using “Church Livestream” is not going to attract viewers. What is the sermon title? What is the topic being addressed? Is there a thought-provoking question or statement which will lead people to watch?

**Devotional or Bible Readings.** Rather than (or in addition to) streaming our worship assemblies, we can produce short weekly (or daily, if you are able) video studies or Bible readings. A Bible reading (whether live or pre-recorded) is a great way to encourage folks to listen to a portion of God’s word each day. With short studies or devotionals, we can address Bible basics and provide brief responses to simple questions or topics. How long should these readings or devotionals be? There is no right answers. Obviously, we would expect them to be much shorter than a stream of our worship assembly. I have seen brethren produce things like a “3-minute word from the Word” or perhaps a chapter per day reading through a book of the Bible. Whatever you decide, consistency is key. If you have committed to a weekly study, be certain to have content ready to share each week. If it has been set up as a 3-minute study each day, then maintain uniformity in the approximate length of the videos. We want to produce content the viewing audience can rely upon, certainly for truthfulness, but also for

frequency and duration.

**Interactive Chat or Study.** If enough people are tuning in, it can be profitable to host a live and interactive Bible chat or study. Depending on the platform, audience interaction may come from texts in the comments area of a live stream (i.e. YouTube or Facebook) or full audio and video participation (i.e. Zoom, WebEx, etc.). Bible topics and texts can be predetermined, which helps your audience know where you are going beforehand. Or you can select a topic based on participant suggestions. It would be best to have some brethren commit to being involved in the study each time to ensure participation. It can be disheartening to host an event and have no one (or next to no one) show up. Not only that, but low (or no) attendance can affect an interactive online study’s long-term viability as visitors may choose to find a more active study.

**Q & A Session.** This is like the interactive study mentioned above, but the direction of the study would be solely driven by participant questions. Topics to be discussed could be live and on the spot or submitted beforehand via email, text, voice mail, etc.. When dealing with on the spot questions, a word of caution – if you do not know the answer, admit it, promise to find the answer for next time, and move on. It is always best to say, “I don’t know, but I will find out,” than to muddle our way through something only to find out afterward we taught something in error.

**TV or Radio Programs.** Does the congregation currently have a TV or radio broadcast? These should be made accessible on the church’s website and social media accounts. Perhaps the church had a TV or radio program in the past but no longer. Are there videos or audio files available? If so, upload them.

Why do we need to use video and live streaming as a tool for evangelism? First, understand that most people who look for a church today begin their search online. Generally, before they darken the door, they want to know something

about us. They want to know more than where we worship. They want to know what we believe and how we conduct our services. Video and live stream enable those who are searching for a church to know more about us and to interact with us before they show up for the first time. And for many, without this digital interaction, they will pass us by for some other religious group with a strong online presence. We need to use evangelistic tools that work for our community, whether it be newspaper ads, direct mailing, door-to-door, fair booths, etc.. People of all ages are searching the web for content, including religious content. Will we seize the opportunity to reach souls by providing the digital content for which they are looking?

Finally, it is important to spread the word, so people are aware of available content. We can use paid advertising on various web platforms or use Google AdWords. There are times when boosting a post might be a good idea. However, the best means of advertising is to have church members share the content on their social media accounts. Shares. Likes. Comments. not only are these free advertising, but the videos will reach the intended target audience (friends, family, and co-workers of the church members). Sharing content is an easy way for every member of the local church who has a social media presence to use it for the purpose of saving souls.

# The Grief of Losing A Loved One (Part 1)

TOM RAINWATER | PHILADELPHIA, NEW YORK

Death is universal. If you're married, one of you will die before the other. Time and death will take away your spouse, your parents, your siblings, your best friends – one at a time. A child or grandchild may pass before you. When a loved one leaves this life, the loss you feel will be profound. Your emotions will go into overdrive while your mind struggles with how to deal with it. Grief becomes a way of life for a while. Know that this experience is common to all people. The struggle with grief is as universal as death.

However, grief is not an enemy. It's part of the healing process, albeit a long one. Grief, no matter how strong, is not abnormal. It's a natural response to pain and loss. So never feel like you're alone, or that something is wrong with you. To mourn is to be human. As long as you're on this earth, you will suffer many occasions of mourning, some of them intense.

Job, who lost so much at once, described grief in this way: *"I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, and I am not at rest, but turmoil comes"* (3:26, NASB). In other words, his mind was incapable of relaxing and being at peace. He became insecure, unsettled, agitated, and shaken on the inside. Turmoil had made an entryway into his life, like an unwelcome person coming in the front door and staying. I believe Job accurately described the effect of grief on one's person.

After I lost my dear wife of 24 years to cancer, I began an intense Bible study of grief to learn best how to cope. It was my therapy. I learned a lot from God's word and from experience. I continue to learn every day. I hope and pray you'll benefit from what I have to share.

**(1) Grief is an emotional experience. Don't expect it to play out logically.**



One misconception is that people must go through specific stages of grief until they finally reach the end. This is not true. Grief is not a linear countdown experience. Why? Because grief is not logical or predictable. It's a long rollercoaster ride with many sudden highs and lows. So, it doesn't work to develop a plan for the elimination of grief. For instance, it's impossible to get all the crying done and out of the way at once. I decided to speak at my wife Sonia's funeral to honor her life. That was huge in helping me with closure, but it didn't lessen the grief. Expect that when you lose a loved one, sadness in varying degrees will be there for the long haul.

