



Sermon Transcription • Romans 11:11-24

But What About Israel?

Pastor Jeff Bucknam

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

I have a good friend, who, when he was in junior high and high school, had a sister who was very near in age to him, who was always getting in trouble. His sister was. He was a good kid, in the sense that there were people who would have looked at his life and said, "You very rarely get in trouble." In fact, his sister believed that strongly, but that was largely because she was always getting in trouble, and she wondered why it was that he wasn't. She was the kind of girl who, even from 12, 13 years old, who started to kind of started to get in involved in activities in her life that you wouldn't expect a 12 or 13 year old to get involved in. One of the ones that my friend used to tell me about was that when their parents would leave for an evening, you know, go out for a date, or they'd have a dinner somewhere or whatever, she knew where the keys to one of the cars was, she was 13 years old, and just take it and drive it all over the place. You know, 50 kilometres. This was back in the 1980s when they had the first car phones, and the dad had a car phone in his car, and she would call back to the house to her brother, "Hey, know where I am?" And he's like, "What? No? I don't know where you are, at your friend's house?" And she'd like, "No, I'm in this place 50 kilometres away, driving." She'd giggle. Of course, the father would find out because in those days, you didn't have a lot of car phones, and the car phone bill would cost a lot, and he got it and was like, "Wait a minute, we were out that night. Who's driving my car and making phone calls? Is it you son?" And he's like, "No. <Laughter> My sister." And she would get in trouble for that. She snuck out all the time from their house. His bedroom, my friend's bedroom, was right above his sister's bedroom, and in the middle of the night it was very common for her to be breaking through the screen...<squeaking noise> opening the window and sneaking out, and running out to the street where one of her boyfriends was there, or whoever was there, and they'd take her off. And she'd come back sometimes the next morning, sometime the next day. It was just a bit of a mess.

The parents were just, of course, understandably, very frustrated and didn't know what to do with her. They got to the end of their rope and they decided that the only way this was going to be fixed, they thought, if they left some reading material around, and that reading material was in the form of brochures for boarding schools, and they would just leave them around the house at different locations. "Oh, here's one in England, and one in Thailand." You know, very far away. That apparently was the thing that struck a chord with her. Like, oh my goodness, this is terrible. My friend told me that on one occasion, he was walking through their living room where she was seated on the couch and the parents were in the other room, and they were making a plan regarding, how are we going to punish her for her most recent indiscretion? And he was walking, my friend was walking by, you know,



kind of giggling because his sister's always in trouble, and she said to him, "Why are you giggling? Why are you never getting in trouble? Why is it always me getting in trouble?" He said to her, "Well, I just let you learn for the both of us." <Laughter> Which is right.

If you've been in a place in your life before where you watch someone else do particular acts and you make a mental note, do not do that. It leads to a kind of life I don't want, a kind of relationship with my parents I don't want. I mean, I don't have a curfew but she always does. You can learn an awful lot from observing other people. My father used to teach a class, he was a civil engineering professor at the University of Washington for a number of years, and one of the classes that he taught was on what he called case studies in civil engineering. So everyday when the students would come to the class, he would regale them with a story about something that had happened in his 30 years plus of professional work. Civil engineers, they build the foundations, or design the foundations, for roads and dams, and sometimes buildings. And he would tell these stories about a road that was built on the side of a cliff and it fell into the ocean because somebody didn't do this or that the right way. The whole idea was, if you guys can watch what's happened to those before you who have cut corners, then you won't cut corners. I used to ask him, "Dad, does it ever work?" And he goes, "Ah, sometimes. Sometimes they just don't pay attention to what's gone on before them." You can learn an awful lot by observing others. Both their successes and their failures.

This is what this passage is about, to be honest with you. It's about God's dealings with Israel, past and future,. Like, what's God going to do with the people of Israel, especially those who don't believe the gospel. Is there a future for them? But more importantly, we as Gentiles, right, there's Jews and there's Gentiles, there's not a whole lot of people from Jewish backgrounds that I'm talking to right now. So what do we, as we watch God's interactions with Israel, what do we learn from that? How they failed, how they succeeded, what's gone on with them? What kinds of things does Paul apply to us in those kinds of circumstances? So what do we learn from God's dealings with unbelieving Israel? I've got three things here, three Ps, right? We learn about God's providence, about our perseverance, and finally, *hope p p*. <Laughter> I win! Providence, perseverance, and hope.

