

Welcome to our new series. We are going to progress through eight principles that will fill your heart; that will cause you to grow when applied. These principles have not just helped a few people; they have not just helped hundreds of people; rather thousands and thousands of people have been helped by these principles. The truth that will be presented rises right out of the Bible. If you want to grow spiritually, you won't want to miss one Sunday as we are on the road to Easter. Theme verse: “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

*** Admit your need for help ***
(first step)

Did you know our human tendency is to deny our personal struggle, pretend we don't have an internal battle and blame others? We push away our sense of need with thoughts like, “Things aren't that bad.” “I'm ok.” “I'm not any worse than anyone else.” But the Bible is quite clear—denial or trying harder does not lead to spiritual growth. We will study **Romans 7:15-8:4**, beginning with . . .

- ✓ **Blame:** “It is the sin living in me.” (vv. 17 & 20) It appears like he is passing the buck. He points to what the NIV calls “sinful nature,” which equals flesh. This is the word used in the Bible for being human, the reality of self, the inclination of sin and the inability to live up to God's standards. In Romans 7, Paul is pointing to himself. He is not blaming anyone but himself. He is acknowledging his flesh. In so many words he is saying, “I need help.”
- ✓ **Willpower:** “For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” (verse 18) Neither is the Apostle banking on willpower. He is not blaming anyone else and he's not saying that he can do it. In fact, in verse 21 he says, “So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” This points to a principle of life . . . a timeless truth that will affect your life and my life as long as we live.

Everything in these verses point to the fact that Paul is struggling as a Christian. He delights in God's ways, but, at the same time, the battle rages on. Does Paul pretend, deny, try harder or admit. The fact is that he admits and he uses this very descriptive word for defeat, wretched.

- ✓ **Admit:** David, in the Old Testament, did that . . . “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away . . . then I acknowledge my sin to you . . . and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” (Psalm 32:3,5) The Apostle Paul admits that he has holes in his soul; King David, in the Old Testament, confesses that he has holes in his soul; other characters of the Bible like Job and Peter do the same. What about you? Is there shame, pride, greed, jealousy, lust, manipulation, addiction . . . to mention a few self-crippling approaches to life? The fact is that if you could solve your problems you would have done it a long time ago, and you wouldn't have them anymore. You can't get fixed until you 'fess up, face your faults, and admit, “I am powerless.”

The Next Step

In the remaining part of our Scripture (**Romans 7:25-8:4**), the truth jumps out in verse 1 with these words, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Religion is about trying harder; self-effort is about looking good; denial is about pretending you are better than you are. The answer in the Scripture to spiritual growth is always grace. The fact is I deserve death right now, this very minute, because I have sinned or I will sin soon. Without grace I am hopeless and powerless.

Self ⇌ Grace ⇌ Spirit

According to the teaching today there is this natural tendency to live with self-generated effort, which leads to defeat. But chapter 8 begins to tell us about something marvelous that truly does fill in our holes — it is the grace that comes through a Spirit-led life. Grace invites you and me not to deny, and not to try harder, but rely on God's help through the companionship of his Spirit. You can move in either direction, but grace is the power God gives you to make changes in your life that are in step with his will and desire for you. How will you allow God's grace to help you? There is only one way: God gives grace to the humble. (James 4:6)

A Prayer — “Father, I have holes in my soul and they can dominate my life. But I open my heart to your grace even as you have saved me; now I walk in your strength. I respond with a heart of humility and faith, admitting my need for help. I begin again in humility and brokenness. You will help me, Father; I trust in you.”

Reflective Questions:

1. What do you think of the title, "Filling the Holes in Your Soul?" What comes to mind? Do you understand the fact that you have holes in your soul? How so?
2. If this first step is admit your need for help, how do you respond to it? What is the tendency in human nature when it comes to admitting need? Does that apply to you?
3. What did the Apostle Paul say about his spiritual life in Romans 7? What stands out to you? How do you know he was admitting his need? Where do you see that?
4. In verse 1 it says, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." What does that mean to you? How important is that to the Christian life? Why is grace the answer?
5. How do you know grace is at work in you? How is that connected to being empowered by the Holy Spirit? What does the Spirit want to do in your life? What is the key to receiving all that he has to offer?