I believe Job grieved primarily for his dead children. After all, when he's introduced, his first concern was his children (1:5b). The addition of physical suffering brought Job more misery. When his three friends arrived, they were so disturbed by the severity of Job's pain that nothing was spoken for seven days and nights (1:12-13). I used to think that was a long time for heavy grieving. I don't anymore. I know what Job was doing. He was shutting down. When everyone went home after Sonia's funeral, I went into heavy grieving, sobbing every 20 minutes for

a few days. Everything just stopped. I wanted to completely shut down, but I couldn't because I needed to be strong for my sons and the brethren in the congregation. After all, I wasn't the only one with problems. But I understand Job. In his case, he didn't have children left for which to be strong. His wife was alive, but unsupportive and distant, which was worse. He couldn't lose himself in his work because it was all taken away. Job described grief as weighing him down: *"Oh, that my grief were fully weighed, and calamity laid with it on the scales! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea..."* (6:2-3a, NKJV). Grief feels heavy on one's heart. At its worst it feels pressing down on you so hard you can't breathe.

Consider Jacob's feelings when he thought he had lost Joseph. Forget for a moment Jacob's faults and his other sons' deception about what had happened. Look closely at how Jacob felt when he thought Joseph was dead. His world stopped. *"Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, 'For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.' Thus his father wept for him"* (Genesis 37:34-35). Jacob experienced anguish, misery, lengthy sorrow, and he felt his grief would kill him.

In the examples of Job and Jacob, strong, new emotions took their toll physically. My point is that this is what you can expect grief to be like. Also, it will run its course on its terms. Don't be dismayed by its strength and unpredictability. This is part of the process.

### **(2) Grief is love that has no place to go.**

When Sonia was dying, I was her caregiver night and day. After she breathed her last and I mournfully took off our wedding rings, I didn't know what to do. She wasn't present anymore. Her soul was gone. Her body was taken away.

I could no longer hold her. I couldn't talk to her. I had a lot of love left for her that had nowhere to go.

Frankly, losing a spouse feels like a major amputation. I was used to being "one flesh" with her. Thus, when she died, I felt like half a person. For over 24 years I had defined myself by her presence, by my link to her. That's who I was. Now I was struggling with how to define myself. I felt empty, lost, and drowning. Losing a child is similar, but different. Many have told me what that's like: The loss of your flesh and blood is devastating. You've loved them from pregnancy or adoption. All the work in raising them, then they're gone. It's an unfinished feeling. The future on earth you had in mind for them will not happen. The things you wanted to see them accomplish are unrealized. Their continuing legacy is lost.

The absence of loved ones is profound. Now there's always an empty place at the table – an empty bed – an empty seat at worship. No more hearing their singing, laughter, or words of love. It's hard to accept that they're not ever stepping through the door again.

### **(3) Strong emotions need a proper outlet. God is that outlet.**

I'm not going to pretend that you can prepare for this kind of grief. But what you can do is grow closer to the Lord now, before the worst happens, so that when it does, you'll know He's close by your side. Also, recognize that the Lord grieves with you. He cares about your tears. David in Psalm 56:8 describes how God knows our every sorrow: *"Put my tears into Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?"* Never be ashamed about crying. God is interested in every tear you shed.

I learned through studying the Psalms that I must let out my feelings and emotions to God. It helps tremendously. When those feelings come back to overwhelm us, then we unload again at Heaven's throne. We must learn to look up



instead of down. Trust in God in your circumstances now and in the future. The Psalmist says it best: *“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God”* (Psalm 43:5).

The apostle Peter tells us to give God all our hurt: *“casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you”* (1 Peter 5:7). Notice what happens when we do that: *“and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:7). Also, *“Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be*

*moved”* (Psalm 55:22). Let’s never forget that our Lord is the One who *“heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds”* (Psalm 147:3).

### **(4) Find your support group.**

Though God is there for us, we also need people (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). Loss is too heavy to bear alone. Create close circles of trusted people to whom you may go with your feelings and emotions. Let them know when you need to talk or cry on their shoulder. Share your experiences with those who’ve suffered similar circumstances and survived. Learn from them how to keep moving forward in the Lord and how to embrace His comfort and hope.

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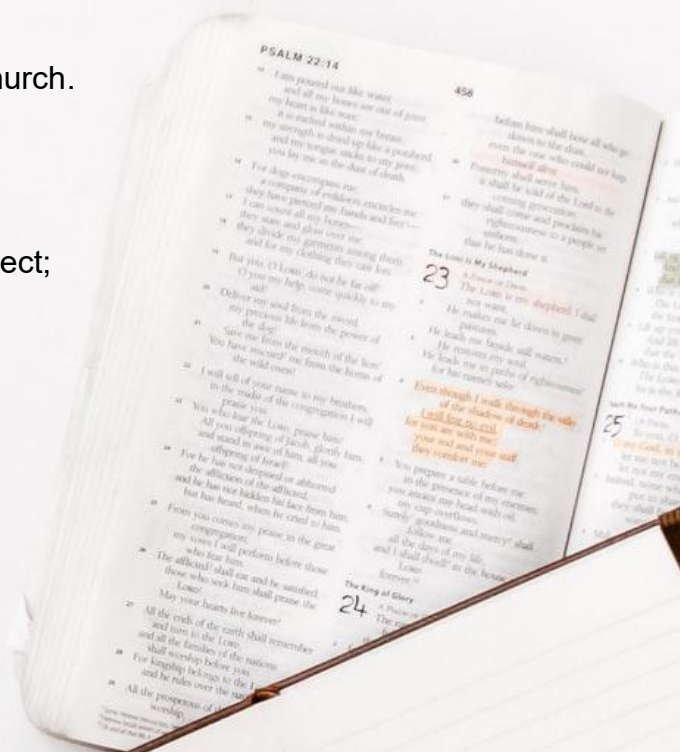
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EDITOR / DESIGNER

Sean P. Cavender

William J. Stewart