

Therefore

ABOUT THE BIBLE WORDS IN THIS BOOK

The Bible text here is the World English Bible, which anyone may copy and share freely.

In a few places we have changed a word that has gone out of use, or made a long sentence into two, so it reads the way we speak now. Every word we changed is printed in *italics*, so you can always see where we have touched it. Where you see italics, that is us. Everything else is the translation as it stands. Spelling follows Australian usage.

Scripture quotations are adapted from the World English Bible, which is in the public domain.

Before you start

About two thousand years ago a man called Paul wrote a letter to a group of Christians in Rome. He had never met them. He was planning to visit and had not managed it yet, so he wrote instead – and it turned into the longest and most carefully argued letter he ever sent.

For eleven chapters he explains what God has done. Then, in chapter twelve, he turns a corner and starts describing what people look like once they have understood it.

That chapter is what this book is about. There are seven days in it, Sunday to Saturday.

Sunday is the most important one. It is the only day that is not about you. It is about what God did, and the other six days only make sense once you have read it. If you are going to skip a day, do not skip that one.

The other six are not jobs to get through. Think of them more like a mirror. You read the day, and you find out something about yourself – sometimes that you are

already doing it, sometimes that you are not. Both of those are useful. Neither of them is a mark out of ten.

There is a space on every day to write or draw something. It is yours. Nobody has to see it.

Read one day at a time. When you get to Saturday, go back to Sunday.

SUNDAY

Everything that comes next is a thank you

Romans 3:23–24; 5:8; 11:32; 12:1–2

For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (3:23–24)

But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (5:8)

For God has bound all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all. (11:32)

Paul writes a long letter to a church in Rome he has never visited. For eleven chapters he argues one thing, because he knows how hard it is to believe.

The thing is this. Nobody earned it.

Not the religious people, who had the law and broke it.
Not everyone else, who broke what they knew. Paul puts the whole lot in one sentence — *all have sinned* — and he does not use it to make anyone feel small. He uses it to explain why the rescue had to be a gift. If some had earned it and some hadn't, there would be two groups. There is one group, and God had mercy on them.

While we were yet sinners. Not after we improved. Not once we had shown we were worth it. While.

Then chapter twelve begins, and the first word is *therefore*.

Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God. (12:1–2)

Therefore is a hinge, and what it swings on is the next phrase: **by the mercies of God**. That is the reason for

everything in the rest of this book. Paul is not starting a new subject. He is saying: given all that — here is what a person who has understood it starts to look like.

Which is why the next six days are not a list of things to get through. They are more like a mirror. You read them and find out what has already changed, and what hasn't yet.

You cannot fail Sunday. Sunday is the part God did.

SOMETHING TO WRITE OR DRAW

Write or draw a prayer, thanking God that Jesus died to put things right.

MONDAY

You are a part, not the whole

Romans 12:3–5

For I say through the grace that was given me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think; but to think reasonably, as God has given to each person a measure of faith. For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members don't have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

The first thing Paul says, after all that, is about how you think of yourself.

It is easy to read it as: don't think much of yourself. That is not what it says. *Think reasonably* — accurately. Paul is not asking anyone to run themselves down. You can tell everyone you are hopeless, and bad at everything, and not worth including — and still be the one the whole

conversation is about. He is asking for something different from that. He is asking you to be right about yourself.

Then he gives the reason, and the reason is not that you are bad at things.

we have many members in one body, and all the members don't have the same function

A hand is not failing at being an eye. There is nothing wrong with the hand. It is a hand, and the question of whether it is better or worse than an eye does not arise, because they are not in a competition — they are in a body.

So thinking too highly of yourself is not a mistake about how good you are. It is a mistake about where you are. You are one part of something, along with everybody else, and all of you are needed for different things. A hand that decided it was the whole person would be wrong about the person, and wrong about itself, and it would also be very lonely.

Paul's last words here are the strangest ones: *individually members of one another*. Not members of a club. Members of each other. You belong to them the way your hand belongs to you.

SOMETHING TO WRITE OR DRAW

Draw the people you are part of. Then put yourself in it.

TUESDAY

You were given something, and it wasn't for you

Romans 12:6–8

having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us: if prophecy, let's prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; or service, let's give ourselves to service; or he who teaches, to his teaching; or he who encourages, to his encouraging; he who gives, let him do it with generosity; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Yesterday was about being a part. Today is about what the part does.

