

*DON'T FORGET TO SAY THANK YOU!*  
ROMANS 16:1-27

BIG IDEA: BE A WORLD-CLASS "THANK-ER"!

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Memo  
To: Apostle Paul  
From: Marcus, Chief Editor of the Antioch Writers Guild  
Re: Comments on Your Letter to the Romans

A copy of your recent letter to the Romans recently fell into my hands and having read it carefully I thought you might appreciate a few helpful literary suggestions. First of all, couldn't you be a little more optimistic about human nature? That material in chapter 1 about the wrath of God against ungodliness will certainly offend many readers and limit the distribution of your book.

Second, I would suggest that you find a more palatable word than "sin" for use throughout your book; maybe something like, "unrealized potential" or "human weakness."

Third, that material on election in chapter 9 has got to go. It's way too arbitrary and will never pass public scrutiny.

Finally, chapter 16 needs to be completely redone and considerably shortened. It's entirely too personal for such a serious treatise. The people mentioned in chapter 16 won't even be known by most of your readers, so what's the point? It looks like a laundry list. After all, 26 people mentioned by name! If you want to send "Thank You" notes to people, why don't you send them separately? I think you should rewrite chapter 16 as a short afterword thanking your secretary, your mother and myself as your editor, if you accept my modest suggestions.

Yours for literary excellence, MARCUS

- B. Many Christian readers would be inclined to agree with Marcus' last suggestion. If you are reading through your Bible and come to Romans 16, you will be tempted to skip right on to I Corinthians. Who are all these guys, after all? What do all these little notes mean to us today? And why on earth did God include something like this in the Holy Bible?
- C. I have a hunch I know why God let this be in the Bible. And I know why we shouldn't skip this chapter. It's because God cares deeply about people, people one by one. People with names. Even all the so-called "little" people. God respects the things that people do in His name to spread the Gospel and to strengthen His church. And the fact that the busy world class Christian Paul, would take this much paper for personal notes in his most detailed and doctrinal letter is a fantastic lesson in human caring. The human author and the Divine Author have much to teach us about the Fine Art of Appreciation.

I. APPRECIATE ACTIVELY (vv. 1-2)

- A. Treat People the Way God Would Treat Them
1. Cenchrea was a seaport town about six miles east of Corinth in Greece. There lived Phoebe, the kind of woman any church would die to have. She is called a "servant" of her church...a *deaconess*. So much did Paul trust and respect her that he gave her the responsibility of hand-carrying this letter to the church leaders in Rome.
  2. After they waded through all the first 15 chapters of Romans they finally came to the note about Phoebe. Hey, said one of the Elders, where's that lady who gave us the letter? We need to take care of her!
  3. Look at **verse 2**, "*receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints.*"
    - a. What does it mean to "receive" someone "**in the Lord**"? First of all it means that there is a common spiritual bond: both parties are

Christians. But push the idea a little further and I think you'll agree that it means that we should **treat people the way God would treat them**. Like in the judgment of **Matthew 25: 34** *"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*

*35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,*

*36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*

*37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?*

*38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?*

*39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'*

*40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

b. This reminds me of another little gem hidden away in **III John 6**, *"You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.*

*7 It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans.*

*8 We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.*

c. When we appreciate God's servants we have the privilege of being representatives of God. God is pleased to talk through us and touch through us. He uses us to be conduits of His love and we get blessed in the process.

d. *"in a way worthy of the saints."*

1) Your dear friend is moving to Dallas. You hand him a phone number and say, "My son John lives in Dallas. When you get there, give him a call and tell him I told you to get in contact with him. He can help you with Realtor contacts and finding a church and doctor and meeting some sharp Christians. Be sure to call him!

A month later you call your friend. You ask, "Did you get in touch with John?"

"Yeah, I gave him a call."

"Isn't he a great guy?!" you proudly ask.

"Well, I really didn't get a chance to meet him. He said he was really busy and hoped we would like Dallas. That was about it."

And you hang up embarrassed and disappointed. Probably even rather angry. You might even call John and chew him out. You wanted your son to receive your friend in manner worthy of your family name and reputation. What he did, or rather, didn't do, reflects on you.

2) As a Christian, I'm not some independent contractor. I am a member of God's family with a reputation to uphold. When I honor God's people it makes God's family look good. When I neglect God's people, I make God's family look bad. We are saints, God's special people. And we have a long-standing reputation for active appreciation to uphold.

