



Video:
**Discussion with Leslie Vandover
and Audie Diggs**

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University Passage Resource

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Engaging With Others
Romans 12:14-17

As Paul continues to expound on what genuine love looks like, he addresses believers' interaction with those outside of the Church. This interaction can mean encounters with hostility and opposition on one hand, or the opportunity for ministry on the other. Believers must risk the first in order to find the second. In either case, love is the response Paul advocates. His exhortation to "bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them" echoes the teachings of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:44). Bible readers are so familiar with this teaching that it is easy to lose sight of how counterintuitive it is. Blessing those who curse us is simply not a natural response. Nor is blessing those who mistreat us in any way. Here is the beauty of the transformed life. We are able to respond this way because our hearts and minds have been spiritually renewed. Every act of hostility is an occasion for the manifestation of a supernatural event that has already taken place within us. Not only is this spiritual victory, it is motivation to take the risk in order to serve the needs of others.

Furthermore, it is demonstration that we do nothing on our own anyway; it is the power of God working in and through us to overcome every obstacle and meet every need. Behind Paul's exhortation in this section lies the firm conviction that we are never alone in the challenges we face or the tasks we perform. God is with us. Paul has already celebrated his revelations that "all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose," that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us," and that nothing can "separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:28, 37, 39 NRSV).

We are transformed, then, so that we might be agents of transformation for others. This is how God has chosen to transform the world—one mind at a time, one community at a time. Simple acts of empathy, like rejoicing with those who rejoice, and weeping with those who weep, can send ripples across populations with the force of tidal waves. Our personal and corporate decisions to live in harmony with one another can be a beacon of peace for whole nations.

Paul's instructions to "not be haughty, but associate with the lowly" and to "not claim to be wiser than you are" may be directed to a relatively aristocratic congregation, but it's an appropriate warning for every Christian congregation across the entire socioeconomic spectrum. The admonition to "not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all" elaborates on the earlier theme to "bless those who persecute you," implying the most effective principle for defeating evil ever formulated (Romans 12:21). It is ironic that such great power is hidden in such simple instruction.

1. What is one recent event that brings you joy?
2. What is one recent event that causes you sorrow?
3. What can you do in the next day or so to bring joy to someone?