[Providence]

First one, providence. Romans 11:11. When I use the word providence, I just want to be clear about what I mean by that. God's interactions with sinful people. How is it that God can remain in control of the world when people are making free choices that are often evil? Is God responsible for the evil? What does he do with the evil? Providence. How does God achieve his ends through imperfect means? Romans 11:11,

"Again I ask [says Paul]: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?"

Who's "they"? Well, "they," if you go back a little bit, is he's referring to unbelieving Israel. He's separated Israel kind of into two pieces. He's saying, look there's Israel as a nation, and then within that Israel as a nation there's <whispering> Israel <normal voice> like the real remnant, chosen by grace, God's elect Israel, who have always been faithful. And he says, obviously those people are with



God and they've responded the right way to the Messiah, but there's also a bunch of people who are ethnic Israelites who don't believe the gospel. So the question he's asking is, what do we do with them? Does God have a future for them? Have they stumbled in such a way that they've fallen beyond recovery?

That's a really interesting image, to stumble beyond recovery. I am a big fan of soccer. I watch soccer all the time on Saturday mornings, watching soccer out of England, most of the time. I have learned after living in Canada that if I watch soccer with someone who's a hockey fan, that they don't have quite the appreciation for soccer. Mostly because they think all the players are weenies. Because...I mean you know why, right? Because if a stiff wind comes by and the player feels it, they're like, "Aaah!" And they fall over and they start grabbing their ankle, like, "Ooh, mommy!" Right? Rolling...So the World Cup was this last year, and there's a guy named Neymar who decided that he'd roll around like someone had sniped him from a distance, and he's go down like, "Ohhhh..." his hand on his heart, clutching pearls...<crying> And then he'd get back up, right? A couple seconds later he's pop back up, "Oh, I can barely walk, there's no way." He gets to the sideline and then two seconds later, running back full speed. Neymar. <Laughter> There's a bunch of divers and cheats, and I've watched soccer before with hockey fans, and they're like, <raspy voice> "This isn't real. It's only a real sport if you take the puck in your face." <Normal voice> When a soccer player stumbles, there are two things. Sometimes they get right back up, so their fall is not permanent. They exaggerate it, whatever, to get the foul. Sometimes they get right back up. But there are times, and I've seen it happen on a soccer pitch, where some guy gets sliding, and he actually breaks the leg of another guy. When they happens, they bring in the cart and they carry them off on the cart, and they go down the tunnel and there's no recovery there.

This is a good image, because what Paul is saying here is, which is it when it comes to unbelieving Israel? Is this just a temporary moment where they are Neymar-ing it and rolling around, and they're going to get back up and they're going to be back in the game? Does God have a future for them? Are they in the cart? Is God done? Saying, "Listen, you rejected, I'm continuing my work with the remnant, that's it. Cut you off." Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Here's his answer: not at all. In other words, it's not a permanent stumbling, it's a temporary one. Romans 11:11-13,

"Not at all. Rather, because of their transgression, their unbelief, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. [I'm going to explain that phrase in just a second.] But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring? [See, there's going to be a full inclusion at some point.] I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?"

This is such a fascinating little passage, right? I mean, here you get Paul who goes out and he preaches the gospel in these new places. He goes into one city here and maybe another city there, and he proclaims the gospel in those new lands. And when he does this, he goes to the synagogues



there. The Jew first, and then to the Gentile. So he goes and he preaches to the Jews. And what he finds there is that some Jewish people, you know, the remnant, they believe. They've been chosen by grace, by God, and that quickens them, so that they believe. But, a whole bunch of other Jewish people reject. Now, here's the crazy part. If those Jews did not reject, the Gentiles would never have been included. If the ministry of gospel proclamation, of gospel preaching, worked 100 percent to the synagogues that Paul was preaching to, and the other apostles were preaching to, you and I would never be here, my Gentile friends. Which means that God used the wicked unbelief of the Israelites, something he didn't want, he used that very thing to achieve his eternal purposes. Okay? I'm going to come back to that. It's a very, very important point. But what Paul's saying here is listen, the way it works is that they've rejected the gospel, I've taken it to the Gentiles, and what's going to happen is, I'm going to preach to these Gentiles in hopes that I'm going to arouse jealousy among the Jews that rejected it. Like, they're going to look over, see the Gentiles accepting it, and going, hey, I kinda want some of that.