Paul lists seven things. Speaking for God, doing jobs, teaching, encouraging, giving money away, leading, and being kind to people who are having a bad time. It is not a tidy list, and he is giving examples, not a complete one.

Three of those are things nobody applauds. Doing jobs. Giving. Being kind. If you were making a list of impressive gifts you would probably leave those out, and Paul puts them in the middle without comment.

Notice he also says how to do some of them. Give *with generosity*. Lead *with diligence* – properly, rather than carelessly, even when nobody is checking. Show mercy *with cheerfulness*, which is the odd one, because you would think kindness was kindness. Paul seems to think there is a way of being kind to someone that makes them feel like a chore. He is right, and you have probably met it.

And the word he uses for all of it is *grace* – the same word he has been using for eleven chapters about being forgiven. Whatever you have was given to you, the same way being forgiven was given to you. You did not build it.

So when you find something you are good at, the question is not *how good am I?* It is *who is this for?*

SOMETHING TO WRITE OR DRAW

What is one thing you are good at, or one thing you find easy that other people seem to find hard? Who could that be for this week?

WEDNESDAY

Love that isn't an act

Romans 12:9–13

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil. Cling to that which is good. In love of the brothers and sisters be tenderly affectionate to one another; in honour prefer one another, not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, enduring in troubles, continuing steadfastly in prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, and given to hospitality.

Thirteen instructions in five verses. Paul is not building an argument here; he is emptying his pockets.

The first one governs the rest. *Love without hypocrisy* – the word comes from the theatre. In Paul's day a hypocrite and an actor on a stage were called by the same word. Love that isn't a performance. You can do every other thing on this list as a performance, and Paul puts that warning at the front.

Then two that sound harsh for a chapter about love: *abhor evil, cling to good*. Hate, and hold on.

That seems like the wrong feeling for this page, until you think about what it would mean not to have it. If someone you love is being hurt, and you feel nothing much about the person hurting them, something has gone wrong with your love, not with your temper. Caring about people means some things will make you angry. The two cannot be separated, and Paul does not try to separate them. What he does is tell you where to point it: at the evil, not at the person – which is the whole of Friday, and much harder than it sounds.

In honour prefer one another is my favourite line in the chapter. Not tolerate each other. Not put up with each other. Go first – be the one who notices what somebody else did well and says so out loud before anyone else gets there. It is a competition where the winner is whoever praises fastest.

Three in the middle are about keeping going: do not let it go slack, stay keen, remember that the person you are actually working for is the Lord. Then three about getting through: be glad because of what is coming, hold on when it is hard, keep praying.

And the last two are money and the front door.

Contributing to the needs of the saints – when someone in your church has no money, that is your problem now.

Given to hospitality – the Greek is stronger than it sounds in English. The word means **chase it down**. Hunt for people to have in your house.

Hold on to *chase it down*. Paul uses that same word again in the very next verse, and he means it to hurt.

SOMETHING TO WRITE OR DRAW

Pick one of these thirteen. Just one. Write down the name of one person you could do it to this week.

THURSDAY

The people who are hardest to be near

Romans 12:14–16

Bless those who persecute you; bless, and don't curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Don't set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Don't be wise in your own eyes.

Yesterday ended with *chase it down* — Paul's word for hospitality. Hunt for people to have in your house.

Here is the word again, one verse later. *Those who persecute you* is the same word. The people who hunt you.

In English those two sentences have nothing in common. In the language Paul wrote in, they use the same word, and anyone reading the letter out loud would have heard it

come round twice. He did it deliberately, and he meant it seriously.

You go hunting for people to be good to. Some people are hunting you, to be cruel. Bless them too.

Bless does not mean pretend it didn't happen. It means ask God to do them good. Which is close to impossible, and Paul says it twice in one verse, as though he knows you will try to get out of it the first time.

Then two lines that look easier and aren't.

Rejoice with those who rejoice. Somebody else gets the thing you wanted. Be glad – actually glad, not glad out loud. That is harder than crying with someone, which is why Paul puts it first.

Weep with those who weep. Not fix it. Not explain it. Not find the bright side. Sit there and be sad with them. Most people cannot do this, because being sad with someone feels useless, and we would all rather be useful.

And then the last one, which is where you came in on Monday: *don't be wise in your own eyes*. Paul said it at the start of the chapter and he says it again here, like somebody checking a door he has already locked.

