



ROMANS

the WISDOM JOURNEY
LESSON 596

FRIENDS FOREVER

ROMANS 8:5-11

What is your mind set upon? What occupies your mind more than anything else? To thoughtfully consider this question is to contemplate your relationship with God and whether you can truly call yourself a friend of God the Holy Spirit.

When my daughter Charity was around two and a half years old, she could not pronounce her R's. She brought me some books to read to her one evening. She sat down on a pillow beside me, ready to listen; but before I began to read, she looked up at me, smiled, and said, "You're my best friend." Isn't that great? "You're my best friend." Now I have to admit she said the same thing to her mother, but that is beside the point.

Now as we sail back into Romans chapter 8 on this Wisdom Journey, the apostle Paul has already introduced us to our divine, eternally faithful Friend. In fact, the entire world can be divided into two camps—people who have this Friend (believers) and those who do not (unbelievers).

That Friend is the Holy Spirit. When you placed your faith in Christ's atoning work on the cross on your behalf, you became the sanctuary—the temple—of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Now, at Romans 8:5, Paul begins a series of contrasts that reveal differences between the

believer and the unbeliever:

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

Paul is literally contrasting *two dispositions*. The Greek word (*phroneō*), translated "set their minds on," refers to the occupation of their heart's desires, their obsession. What are you devoted to? The truth is, what you love, what you think about, is what you pursue—because what you think about, you are! One translation of Proverbs 23:7 puts it this way: "As [a person] thinks in his heart, so is he" (NKJV). What captivates your mind is what controls your life.

Paul then goes one step further and makes a contrast between *two destinations*. He writes in verse 6, "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."

Living for your body, for your money, for your comfort—for the stuff of earth—produces a deathlike life. But the Spirit gives purpose to your life and peace to your heart.

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The most unhappy people you will know are going to be people with plenty of money to spare but no purpose in life beyond their own little address and their own little life. The most unhappy, discontented people you will ever meet are living in beautiful homes but with empty hearts and lives. Only the Spirit of God can give life and peace.

In verses 7-11, Paul summarizes the results of these two dispositions and these two destinations:

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God [that's Romans chapter 1], for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot [that's Romans chapter 2]. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God [that's Romans 3 and 4]. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because

of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness [that's Romans 6 and 7]. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you [that's the beginning of chapter 8].

Beloved, here is the harsh truth—and I am not saying it to be harsh but to tell you the truth—people who are governed by their flesh and love the things of the flesh are the living dead! Their lives are empty. And they are also headed for eternal judgment from God. But people who are governed by the Spirit and love the things of the Spirit of God are the living redeemed! They are heading for eternal life with Christ.

Unbelievers, Paul writes here, are hostile toward God. The fact is, they really do not want God. The tragedy is that one day they will discover that everything they believed in that led them away from God was a terrible deception—an empty promise that could never give them life and peace, which come only through the Spirit of God.

I have read the rather tragic story of Sir Arthur Keith, one of the greatest anatomists of the twentieth century. As a young man he attended evangelistic meetings in Edinburgh at a time when many students committed their lives to Jesus Christ. He himself often felt, he would write, “on the verge of conversion,” yet he resisted. He rejected the gospel because he believed the biblical record of creation was

just a myth and the Bible was made up by men.

In 1908 some bones, including a jawbone and teeth, were discovered buried in a gravel pit, just forty miles from downtown London. Keith became intrigued by the discovery, which was announced at the Geological Society of London and proclaimed the evolutionary “missing link” between ape and man. They nicknamed the supposed link Piltdown Man. The vast majority of paleoanthropologists worldwide hailed this as a great discovery of our human ancestors.

Piltdown Man became the obsession of Sir Arthur Keith. To him these bones validated evolution; this was the “missing link.” Keith wrote more on Piltdown Man than anyone else. His best-selling and most famous book, entitled *The Antiquity of Man*, centered on the Piltdown fossils.

Some forty years later, in 1953, science caught up with speculation, and the British Museum announced Piltdown Man was a fraud. The jawbone was not much older than the year it was found. Someone had treated the bones with iron salts to make them appear old; scratch marks, that had been invisible to the naked eye proved that the sharp teeth had been recently filed down.

Sir Arthur Keith was eighty-six years old when news came that the fossil bones he had trusted in and written about for forty years were a hoax. The bones he believed proved creation a myth had been a fraud. His writings had been based on a myth.¹

Can you imagine spending a lifetime believing in the wrong thing? Little more than a year before this venerated scholar died, he realized he had been deceived.

What are you believing today? What are you living for? Who are you trusting in?

I cannot imagine Sir Arthur Keith’s disillusionment and anxiety just months before he died. In contrast, I think of another man I knew personally and the peace and confidence he had as he faced certain death.

He was just a few hours from dying as I stood in his hospital room, holding back tears, hardly able to speak. His wife was there, singing to him, reading the Bible to him, as he came in and out of consciousness. He was my age—we were in our early forties at the time.

As I got ready to go, knowing I would probably never see him again this side of heaven, I leaned over the bed, not assuming he could even hear me, and said, “I’ll see you later on.” He smiled, and I will never forget how he whispered back with confidence, “Yes, you will.”

The Bible promises that in Romans 8:11: “He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” So, thank God for your indwelling Friend—this divine Friend, the Spirit of God. He is your life-giving, life-leading, eternally faithful Friend.

And beloved, I want you to hear God say this to you today from His Word: If the Holy Spirit is your Friend, you will be friends forever!

Reflect on your understanding of the Holy Spirit as a divine, eternally faithful Friend. How has your relationship with the Holy Spirit evolved over time, and how does it impact your daily life?

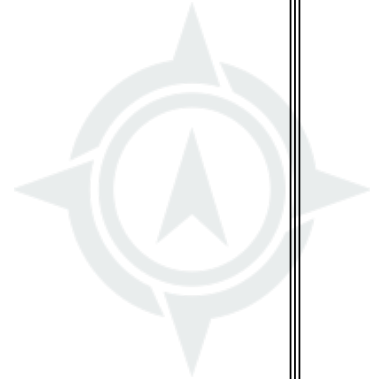
Explore the idea that what captivates your mind is what controls your life. What are the primary thoughts and desires that occupy your mind on a daily basis? How do these align with your walk with the Holy Spirit?

Consider the role of the Holy Spirit in giving purpose to your life and peace to your heart. Share a personal example of how the Holy Spirit has brought purpose and peace to your life.

Reflect on the promise in Romans 8:11 that the Holy Spirit will give life to our mortal bodies. How does this promise bring hope and assurance in your walk with the Holy Spirit as your eternally faithful Friend?

Plot your Wisdom Journey.

How would the Lord have you respond to what you've learned today?



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¹Robert J. Morgan, *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories* (Thomas Nelson, 2000), 156.