An image here probably helps. So it's almost Christmas time, as I've said. And the days are coming close when we have to buy the gifts for the children. And my boys in the past have wanted to have drones. I think most little boys these days want to have drones. Most of them would like to have them weaponized. <Laughter> At least they don't want the 30 dollar ones. See, Dad wants to buy the 30 dollar one, right? The one that's going to break after a couple seconds, you know, that you get at the Wal Mart. But they want the 800 dollar one that you buy online, that is kind of weaponized. "I have to have it Dad. It goes 10 kilometres, and I have to see what's out 10 kilometres from the house." <Laughter> You know? They're going to fly it up by their friend's house, and spy on them, and whatever it is that they're going to do with the thing. "You know that's illegal, kids?" "Uh, I don't care." You know? <Laughter> So they want the 800 dollar, or the 1000 dollar drone. Let's imagine, and believe me, this is an imagine, that I bought it for him. (They're not getting it.) But like, "Surprise, boys!" 1000 dollar drone, let's imagine that I get it for them. Open the gifts in the morning, and, "Aaah! It's a drone! I'm so excited about the drone!" And then Christmas morning's kind of over, and then they say, "Can I take it out in the back and use it?" "Yes." So they get out there and they've got the drone, and they put it down, and it's got like 10 propellers on it. And they're holding this command module, it looks like something that went to the moon in the 60s, right? And it's got levers everywhere, and they're looking at it and looking at the instructions and then the thing, and then the instructions, and they're like their father, can't figure it out, right? And they're thinking to themselves, okay. So maybe they push this one up, and it kind of moves sideways and hits the fence, and then they bring it back and do it the other way, and it hits the fence, and they're there for like an hour or two, or whatever it is, and they can't figure it out. And they're not receiving the benefit from having this gift. So as a result, what do they do? Like every young boy on Christmas morning when he gets a gift he can't understand, he rejects it and goes and plays Playstation. Because they always get the Playstation gift, right? So they're off, and they're playing their video games. It's only got two knobs, it's way easier. And this drone is in the backyard.

Now I want you to imagine in this picture, that I make a phone call to my friend who is in the US military who flies the drones for a living. And he's used to flying them and shooting at people, whatever. And so we bring him over. "Oh, a drone!" And he picks up the thing, he knows exactly what



to do with it. Lifts it off, takes off, 10 kilometres, he's at your house, seeing like a video of your Christmas morning now. He brings it back, it's flying all over, it hovers by the window where my son is inside and he's playing his video game. And my son looks outside and he sees his drone sitting there, staring at him. He drops the Playstation, he goes to the window, and he says, "Oh! It's working!" He looks down, and he sees the military guy using it. What's going on in my son right now? What's being aroused? Envy! Jealousy! The thing that he has rejected, thinking it would be of no use to him, is now being shown to be a rich blessing. And so he's looking in the window now, and saying, "I want it!" That's what Paul says his ministry is. Paul says, "I'm the guy who comes upstairs in that moment and says to your son, "Don't you want it? Look how it's being used. Look at the blessing that it's bringing to these other people. Don't you want it? Don't you want it? Don't you want it?" It's arousing envy in them. But the point that I really want to make here is how amazing is it that God takes the wicked acts of these Jewish people, this rebellion, this transgression, as it's called here, and he uses wickedness to achieve his good ends? In such a way that had the wickedness not happened, the good ends wouldn't have happened. Or to put it as pointedly, I think, as I can: the wicked acts people do in this world ultimately serve the good ends that God has. At every turn.