Reading Schedule for February 8-14, 2010

We are in the throes of what might be called, "Prince of Egypt," the movie about Moses. Some of the greatest stories in Hebrew history will be presented in these next few chapters. By the end of this week we will get to Mount Sinai and anticipate the Ten Commandments. As you are reading these marvelous stories, I want you to take in the most significant event in the Old Testament for God's people . . . the parting of the Red Sea/deliverance from Egypt. I hope it will encourage you and stretch your faith. In the midst of difficult times we remember that our God cares.

February 8: **Exodus 9:8 – 10:29** – "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt—darkness that can be felt.' So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived." (10:21-23) With each plague the power of God's intervention was being felt. The Egyptians realized how powerless their own gods were in the face of the Almighty Hebrew God, who obviously is the one true God. The Egyptian gods were not personal, they were many, and they had divided power at best. How is our God different? What does our God offer to us? What do you appreciate about God through this story?

February 9: **Exodus 11:1-10; 12:29-36** – "At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead." (vv. 29 & 30) Every firstborn child of the Egyptians died but the Israelite children were spared because the blood of the lamb had been placed on their doorframes. This is the central theme of the Bible. It is a foreshadowing of what Jesus would do as his blood would be poured out for you and me. God offered his own son in exchange for us. Why is this story the most significant historical event for the Hebrews? Why is it significant for us? How is its meaning important to you?

February 10: **Exodus 13:17-14:31** – "Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left." (vv. 21 & 22) Even when there was no apparent way of escape, God provided a way. The God who created the earth and the water performed a mighty miracle at exactly the right time to demonstrate his great power and love for his people. Sometimes we find ourselves caught in a problem and see no way out. Don't panic; God can open a way. How does this help you? What do you want to say to God in response to the great deliverance for his people?

February 11: **Exodus 15:22-27; 17:1-7** – "When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?'" (vv. 23 & 24) It didn't take but three days and the Israelites were afraid and grumbling. I don't exactly know how to respond to this in that I am not exempt either. God is marvelously good and yet I look at the things I think I deserve or how things should be better. Like Moses in the story, I take things into my own hands. How about you? Can God be trusted? How deeply do you trust him? What does this story teach you?

February 12: **Exodus 16:1-36** – "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.'" (vv. 4 & 5) The Lord can do anything. His provision is enough. He would be clear on his instruction but the people would forget or not follow through. I like this picture of daily bread. How does this story relate to your daily life? What do you learn from it?

February 13: **Exodus 18:1-27** – "Moses' father-in-law replied, 'What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.'" (vv. 17 & 18) This is one of my favorite stories because I have the propensity to try to do it all. In my early ministry life I would operate as if everything depended upon me. By age 30 I was close to exhaustion and to burnout. Moses helps me because I am like him. Moses needed to delegate and so a leadership principle that is indispensable for my life would be delegation. How about you? How can your team effort in life and for the sake of Christ become stronger? Who could you hand off parts of your life so that they might have the joy of being used by God? Look up 2 Timothy 2:2 for a reference about passing on the truth of God.

February 14: **Exodus 19:1-25** – "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.'" (vv. 10 & 11) Do you know what the word consecrate means? It is about setting apart something for God's purpose. In this case the people were to set themselves apart from sin and the daily routine of life so that they might focus on God. The act of washing and preparing served to get their hearts ready. When we come to worship on a Sunday morning, how often are we ready with a sense of consecration to meet God? I believe we take our worship experience casually. This reminds me that God is holy and I am called to prepare myself to meet him. How will this affect your approach to our worship service today?

Prayer: Pray for our relationships in marriage and family life as we anticipate the celebration of Valentine's Day. Pray for the Gospel message being proclaimed this coming Sunday to those who attend. Pray that February will be a marvelous month of ministry in which we draw near to God in love and worship.