- 3) By the way, family reputation starts with the parents and Christian reputation is no exception. Our Heavenly Father is an appreciating God. Examples:
- a) Think of all the words of appreciation God put in the Bible about people:  
 Abraham: commended for his faith  
 Moses: commended for his humility and called by God His friend.  
 David: commended as a man after God's own heart.  
 Job: commended for his godly patience under testing.  
 The Disciples: Jesus called them His friends and promised them rewards in His coming Kingdom  
 The Letter to the Seven Churches of Asia of Revelation 2 and 3. Even the letter to the Church at Ephesus, which has a stern warning, is not without loving appreciation.  
**Revelation 2:2** *I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.*
- b) Think of God's program of rewards:  
 (2 Tim 4:8 NIV) Now there is in store for me the **crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.
- (James 1:12 NIV) Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the **crown of life** that God has promised to those who love him.
- (1 Pet 5:4 NIV) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the **crown of glory** that will never fade away.
- (Rev 2:10 NIV) Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the **crown of life**.
- B. Find Ways to Help Them (**v.2**, *give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.*)
1. Don't wait for God's servants to ask for help. The thing that makes God's servants so good is the very thing that makes it hard for them to ask for help. They'll do anything for you but they don't want to put you out by asking you for something.

2. It's never enough to say, "Well, just call me if you need anything." They won't call. We need to care enough to notice what the person needs and give it. Instead of saying, "Just call," say, "Five strong guys and a truck will be in your driveway at 8 a.m Saturday."
3. And try to be creative. I saw an idea that intrigued me. How about this Christmas give a gift magazine subscription to your missionary friend? Maybe something to help their ministry like Leadership Journal or Evangelical Missions Quarterly. Or maybe something to help them keep in touch with home like a weekly news magazine or Moody Monthly.
4. In the early days of his pastoring in inner city Chicago, **Bill Leslie** had no close friends. So he started meeting regularly with a couple of Christian leader guys named Bud and Hal. After a while, Bud came to Bill and said, "*Bill, I love you. I want you to know that what happens to you, happens to me....I just want you to know that your hurt is my hurt, your pain is my pain, your success is my success; and my money is your money, my house is your house, my car is your car.*" (Interview with Bill Leslie in Leadership Journal, Summer, 88, p.17)
5. Some years ago in a sermon, I quoted a statement by **Patrick Morley**, "*I think most men could recruit six pall-bearers, but hardly anyone has a friend he can call at 2:00 A.M.*" (The Man in the Mirror, p, 117). A soon as the sermon was over, right here in this room, two guys walked up to me and said, "You can call me at 2:00 a.m. anytime." They meant it and I appreciated it. Those guys are real friends because a friend is available 24 hours a day.

II. APPRECIATE HEROIC DEEDS ( **verses 3-4**, *3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. 4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.*)

A. Don't Take Heroes for Granted

1. Priscilla and Aquila are a couple of those almost bigger-than-life kind of people. This husband-wife team traveled with Paul from Corinth to Ephesus where he left them. There they were used of God to mentor the gifted preacher Apollos. Now they are in Rome and are hosting a church that meets in their house (v.5) Paul thinks so highly of them that he calls them "*my fellow workers in Christ Jesus*"
2. What makes people like this "tick"? They could have just started the coffee at 6, read the paper, gone to work, mowed the lawn, watched their son's basketball games, helped with the school carnival and gone camping with the family each year in July.
3. What makes someone take on the Preschool Sunday School Department or head of the Building Committee? What made Kevin and Alina and Jeff and Shenya go to Bible School and then become missionaries in Mexico? What makes people in this church work with unwed mothers in the community. What makes people in this church runs Christian ministries in the Monroe prisons? To me, these are all modern day heroes for God.
4. What makes them tick? They see something that needs to be done for God. They see how they can help get it done. And they just do it. And they keep doing it even if it gets hard. Notice in verse 4 they almost died for it.
5. Christian heroes are willing to risk things. They don't hedge their obedience to God. The comfort zone is not sacred ground for these folks, in fact, it looks rather boring to them because it's too safe.
6. Our church has a good measure of heroes. We ought never to take them for granted. This church would never have started without them. We wouldn't have AWANA without them. We wouldn't have a music ministry without them. We wouldn't have new believers without them. They are not getting paid to do what they're doing. They do it for the love of God and the love of His people.

B. Get Personal, "*they risked their lives for me.*" *lit, they lay done their own neck for my soul*

1. We don't know what they did for Paul but it touched him deeply and the news spread through all the Gentile churches. Paul probably bragged on them wherever he went. His appreciation was personal and he couldn't keep it bottled up.
2. Which of God's heroes has helped you?
  - counseled
  - taught
  - loved your kids
  - led you Christ
3. How about a note of encouragement?

