

The Struggle

"He did not know whether Eve had resisted at all, or if so, for how long. Still less did he know how the story would have ended if she had. If the 'serpent' had been foiled, and returned the next day, and the next ... what then? Would the trial have lasted forever?" C.S. Lewis, Perelandra

"I can resist anything except temptation." Oscar Wilde

The struggle with temptation, and the struggle against sin, is a daily reality. It's how we choose to respond to temptation – our attitude and actions – that marks us either as a child of God, or as someone who is lost. This week we will look at a famous, and famously confusing, passage about one man's struggles. It's a confusion we can all recognize in ourselves if we take the time to consider our own desire to please God, and our many actions, which fail to do just that. The passage also includes two comforting reassurances: Paul himself struggled and occasionally failed, and God is the one who rescues us despite our failures.

Monday – Helpful Guidance

"Law can discover sin, but not remove it." John Milton, Paradise Lost

1. Please read Romans 7:7-13. What point is Paul making about the interplay between law and sin?

Text insight: The "law" here means the Old Testament laws - such as the Ten Commandments – which governed all aspects of life in ancient Israel, both spiritual and worldly.

2. In verses 7 and 12, what conclusion does Paul reach about the nature of the law? What support does he provide for this conclusion in the latter part of verse 7?
3. Now look at verses 8-11. What opportunity did the law afford to sin? According to verse 13, though, what did the law ultimately do to sin?

Tuesday – The Struggle

"He that falls into sin is a man; that grieves at it, is a saint; that boasts of it, is a devil." Thomas Fuller, Holy State – of self-praising

1. Please read Romans 7:14-20. Now read it again, even more slowly and carefully. Try to place some of these phrases and sentences into your own words.
2. What part of Paul's struggles do you recognize in yourself?

Prayer Focus: This is a hard passage for many of us to comprehend. Ask God to guide you into understanding his word, and how you can apply it in your own relationship with him.

Wednesday – Confused

"If confusion is the first step to knowledge, I must be a genius." Larry Leissner

1. Please read Romans 7:14-20 again. The beginning of verse 15 is the central point of this passage. In what ways does this verse resonate with your life experience?
2. Now look at verse 19 (doing what I don't want to do). What actions of your own fall into this category?

Digging Deeper: James 1:5 contains good advice. How does this verse relate to Romans 7:15? See James 1:13-15 for more insight into the nature of sin and our struggle with temptation.

Thursday – Delightful

"Actions are not harmful because they are forbidden, but forbidden because they are hurtful." Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin

1. Please read Romans 7:21-22 along with Ephesians 6:10-11. How does Paul's statement in Eph. 6 help you understand his predicament in Romans 7:21?
2. In the midst of Paul's struggles, what does he say about God's law in Romans 7:22? Can you understand how this set of holy instructions for living can be considered a delight?

Text insight: The word "delight" in verse 22 has been translated also as "joyfully concur," "love ... with all my heart," and "with my whole heart I agree."

3. Psalm 119 is an epic poem about God's law; each of the stanzas is an eight verse declaration of its excellence. In verses 1-8, find the eight ways the writer refers to God's law, and what he says about it.

Making it Personal: Pick any 2 or 3 stanzas of Psalm 119, and study the psalm writer's delight in God's word. Pray for God to cultivate, in you, a delight for his word as well.

Friday – Rescued

"Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

C.T. Studd, missionary

1. Please read Romans 7:23-25. Paul calls himself a prisoner. Of what? Who will rescue Paul?
2. See 2 Cor. 3:17. What is promised for those who persevere through struggles by turning to the Holy Spirit? How does this help you understand the rescue Paul mentions in Romans 7:24-25?

Making it Personal: Have you ever felt the wretchedness Paul laments in verse 24? Thank God that he runs a rescue shop right where we are, "within a yard of hell."

For the Weekend: Compare 1 Corinthians 10:13 with Romans 7:14-25. What reassurance are you given regarding temptations you face? Pray for God to give you eyes to see the way out, and the strength to make it through.