So let me show you in just a couple of other case studies in the Bible where that's the case. So in the Old Testament, a story about this guy named Joseph who is relatively pompous, because he has these dreams. His father kind of likes him better than his other brothers, he's got a bunch of brothers, and so he has these dreams, and the dreams are basically of his brothers bowing down to him. And so, like a good little brother he has a dream, gets up in the morning, takes his jammies off, goes out to the fields where his brothers are working and says, "Guess what I dreamt last night? Maybe all of you should gather around so I can tell you all at once. Well guess what I dreamt last night? That all of you were bowing down to me. It was a good dream." <Laughter> And this happens on repeated occasions, he keeps telling it, and of course eventually...if your little brother did that to you, at some point gentlemen, you would say, "Come here, I've got five things I would like to say to you." And so that's what they do. They say, "Look, we have to put a stop to this. His arrogance, he's pompous. So next time he comes out, what we're going to do is we're going to kill him." So he does. He comes out, and they decide that they're going to grab him. They throw him in a pit, take his coat off of him that he thinks is so great, throw him in the pit. One of the brothers says, "Okay, maybe the pit's a little much. We just sell him to these traders that are going by." So they sell him to the traders. By the way, is this a wicked act? Is it a wicked act to sell somebody else into slavery? In the last service they were like, "Hmmm, I'm not sure." You know, it's like, what in the world? <Laughter> Remind me not to bring Ezra to your house. <Laughter> Anyway, it was a wicked act. Slavery is an evil thing, and they're going to do this wicked, particular act. And they do it. And then God takes this guy...okay, they go back and they tell their father, "Hey, everything's bad, your son died." The father's devastated. But this boy, this Joseph, gets taken by God through a whole bunch of terrible circumstances. He works for some people who lie about him, other people who don't follow through on the things they promised they'd do. He is the object of scorn repeatedly. But the Lord is with him, and eventually, he rises up to be the second most powerful man in all of Egypt, the biggest country in the world at the time. Vice President Joseph.



Famine in all the land, Egypt's the only place with food and in this crazy twist of providence, the brothers who sold him are now arriving at the doorstep where Joseph is going to give them food. They don't know it's him. They learn that it's him, and they're freaked out of their minds. "He's going to get us, he's going to get revenge on us!" But what they hear from Joseph is different from what they expected. Here's what Joseph says in Genesis 50:20 to his brothers who wickedly sold him. He said,

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

So, the wicked act that they intended for evil, God used that very wickedness to achieve his eternal ends. That's the way it works. I'll give you another one. Was it wicked for the Jewish people of Jesus' day to kill him? Yes. Good. We're on board with that, it's a good Sunday school answer, right? The murder of God was a bad thing. It was the worst thing, right? When Peter has an opportunity to preach to the very people who killed Jesus, here's what he says, Acts 2:22,

"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. [You were witnesses to see all the amazing things he did.] This man [this Jesus] was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."

So this wicked, terrible act that you have done was actually planned by God before the foundations of the world to bring him glory and us ultimate good. So you and I wouldn't be here today if God hadn't used that wicked act for our good. And this is how it works. And I'm telling you, you and I face all sorts of wickedness, do we not? We live in a world where people go into schools and shoot children. And we're left with like, "What in the world is going on? What kind of chaos?" Or, you live in a world where somebody lies about you at work, demeans your character, and either you get fired or denigrated, or demoted or whatever, and you long for justice. And you say, "That was a wicked act." What do we say about wickedness in our world, as we're faced with it all the time. Christian people say two things about it. Number one, we say it's wicked! It's evil. We have categories for it. We have a God who defines what's good and right and just. And it's not according to what he wants. And yet, we also say that God will use it at every single turn, for our good and his glory. Man, if that just sunk into you, just a little bit, you would realize how secure you are in the hands of a God who loves you, yes? That there's nothing anybody in the world can do to you, as wicked as it might be, that will ruin his plan for you.

Theologians, when they talk about this, often use an illustration. They say, look, the way God is working with his world is the same way an artisan uses a loom. When you walk into...somebody's making a tapestry...I'm sure this is something you've all experienced, right? You walk in, somebody's making a tapestry. You know, you're going to do that this afternoon? Okay. Apparently, on one side of the tapestry-somebody's making a tapestry. On one side of it, actually, is this massive chaos, it's just strings going everywhere. You've seen blankets like that before, where underneath it just looks like a horrible mess. There's no rhyme or reason to it, it's chaos everywhere. But if you go to the other side, you see how it's being worked, all that chaos is being worked out into a masterpiece. And that's the



way God's working in this world, with you in your life, is that in this present moment it might look like massive chaos, but God is working out his masterpiece in you. And sometimes you get a glimpse of it, you look back and you think, <gasps> look what he's done. All of eternity, will you be looking back saying, "Look what he did." So we learn something about providence here.