### III. APPRECIATE KINDRED SPIRITS

A. Who Has Suffered with You? (v. 7 *Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in **prison** with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.*)

1. We ought never to take for granted the people who suffer with us, especially when they have done it by choice. We don't know how these folks ( 2 men or a married couple; Junias can be masc. or fem.) got into prison with Paul, but chances are that they were teamed up with him in ministry when persecution broke out . Paul wasn't a "safe" man to be around. One **pastor** lamented, "*Every place the Apostle Paul went there was a riot. Every place I go they serve tea.*" These two people forged a bond of friendship with Paul because they weren't afraid to suffer with him for Jesus Christ.
2. Something special happens any time people go through an experience of suffering together, like the bond that exists between war vets, but here the accent is on suffering together for the great cause of Christ.
3. Is there someone who is suffering with you for the salvation of your kids? They are kindred spirits. They don't have to care for your kids, but they have chosen to shoulder the suffering with you. Let them know that you appreciate them.
4. Is there someone who has walked with you through a painful ministry experience? I'm not talking to everybody now. I'm talking mainly to those of you who have taken the step to serve in places of more visible ministry leadership for Christ and His church. Do you have...
  - Someone who believed in your ministry when others criticized?
  - Someone who stepped into the line of fire and defended your reputation when others accused?
  - Someone who volunteered to stand with you in doing a tough-love ministry thing, like going to talk with a sinning Christian?
5. When you first take on a leadership ministry, chances are it was exciting. You are full of ideas. You can't wait to get started. You're eager to meet or recruit your ministry team. But you may not fully appreciate the fact that spiritual ministry is a battle zone. **Satan** is not at all happy about what you are doing and he has all kinds of ways to show you that. You can't get anybody to work. Your motives are attacked. A trusted companion goes away mad. And before you know it this great ministry that you thought God had made you to do is the source of your greatest pain.
6. God knows that. That's why He gives us people to share the suffering. It is not an accident that Jesus recruited 12 Disciples. When the persecution came, they had each other.
7. I owe a great debt of gratitude to the Elders I have served with over 25 years of ministry. In every church I've served there have been times where it wasn't fun to be a pastor and it wasn't fun to be an Elder. But we supported each other through the times of spiritual leadership suffering. They have been great friends and ministry colleagues.

8. If God has given you someone who has shared your suffering....let him or her know how much you appreciate it.
- B. Who Has Served with You? (v. 9 *Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ.*)
1. Paul and Urbanus were now in different countries, but the affection built through **serving Christ together** still kept them kindred spirits.
  2. I was recently asked to write a letter for a scrapbook being assembled for a person retiring from many years of church staff work. This is a person I once hired and worked with before I moved to a different church. I was so delighted to have this opportunity to say thank you to a friend with whom I got to serve God. **READ EXCERPT**
  3. Merilee and my deepest friendships have been cultivated through serving God with people. **CHUCK AND CHRIS HORD**
  4. People build friendships through *sports and clubs and square-dancing*. Why not build friendships through ministry? I believe that ministry friendships have the **potential** to go deeper than any other kind of friendship. When a person takes on a new ministry of leadership and needs people on their team, my first suggestion is that they talk to their friends. What could be more meaningful than building your friendships by doing something together for God that will chance lives and last for ever.
  5. And when that happens for you, tell these fellow servants and tell them often how much you appreciate them.
  6. Close friendship prospers with shared vision and mission. All of Jesus' close friends were committed to the preaching of the kingdom of heaven. All of Paul's close friends were committed to the worldwide proclamation of the Gospel. Close Christian friendship is about something bigger than both of you. *"That is why those...people who simply 'want friends' never have any. The very condition of having Friends is that we should want something else besides Friends. Where the truthful answer to the question 'Do you see the same truth?' would be 'I see nothing and I don't care about the truth; I only want a friend' no friendship can arise...there would be nothing for the friendship to be about; and friendship must be about something, even if it were only an enthusiasm for dominos or white mice. Those who have nothing can share nothing; those who are going nowhere can have no fellow-travelers."* (C. S. Lewis, The Four Loves, p. 98)
  7. Michael Lehrer takes us behind the news camera to tell of his love for Robert MacNeil: *Robert MacNeil is my friend. And that is not always the easiest thing to be. I am prickly, emotional and often say and do stupid things. He always forgives me. I have never asked him to do anything for me that he has not done. He has never done anything to hurt or diminish me. I look up at the TV monitor in our Washington studio every evening and see him there in New York and I see a man who wishes only the best for me..*  
*Robert MacNeil?*  
*Robert MacNeil is the best!* ("MacNeil and Lehrer: What They Really Think of Each Other," TV Guide, October 3, 1987, p. 18)
- C. Who Has Nurtured You? (v. 13, *Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a **mother to me, too.***)
1. I remember 2 men who taught my boys Sunday School class when I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade.
    - I remember a couple who led my High School youth group and took a personal interest in me
    - I remember my grandmother who gave me \$800 so I could go to Bible School
    - I remember a theology prof who impacted me deeply at Moody
    - I remember Pastor Wendt who took me on as a wet-behind-the-ears intern right out of college and patiently coached me into the ministry.