SOMETHING TO WRITE OR DRAW

Think of somebody who is hard to be near. Not an enemy — just difficult. Write their name, and one ordinary kind thing you could do, that they would not find out came from you.

FRIDAY

Getting even is not your job

Romans 12:17-20

Repay no one evil for evil. Respect what is honourable in the sight of all people. If it is possible, as much as it is up to you, be at peace with all people. Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord." Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing so, you will heap coals of fire on his head."

Thursday asked you to bless the person who is cruel to you. Friday is about the part of you that wants to get them back. That part does not disappear just because you have decided to be good.

Paul does not say the feeling is wrong. He says God will deal with it, and you will not.

Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay. God knows what that person did. He also knows things about them that you do not know, and he will sort it out. Nobody is getting away with anything. It is just not your job to be the one who makes them pay.

Getting someone back is hard work, too. You have to remember it, and go on remembering it, and stay angry about it. That takes up a lot of room in a person.

Then look at what Paul asks you to do instead.

If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink.

Food and water. The most ordinary kind thing there is. You cannot do it from across the room, either — you have to go over there.

People argue about the last line. *Coals of fire on his head.* Some say it means the person will feel ashamed, because being treated well by someone you have hurt is very

uncomfortable. Others say Paul means God will sort them out in the end. Paul does not tell us which one he means.

The line to notice is in the middle. *As much as it is up to you, be at peace.* Up to you. You might do everything you can to put it right, and the other person might still not want to make peace with you. Paul knew that could happen, which is why he wrote it that way. You are only responsible for what you do.

SOMETHING TO WRITE OR DRAW

Is there someone you are still angry with? Write down what you would need God to do about it. Then leave it with him.

SATURDAY

Don't let it make you like them

Romans 12:21

Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

One verse today. Paul has finished, and this is the sentence he finishes with.

Overcome is a word for winning. It is what you say about an army that wins a battle, or a runner who wins a race. Paul uses it twice in one short line, and the second time he turns it around.

Say somebody is cruel to you. The cruelty can win, or you can win.

If the cruelty wins, it does not just hurt you and go away. It changes you. You become someone who gets people back, someone who keeps score. That is what Paul means by

being *overcome by evil* – the cruelty got inside you, and now you are doing it too.

So how do you win? Not by getting them first. Paul already said that on Friday.

You win by doing good.

That sounds too small to be a victory, and at the time it does not feel like one. But think about the other way.

Someone is cruel to you, you are cruel back, and now there are two cruel people instead of one. Nobody won that. There is just more cruelty in the world than there was before.

Do good instead, and it stops with you. It came as far as you and got no further.

Look back over the six days now. Be honest about yourself. Use what you were given. Love people properly. Go near the people who are hard to be near. Let God deal with the score. None of it was a list of jobs to get through. It was a

picture of what a person looks like when they have understood that God had mercy on them.

Nobody looks like all of that yet. That is all right. Go back to Sunday and start again.

SOMETHING TO WRITE OR DRAW

Look back at what you wrote on each of the six days. Is there one thing you want to ask God for help with? Write it here.

For the adult reading this with them

This is a seven-day read through Romans 12, written for a young teenager.

Two things are worth knowing if you are reading it with them.

The first is the order. Sunday carries the mercy – what God has done. The other six days are all answers to that, and they do not mean very much on their own. Romans 12 begins with the word *therefore*, and a young reader who meets the six days without Sunday has been handed a list of rules instead. If they start somewhere in the middle, it is worth going back to Sunday with them first.

The second is that Friday is the hard one. It deals with wanting to get even, and with Paul's instruction to feed an enemy. We have deliberately not told them what *coals of fire on his head* means, because the people who study it for a living do not agree, and we would rather they asked you than were given a neat answer that may well be wrong. If

they do ask, it is a good conversation to have, and *nobody is certain* is a true and useful thing to say.

One more thing. The response space is theirs. It will work better if they know nobody is going to read it, including you – unless they offer.

This book did not begin with artificial intelligence. It began with years of ministry, reading, prayer, suffering, and conversation.

During its development, AI became a conversation partner. It challenged assumptions, tested arguments, suggested structures, and helped refine expression. Many of the words here emerged through that dialogue.

The experiences, convictions, interpretations, and conclusions remain my own.