

"Emotions and the Long Game"

Text: Romans 8:1-11

God grant you joy and confidence in the victory that is already yours, through Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Can you think of anything that is more difficult to control than emotion? In any given moment it is nearly impossible to control how we feel. The best that we can hope for is to learn to control how we *react* to how we feel, until the emotion subsides or changes. "Anger management," for example, is learning how to control the *reaction* to anger, not anger itself. Some feelings, like depression, have a physiological cause that can be corrected through a variety of treatments but, until that happens, the job is to control how you react to that depression.

Here's an example of why this is important on a much grander scale than we might imagine. It is *objectively true* that life for you, as a child of God, could not possibly hold greater promise or a brighter future. That's just a fact. No matter what's going on right now in your life, the magnificence of your eternal future *has* never and *will* never change. It is both constant and certain. Yet it doesn't always *feel* that way, does it? Problems here in this vale of tears seem to pile up from time to time – to the point that it even becomes difficult to keep a future as bright as ours in focus. We plod through the days as if we are losing, or have already lost, when in fact we have already won.

It is our emotions that do that to us. We allow the emotions that result from relatively insignificant and temporary frustrations, failures and setbacks to overshadow not only all that is good in our lives *right now*, but we also even allow the here and now to actually dull the magnificent, crystalline promises of the hereafter. Our relevant and uplifting text for this morning will simply not allow that sort of mindset or attitude; it will not tolerate any sort of pessimism or gloom in the face of such a glorious and promising future – a future secured for us by Christ on the cross.

The text that will, by God's grace, realign and reenergize us this morning is found in the 8th Chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans:

^{ESV} **Romans 8:1-11** *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ ¶ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

This is God's Word. We humbly acknowledge that these are not the words of mortal men but the words of our Creator God, who desires to strengthen and comfort us when we visit him there. That such gifts would be ours this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify in the Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

The title of the sermon this morning is, as you can see, "*Emotion and the Long Game.*" I'm sure you are familiar with the general concept of "the long game." Playing the long game means making plans and taking actions that focus on long-term goals rather than immediate conditions or results. It involves patience and consistent effort to achieve goals over time. Understand that playing the long game is neither inherently virtuous nor inherently evil. In other words, the goal can be either good or bad. In fact our text for this morning provided examples of each, and it did so in a single sentence: ***For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.***

In other words, the goal or endgame of the inherently *evil* long game is focusing on **“the things of the flesh,”** while the goal or endgame of the inherently *good or virtuous* long game involves focusing on **“the things of the Spirit.”** To simplify it still further, the *goal* of the one is bad earthly stuff and *goal* of the other is good spiritual treasure. Both represent long-game goals, and our text reveals first the inevitable result of each (***For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace***) and then the reason: ***For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.***

Let's do a little reverse engineering on all of this. In other words, let's disassemble each to better understand the divine guidance and wisdom that our God is communicating to us in our text. First, what does Paul mean by **“set their minds on the things of the flesh”**? To **“set their mind”** means to focus on or to be preoccupied or obsessed, and the **“things of the flesh”** are the things that interest and excite the old Adam, the natural cravings of our sinful flesh, the sinful passions and desires with which we were born. Put the two together and **“set their minds on the things of the flesh”** means to be preoccupied or obsessed with the sin and evil of this world. Those who allow such things to occupy their thoughts can see nothing else. When anyone is thus preoccupied, nothing better or higher is possible. All “higher things” are closed off to them.

On the other hand, just the opposite is true of those who **“set their minds on the things of the Spirit.”** The **“things of the Spirit”** are the very “higher things” that are closed off to those who are obsessed with the **“things of the flesh”**. In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul lists examples of both:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

^{ESV}(Galatians 5:19-21)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ^{ESV}(Galatians 5:22-24)

Note also how, in both letters, God the Holy Spirit makes it clear that no one can have it both ways. Our goal can be the things of the flesh or the things of the Spirit. One or the other, never both. The reading from Galatians 5 provides the first reason – **“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”** In our text we are also told that the mind set on the flesh does not and cannot submit to God's law, and again in Galatians 5 that every fruit of the Spirit is God-pleasing and therefore **“against such things there is no law.”** Those who set their minds on the flesh can do no right, those who truly set their minds on the things of the Spirit can do no wrong.

So God's Word identifies two very different **“minds”** or long-term goals, one that is all about pleasing the sinful flesh and the other all about pleasing God. Let's look at how human emotion affects each.