[Perseverance]

Second, perseverance. Romans 11:16-18,

"If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; [he's using an image of dough and offerings, religious offerings, but then he changes the image.] if the root is holy, [so he's talking about the Jewish people, the Jewish nation. If the root is holy] so are the branches [so the people]. If some of the branches have been broken off, [some of those Jews have been broken off] and you, though a wild olive shoot [you Gentile], have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, [so you get the blessings that were promised to Israel because you've been grafted in] do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches [the ones that were broken off]. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you."

In order to study this this week, I got to watch YouTube videos of olive tree grafting. So if you have any questions, I am here. <Laughter> For later. This one guy took an olive tree root, and he grafted in three different kinds of olive trees to grow three different kinds of olives on it. It was amazing. The way you do that is you cut little pieces off the end of it, and you stick it next to...this is very technical language, just follow me for a minute. You cut the little pieces and you stick it up next to the root where you've cut off a piece, and it kind of fits in there. And then you wrap it all up, and eventually, the root will grow over the branch, and will grow the branch. So he had three different roots going. So this is the image that Paul's using here. He's saying, looks, this is the way it is. You are a wild olive shoot, you've been brought in, God has broken off some of the unbelieving branches of Israel, and you've been slotted in in their place, and you are receiving now the benefits of being part of Israel. You have an opportunity at this moment, of course, to say, "Oh, look at me, I've been welcomed in because I'm so amazing." But he's saying don't do that. Because it's not you, it's not your tree.

Can I just pause really quickly? This week, somebody shot up a synagogue. Okay? They claimed to be a Christian man who shot up this synagogue, and said, "All Jews must die." Can I just say that you're not reading the Bible if you think Jewish people should die. There is no place for anti semitism in the Christian church, period. At all. You should read this passage. It's a Jewish tree. We are grafted into a Jewish tree. Right. He's going to take this picture, this image of grafting in, and he's going to pick it up then. Romans 11:19-22,

"You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.' Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. [The reason you're there is because of faith. The reason they're not there is because they don't have faith.] Do not be arrogant, but tremble. [Why should you tremble?] For if God did not spare the natural branches,



he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, [by breaking them off] but kindness to you, [including you in,] provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.”

You see the image, right? He snaps off the unbelieving branches, grafts you in, and the lesson that you should learn by observing what God has done with the unbelieving branches of Israel is that if you don't continue in the faith, you'll be cut off too. Or to put it as pointedly as I can, you must continue in the faith in order to be finally saved. This is a consistent teaching in the New Testament. You must continue in the faith in order to be finally saved. Paul picks up...he deals in other places with the example of Israel falling by the wayside. He did it in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, read it with me. You'll see the argument he's making. It's the same argument. He says,

“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. [Right, they're coming out of Egypt, the people of Israel are under the cloud, and they go through the Red Sea.] They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. [Even immersed into the water. So they had a baptism. Just like you have a baptism, Christian.] They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.”

So they get out into the wilderness, and God provides the manna everyday, right? They eat a spiritual food that reminds them of what God has done and is doing for them. They drink the water from the rock which is a reminder to them of God's provision for them. They basically take communion out there, yeah? So they've been baptized, and they take communion. They have all the Christian experience that you guys have. 1 Corinthians 10:5-12,

“Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.’ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So, [listen.] if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!”

This is an example of a whole bunch of people who had the same experience as you had and they didn't continue in the faith, and God snapped them off. So don't be arrogant, but tremble. You know, people sometimes ask me the question, what is the nature of-and they don't ask it that way-what is the nature of saving faith? But it's a common question. What are the marks of true saving faith as opposed to non-saving faith? There's a lot of people who claim to be Christians who actually aren't. So what are the marks of true saving faith? I think in Scripture, what you'll find are three marks of it. Saving faith is a professed faith, saving faith is a practiced faith, and saving faith is a persevering faith.



