

## Switching Teams

**Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life** (Romans 6:22).

**Scripture:** Romans 6:15-23

**Song:** “Take My Life” (“Holiness”)

Five years into his professional baseball career (which had begun in 1883), Billy Sunday had not yet played a full season. That changed when he was traded from the Chicago White Stockings to the Pittsburgh Alleghenys. Leaving his old team behind, Sunday now played under a new coach with new teammates. His popularity exploded, and this would later serve to draw large crowds when he transitioned from famous baseball player to renowned evangelist.

When we become Christians, we switch teams. We leave behind our old team of sin to serve on God’s team. We give up old patterns of sinful behavior to lead lives of righteousness and faith. Just as Sunday reaped the benefits of his new team, so we reap the priceless benefit of eternal life when we switch to God’s team.

Though sin may seem to have the short-term benefit of temporary pleasure, we give up our allegiance to sin when we come to Christ. We can do so willingly, knowing that a great reward awaits us—a life of holiness now and endless joy with our Savior, Jesus, in the life to come.

**Father,** help us to live righteously as we serve on Your team. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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 May 2–8. **Tina Clark** has a passion to help followers of Jesus use their gifts and talents for God’s service. In her spare time, she enjoys cycling, walking through nature, and snuggling with her cats.

## A New Heart

**“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh”** (Ezekiel 36:26).

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 36:25-30

**Song:** “Give Us Clean Hands”

“Say you’re sorry to your sister,” my mother sternly told me.

Ever a stubborn child, my lips sealed all the tighter. I would not apologize, and we would sit there for what seemed like hours until my mother gave up trying to get us to make amends. For most of my life, I was never apt to apologize. However, when I became a Christian, my heart was changed. I began to understand how my actions impacted others, and I no longer hold back my apologies.

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God promised to restore the Israelites to their land. Not only would He bring them back home, but He would also give each of them a new heart and a new spirit. The very core of each being would be changed. Previously, their hardened hearts had served idols, but their new hearts of flesh would give them the desire to serve God.

This new heart is something that God gives freely to us when we come to Christ. In Christ, God changes our sinful desires into desires to obey His commands. While we may still sin sometimes, our innermost being has changed in such a way that we want to be right with God. Obedience to God, then, isn’t a chore for us; it’s a delight.

**Father,** thank You for giving me a new heart, one that is ready to obey You today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Free from Bondage

**You also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God** (Romans 7:4).

**Scripture:** Romans 7:1-13

**Song:** “No Longer Slaves”

I was living in bondage. Anxiety dictated my life. It determined who I did and didn't talk to, what I did and didn't do. I lived in fear, trying to keep up with its demands to avoid anything that made me uncomfortable. It controlled my life until I learned to live in a new way. Instead of avoiding activities, I learned to engage in them despite my anxiety. Though anxiety still is a part of my life, I'm no longer a slave to it.

Paul wrote the letter to the Romans to keep Christians out of another type of bondage. This bondage comes from trying to keep the law to merit favor with God. However, keeping up with its demands is impossible. For example, each one of us has lied at some point. How many other commandments have we broken? Now imagine trying to keep the whole of the Law of Moses with all its special instructions. Praise the Lord! We don't have to carry that burden.

As Christians we have received Christ's righteousness by faith. We have been set free now to live in a new way, keeping God's commands out of love, bearing righteous fruit by His Spirit.

**Father,** I praise You with deep gratitude in my heart today for making a way for me through Christ to serve You in love. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Another Apology

**Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!** (Romans 7:25).

**Scripture:** Romans 7:14-25

**Song:** “Wonderful Grace of Jesus”

The young camper came to me with her head down. “Sorry, Tina,” she said. It hadn’t been the first time that week that she disobeyed me, and it wouldn’t be the last. I could tell that though she wanted to please me, she often found herself in trouble, running off to places she shouldn’t or being loud in the chapel. She tried to do what was right but sometimes made the wrong choices.

Every time she came to me, I forgave her. I never held her shortcomings against her. God does that with us. Because we still have a sinful nature, we fall short at times. Though we know to do what is right, our thoughts and actions may not always be pleasing to God. This can be a source of frustration. We want to please Him, but we struggle to do just that.