2. Paul had a friend's mother who loved him like her own son. When Paul's family rejected him because of His conversion to Christianity, God gave him a surrogate mother to love him.
3. Even Jesus had people who nurtured him:  
Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary (John 11, 12)  
Luke 8:1 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3 Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. {In Luke 23 it is these women who went to embalm Christ's body after the resurrection and later discovered the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene was the first to see the resurrected Christ}
4. Who has God used to assist you or to mentor you? Have you heard the line, "If you see **a turtle on a fence post**, you know that somebody put him there."
5. We're all turtles and we all have somebody who deserves a word or an act of appreciation from us.
6. I'm standing here today largely because 26 years ago a man named Roy Sprague recommended me to Lowell Wendt who took me under his wing as a young intern and recommended that I stay on as his pastoral assistant at Alderwood Manor Community Church.
7. Who leveraged your future with an introduction? Whose future can you help leverage?
8. The name comes out of Greek mythology. Before Ulysses went off to war, he selected Mentor to be advisor to his son, Telemachus. Today we use the word to describe any wise and trusted counselor.
9. The intriguing married couple, Aquila and Priscilla, mentored Apollos. In Acts 18:26 they pull this golden tongued preacher aside and fill him in on some major holes in his theology.
10. Barnabas mentored John Mark when Paul rejected him. Years later, Paul wrote to summon this younger man to his side. Barnabas had seen the potential which Paul had not.
11. If you are a younger believer, I encourage you to find a mentor to help you grow in the Lord. Maybe you're not a younger believer but you are ready to move to a higher level in your Christian development or in your service for Christ. Find a mentor to help you attack that transition. Need help? Read Howard Hendrick's [As Iron Sharpens Iron](#).
12. Howard and Jeanne Hendricks tell of the spiritual impact of a close Christian friendship: *"My wife and I recently spent some time in Colorado with two of our closest friends. The most beautiful experience of my life is to be around that man and his wife. Jeanne and I have never had five minutes with that couple that didn't create in us a greater hunger for Jesus Christ."* ("What Marks Your Friendships?" [Kindred Spirit](#), date?, p. 6)

IV. APPRECIATE "ROUTINE" FAITHFULNESS (v. 6, Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. v. 10 Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ. v. 12 Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.

A. Treat Servants with Dignity

1. We know nothing of these Roman folks except that they were approved servants in the eyes of God, their church and Paul. But according to Jesus, that's the highest level of honor.

**Mark 9:35**, *Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."*

2. Somebody said, “*God only had one son and He made Him a Servant.*” Good point. If it was good enough for Jesus, it’s good enough for us.
  3. Swindoll, *The Keeper of the Spring*
- B. Celebrate “Sweat”
1. “*worked hard, worked very hard*”
  2. Seems like people will work hard for almost anything except God. Seems like Christianity is viewed by lots of Christians as a no-sweat proposition.
  3. Except that God calls us to get it everything we’re got to the point of taking up our cross daily, denying ourselves and following Him.
  4. *II Tim 2: 15* Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

CONCLUSION:

- A. One of my preacher heroes is **Haddon Robinson**. I’ve read a lot of his stuff on preaching, but five years ago I stumbled on something out his own soul about the pleasure of friendship: “*A few years ago I met some old friends, all of them professors in theological seminaries, at a professional meeting, and we decided to go out for supper together before the evening session. We never made it to that meeting. We talked and laughed and argued and laughed and remembered and laughed until the restaurant closed. It had been a long time since I had laughed myself to tears, and that night the rollicking conversation was a better medicine for my soul than prayer. The godliest friends who have touched my life have enjoyed a delightful sense of the absurd.*” (“Laughing the Night Away,” CT, March 8, 1993, p. 15)

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