See? Three Ps, I win. <Laughter> So professed, practiced, and persevering faith. Here's what I mean. It's a professed faith in that in order to be saved, you must call upon the name of the Lord. You're not just going to, you know, claim your grandparents' faith as your own and assume that everything's going to be okay. You must call upon the name of the Lord. You must say to the Lord, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." You must turn to him and believe certain things about the Lord. That he is Lord. He has authority and power to accomplish what he promises. That's professed faith. Second though, you must practice the faith you profess. If you say that Jesus is Lord but then you act (you know, which is language about his authority and your submission), if you say that and then whenever your Lord says to you, "Hey, you know what, you should do this as opposed to that," and you read in the Scriptures what he says, and you're like, "Ah, I don't really care." Is he your Lord? No, there's a practice to it. You don't just say the words, it has influence in the way that you live. The Holy Spirit is in you, he will produce fruit. So faith is professed and it's practiced, but ultimately you have to persevere in the profession and the practice. And passages like this are pushing that direction. Saying, listen, if you don't finish the race, the running was in vain.

You know, an image is probably helpful here. You must continue in the faith in order to be finally saved. So here's an image. You go on an airplane, you go to Vancouver, you're going to get on a plane. It says on the sign "Houston." Apparently you want to go to Houston, because Houston's, I don't know, awesome. So you want to go to Houston. So you get on the plane. You see on the sign...you're putting trust in the plane when you get to the plane that it's going to bring you to the destination it's saying, yes? Which is often a misplaced trust. Because, you know, it says "Delta" on the side. <Laughter> That's not a good sign, right? Air Canada...that's not going to work, you won't end up where you need to go. But WestJet will. Ah, mighty WestJet. <Laughter> So, you get on your WestJet flight that's going to Houston. You place your trust in the flight, in the plane, that it will deliver you. You enter into it and you sit down, and you eat the little peanuts and the other stuff that they give you. Who's doing the work? When the plane takes off and it's headed to Houston, who's doing the work? Well, the plane is. You're receiving the benefit from the flying of the plane, you are *in* the plane. The same way that you're *in* Christ. You got into Christ by placing your trust and faith in Christ, to deliver you to where Christ said he was going to take you. And you will get to Houston. I promise. It's WestJet, they're so good at this. You'll get to Houston. Unless, you know, like halfway through the flight, you're looking over to that little door on the side, and you're going, I wonder what happens if I pull that open. I've always wanted to fly. And then you jump out of the plane. So if you continue in the faith, if you continue in the plane, you will reach the desired destination. That's right, that's right. You do realize why it's so important for you to do activities in your life, then, that keep you in, right? To surround yourself with Christian brothers and sisters, and make the commitment to coming to things like church, and being in community groups, and spending time around things that will keep you in the flight, so that you don't get stupid and decide you're going to jump out the side. Because you know, you can do this on your own. Providence, perseverance, and hope.

**[Hope]**

Romans 11:23-24,

“And if they do not persist [“they” being unbelieving Israel. And if they do not persist] in unbelief, they will be grafted in, [they were snapped off because of their unbelief, but if they don’t persist in that unbelief, they can be grafted in. These hardened people who have decided to reject Jesus, if they don’t persist in that rejection, God *can* put them back in. If they don’t persist in unbelief they will be grafted in] for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!”

Paul, of all people, understands what it looks like for somebody who’s been hardened to turn back around, because that was him. He was dragging those Christians to court, wanted them dead. And God met him on Damascus road, just hit him, and put him on his backside, and said, “No, you’re going to be mine.” So here he is, the reformed persecutor of the church, now saying, “But don’t you see? There are lots of ways for people like me to come. The hardened have hope.” Which is really important, I think, for you here. Is it not? Because most of the people that I’m talking to have friends, family members, who have hardened their hearts to Christ. And we wonder, oh, Lord, are you able? And the answer is yeah. Of course he is. There’s hope for the hardened. If God can take these hardened Israelites and in the end, bring some back to him, he can do the same thing with your friends, and maybe you’re sitting here today and you’re that person. And you think, oh, you know what, there’s no way. Look at all the things that I’ve done. Man, you just don’t understand what God is like.