A mind obsessed with **the works of the flesh** actually adopts that pursuit as both its short and long-term goals. The long game is to retire early and wealthy and thus to have both the time and money to indulge “self,” but the short-term goal is also to indulge the sinful flesh all along the way – if possible, during every waking moment of every single day. The appetite for sin is insatiable and therefore nothing will ever be enough. Given that, what sort of emotions would you imagine would torment those individuals when they don't get what they want, or when they suffer any sort of deprivation, hardship, sickness, or suffering? Anger, frustration, dissatisfaction, depression, sorrow, regret – probably all of these. When this world and its sinful pleasures and passions represent all that you want out of life, of course you will be angry, frustrated, and depressed when life doesn't satisfy your obsession. You should fully expect that your emotions will beat on you like a piñata.

Now suppose you adopt, you follow, God's plan for your life; that is, you set your mind on the things of the Spirit here on earth, while all the while you keep heaven as your ultimate goal. That's the Christian long game. In that scenario, what power can the ups and downs of life have over you? Life on earth cannot rob you of your goals when your goals are **“the things of the Spirit.”** Remember what they are – **“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.** None can be taken from you. Note especially the last one in that list: **self-control.** Christians are also human, so of course we will experience a full range of emotions. The question, again, is how we react – which is where that gift of self-

control comes in. The godless are slaves to their emotions. Children of God are not – at least we need not be.

What negative emotions trouble you? You can know that it's a *negative* emotion when it pushes you toward anything that is part of that **“mind of the flesh,”** when that emotion urges you to sin. Are you often angry by what you see all around you, frustrated that you can't seem to fix it, demoralized by the fact that so few really seem to care (especially those who have the power to do something about it), or do you find yourself depressed and anxious about the future? Check to see if maybe you've drifted from the Christian long game, if your goal has drifted from heaven to earth. Are you filled with envy because of what others have, feeling superior because you have more, sad that your life isn't turning out the way you once envisioned it? Check to see if you've allowed some of that **“mind of the flesh”** to creep in.

The hard, cold fact is that this world was irreparably broken by sin and cursed by God himself. There is no fixing it. It cannot be salvaged. It has been marked by God for total destruction. To expect more is not only foolish, it will torment us. Evil can never be tamed or eradicated while the earth remains. The best that we can hope for is to be shielded from it by our all-powerful God.

That's not good news, but do you know what is? The rest of our text for this morning. Allow yourself to experience the pure joy of just that first verse: ***There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*** To be **“in Christ Jesus”** means to believe that he paid your debt of sin on the cross. You believe that, which means that *nothing* can condemn you – no condemnation – not now, not ever. Paul goes on to tell us why: ***For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*** God the Father condemned his own Son in our place. Through faith in Jesus, God now sees every single one of his children as sinless and holy – as those who, in Christ, have fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law. No one and nothing can ever condemn us.

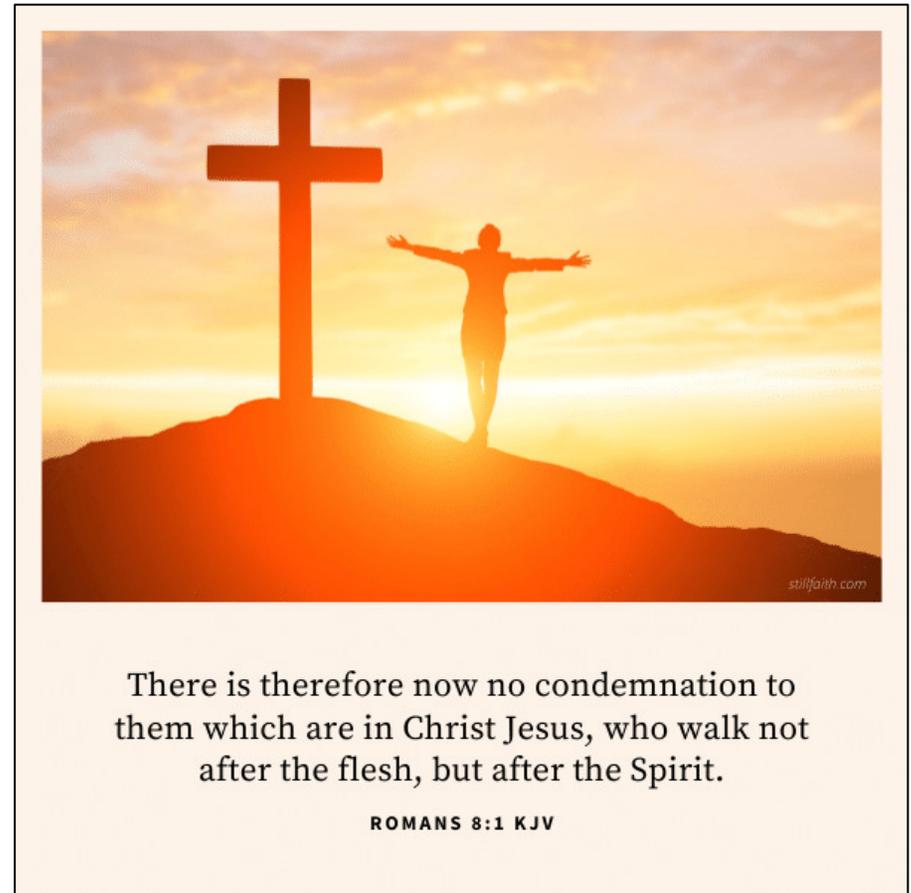
Don't rob yourself of all that that means for you, individually, personally. It means that, holding fast to your Savior Jesus, you've won. The only One that really matters is God, the righteous Judge, and he's already

