



Mind the Gap

"...live in accordance with the Spirit..."

Romans 8:5-17

Subway Signs

Have you ever ridden a subway in a major city? You may have noticed a sign that says, "Mind the Gap." It is often accompanied by a thick yellow line to let you know that when the subway train pulls into the station, you shouldn't cross the line until the train has come to a complete stop. The sign is reminder that there is a gap between the platform you are standing on and the carriage you are stepping into. You are being told to be careful not to drop your phone, book, or bag: There is a gap.

There are moments in our lives when we discover an inner stirring taking place deep in our souls and a desire to grow in our faith. This stirring often begins when we recognize a gap between the life-giving truths we encounter in Scripture on Sunday mornings and the gritty, messy details of our daily lives. We begin to ask, "How can I connect the great energizing and enabling promises of God to the clutter and chaos my life?" In other words, "How do I close the gap?"

Back in May I embarked upon a new series of studies with my congregation. We spent several Sundays exploring what it means to encounter the enabling and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit, and how to live out our faith amidst real-life challenges. We discovered that few scriptural truths have stretched us more and few practical realities have equipped us more to close the gap between Sunday and Monday.

"Those who live in accordance with the Spirit..."

In Romans 8 Paul directly addresses the gap between actively living out our faith each day and applying it to the messiness and distractions of daily living. This well-known chapter has been described as a plateau for

those climbing challenging terrain in their ascent through the glorious scenery provided by the book of Romans.

The first seven chapters of Romans provide a spectacular and breathtaking climb. Chapter 8 is a place of rest, a place where you can breathe deeply, a place of refreshment and renewal, a place where you can look back down the trail and give thanks for the journey you have been on. It is difficult to imagine a more encouraging, comforting, inspiring plateau than Romans chapter 8. Its biblical truths are theologically profound as well as foundational to our understanding of how to nourish and nurture the Christian life.

As you land on Romans 8:5, you are immediately aware of the conflicting forces constantly at work within us. The Apostle Paul describes two kinds of individuals, "those who live according to the sinful nature" and "those who live according to the Spirit."

Each of us who is seeking to grow in our faith will at some point have to wrestle with temptation and sin. We know that sin comes in many forms. It begins by enticing us from a distance, appearing as nothing more than a passing thought. Then we are tempted again, and our response is often, "Well, that is not as ridiculous as it first seemed." Then comes another thought and another. The sinful nature slowly entices us by appealing to our senses until we find the temptation attractive. Then comes deception, which is followed by preoccupation, and before we know it, the temptation has become so strong that it dominates our thoughts, and temptation's enslavement gives birth to sin.

Paul is clear in his focus: "When you live according to the sinful nature you set your minds on what that nature desires." He is reminding us that when our impulses begin to control us and dominate our thinking, we are surrendering to the sinful nature and submitting to the deviant, destructive pathology of sin. This is the point when we experience a widening in the gap.

"But..." (vs. 5)

But the second part of the verse begins at a pivotal point: "But those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their mind set on what the Spirit desires." Paul reminds us that when we live in agreement with the Spirit of God, it involves the mind—how we think and how we mentally respond to the temptations and daily challenges before us. Intimacy in our relationship with the Spirit of God involves the mind.

When we feed our heart, mind, and soul on the wonders of God's Word and focus on Him, we find ourselves immersed in the immensity of His love, refreshed and renewed in the concentrated brilliance of His glory. When we grasp and grapple with a mature, biblical understanding of the majesty, grace, and grandeur of God's unprecedented love, we are setting our minds on the Spirit of God. We find the gap closing, and discover we are not controlled by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit.

Amidst the restrictions of a COVID-19 quarantine, some in my congregation have been sending me amusing emails. One involves two ladies chatting. When the first lady asks about the other's husband, her friend replies, "He is in the garden." "That's strange," the first lady says, "I just came through the garden and didn't see him." To which her friend responds, "You have to dig a little."

Despite the humor of this email, living out our faith day by day is not easy, especially given the extraordinary challenges and uncertainties of the last few months. Yet we are never expected to live out our faith in our own strength. God reminds us to *mind the gap* and remember that "those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their mind set on what the Spirit desires." Then we will know the reality of the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit and the thrill of living out our faith each day.