My favourite scene in the entire Bible is the scene in the prodigal son story. The prodigal son story, a son goes and asks his father for all the money, all the inheritance. His father, being kind, gives it to him. The son goes off and he uses all the money, he has wild parties, and ends up in a pigsty. Feeding the food to the pigs who are eating better than him. And he realizes there, man, at my father’s house, there are slaves who are better treated than me. So I’m going to go back and I’m going to say to my father, “I’m not worthy to be called your son, just take me in as a slave.” And he makes the long journey back home. One of my favourite scenes in the entire story, in the entire Bible, is this father, who is scanning the horizons, and he’s looking for his son to return. And when he sees him, a long way off, this dignified man grabs his skirt, lifts it up, and high steps it out to this boy. And he throws his arms around his neck and says, “My son!” Who starts then his speech. “Dad, I’m not worthy to be called your son. You should just make me a slave.” And the father says, “Ah, sssshhhh. Get the fatted calf, get the ring. My son is home. He was dead, but now he is alive.” You why I like it so much? Because it’s a picture of what God is like for people like me who harden themselves quite a bit. And anytime that I’m willing to come home, God is there saying, “Whatever you’ve done, whatever you’ve become, you’ve come home.”



Max Lucado, I'm almost finished with this. Max Lucado in this wonderful little book that was printed years ago called *No Wonder They Call Him Savior* told a story that was similar. I'll just read it to you. He says,

“Longing to leave her poor Brazilian neighborhood, Christina wanted to see the world. Discontent with a home having only a pallet on the floor, a washbasin, and a wood-burning stove, she dreamed of a better life in the city. One morning she slipped away, breaking her mother’s heart. Knowing what life on the streets would be like for her young, attractive daughter, Maria hurriedly packed to go find her. On her way to the bus stop she entered a drugstore to get one last thing. Pictures. She sat in the photograph booth, closed the curtain, and spent all she could on pictures of herself. With her purse full of small black-and-white photos, she boarded the next bus to Rio de Janeiro. Maria knew Christina had no way of earning money. She also knew that her daughter was too stubborn to give up. When pride meets hunger, a human will do things that were before unthinkable. Knowing this, Maria began her search. Bars, hotels, nightclubs, any place with the reputation for street walkers or prostitutes. She went to them all. And at each place she left her picture—taped on a bathroom mirror, tacked to a hotel bulletin board, fastened to a corner phone booth. And on the back of each photo she wrote a note. It wasn’t too long before both the money and the pictures ran out, and Maria had to go home. The weary mother wept as the bus began its long journey back to her small village. It was a few weeks later that young Christina descended the hotel stairs. Her young face was tired. Her brown eyes no longer danced with youth but spoke of pain and fear. Her laughter was broken. Her dream had become a nightmare. A thousand times over she had longed to trade these countless beds for her secure pallet. Yet the little village was, in too many ways, too far away. As she reached the bottom of the stairs, her eyes noticed a familiar face. She looked again, and there on the lobby mirror was a small picture of her mother. Christina’s eyes burned and her throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo. Written on the back was this compelling invitation. “Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn’t matter. Please come home.” She did.

In your picture of what God is like through the book of Romans, you should have it stretched to believe that he’s a God who is more sovereign, more powerful than you can possibly imagine. But he’s also the God who scans the horizon, who leaves his little picture by the bedframe of the world, and he longs for his prodigals to come home. Whatever you’ve done, whatever you’re become, it doesn’t matter. Just come home. Let me pray for us,

Lord, I’m so thankful for your glorious nature, and how multifaceted it is, and how magnificent it is. At every turn we spin the diamond and we learn new things about the way you’re interacting with your world, Father. And we are delighted. So God, I pray that you would help us to continue to look at it. To persevere in looking at it, and to commit ourselves to that, Father. To have hope for those who are far off, Father, and look like they are hardened. But knowing full well that you can bring them back, Father. And also, I pray, Lord, that you would help us to get a keen eye on your providence in the world, and that you do all these things for our good and your glory, ultimately. As we follow you the rest of our days here. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.