Thankfully, God has delivered us. He doesn’t hold our shortcomings against us. This means that we don’t have to fall into the trap of feeling constantly guilty for our sin. Our mistakes don’t define us. While we still understand the grave nature of our sin, we can rejoice that God has forgiven us. Because of His deliverance, we each can still live a life that is pleasing to Him despite our shortcomings and sin.

**Father,** thank You that You deliver us from our sin. Help us live in ways that are pleasing to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## An Adoption Story

**The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship** (Romans 8:15).

**Scripture:** Romans 8:1-4, 10-17

**Song:** “Adopted”

Anika bounced from foster home to foster home, and no one could handle her behavior. Full of energy, this young girl would get settled with a family only to be sent away once again. She didn't have a place she could truly call home—until she ended up at Doris's house. Despite Anika's behavior, Doris's heart was filled with compassion. It wasn't long before she made the decision to adopt.

Before she was adopted, Anika lived in fear of being sent away. Now she no longer needs to live with that fear. As Christians, we're adopted as well. We become a part of God's family. Before our adoption, we lived in fear, a fear of falling short of God's standards and being sent away from His presence.

In Christ we no longer need to live with that fear. As children of God, we're entitled to the benefits of being sons and daughters of King Jesus. Those benefits include forgiveness of sin and eternal life with our Savior. We are not condemned; we are redeemed. We are not forsaken; we are adopted. We are not controlled by sin; we are set free. When fear creeps up in our hearts, we can remind ourselves whose children we are.

**Father,** it is an honor to be a part of Your family. Thank You for rescuing us from fear. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Sent

**Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).**

**Scripture:** John 20:19-23

**Song:** “I Love to Tell the Story”

Jim and Elisabeth Elliot knew what it meant to be sent by God. Their mission: tell people about the love of Jesus. For Jim, that meant going to an unreached people group, the Auca tribe (later called Waorani/Huaorani) in Ecuador. No one had survived bringing the gospel to this group of people, and Jim would be no exception. For Elisabeth, it meant later going back to that same tribe, the tribe that had killed her husband.

Elisabeth found success among these people, seeing a number of them come to faith in Jesus. She didn't back down from God's call on her life, no matter the danger. She was sent, just as Jesus' disciples were sent in today's passage. But neither the Elliots nor the disciples were sent out alone. They would have the help of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised would teach them all things and remind them of what He had said to them (John 14:26).

We are also sent by God to proclaim His love to others. That calling may look different for each one of us. God is sending us into our workplaces, our families, our communities, and beyond. While it takes faith to follow that calling, we are not alone. We have the help of the Holy Spirit to guide us in everything we do for God's kingdom. Because of His help, we can follow God's call with confidence.

**Father,** fill us with courage to go wherever You send us. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Longing for Home

**Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us** (Romans 8:18).

**Scripture:** Romans 8:18-30

**Song:** “Almost Home”

I sat in my house, yet I was longing for a different home. As I struggled with the emotional pain of a disorder that wreaked havoc on my life, I longed for the day that that pain would be gone, the day when God would wipe away my every tear, the day I would be truly home. With those tears streaming down my cheeks, I lifted up my prayer to God, asking Him to give me the strength to face each day until I'll finally be home with Him.

In this world we will face trials and tribulations. That's the reality of living in a world that's burdened under the weight of sin—a world that, like us, is groaning inwardly as it awaits the day it's made new. We suffer now, but a day is coming when we'll experience joy beyond our wildest imagination. The goodness of Heaven will make our present sufferings seem insignificant in comparison.

Knowing what lies ahead for us gives us hope. That hope gives us a reason to press on, even when the weight of our suffering seems unbearable. Thankfully, God hasn't left us to struggle through each day alone. With the Holy Spirit interceding for us, we can be confident that God has heard our cries for help, even when we ourselves don't have the words to express our pain. So we can take heart: each day brings us one step closer to home.

**Father,** give us strength each day until we're home with You. In Jesus' name, amen.