declared you to be not guilty. That's how you address all of your negative emotions, and that's justification for **“living according to the Spirit and setting your mind on the things of the Spirit.”** You can walk through life in joy and peace and confidence because you know and trust what God himself promised in the last verse of our text: ***“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”*** Live, act, and speak like you've already won. Because in Christ you have, and therefore your future could not possibly be any brighter. Amen.

^{ESV} **Ezekiel 37:1-14** The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ² And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD." ⁷ ¶ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. ¹¹ ¶ Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' ¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD."

^{ESV} **John 11:17-27** Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

^{ESV} **Romans 8:1-11** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ ¶ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.



There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

ROMANS 8:1 KJV

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The Fifth Sunday in Lent – March 22, 2026

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 131

"Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 31ff.

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The First Lesson: (Ezekiel 37:1-14) In picturesque and memorable fashion, the Lord here teaches us that *physical* life (which comes from God alone) is not the same as *spiritual* life (which also comes from God alone). Only God can grant life of any kind to mankind. He is the Lord of Life – both physical and spiritual, and we are to entrust both to him at all times. We are also hereby reminded of just how hollow and pointless physical life will always be without spiritual life.

Psalm 51 *(Hymnal page 76)*

The Second Lesson: (John 11:17-27) Our New Testament lesson contains one of the earliest and best testimonies concerning the true identity of Jesus Christ. Martha correctly here labels Jesus as the Promised Savior. Jesus himself also here teaches us that physical life will be breathed back into these mortal bodies at the Resurrection of the dead. How we ought to long for that great day, working tirelessly until it arrives.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed *(Projected on Screens)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 680

"God of Grace and God of Glory"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 8:1-11 *(See back page)*

"Emotion and the Long Game"

The Offertory – (Projected on Screens)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 434 *(Stanzas 1-4)*

"Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice"

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Preparation for Holy Communion *(Hymnal page 38)*

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving *(Hymnal page 41)*

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 147 *(Stanzas 1 & 4)*

"God, We Praise You"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time.

A note on Communion: It is a matter of conscience among us, drawn from God's Word, that communing together is an intimate expression of confessional fellowship based on shared beliefs. We therefore ask those who have not publicly declared their unity of faith with us to first meet with the pastor for the information you would need and want before communing. Please understand that we seek only to follow the Word and will of God and are in no way judging your Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (37) Average (38) Wednesday (28)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service with Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	- 7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	- 9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	-- Church Council and WF meetings

CLC News – Dr. Daniel Sullivan has accepted the call to fill the vacant position on the faculty of Immanuel Lutheran College. Pastor Thomas Naumann has accepted the call to Grace of Fridley, MN. ILC is looking for a new girls' dorm supervisor for the 2026-27 school year. See Pastor Roehl for details.

Looking Ahead – Both the Church Council and the Women's Fellowship are scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour next Sunday, which is also Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, with services at 7pm on both April 2nd (Maundy Thursday) and April 3rd (Good Friday).

ILC Visitors Day – Immanuel Lutheran High School in Eau Claire, WI will host their annual High School Visitors Day on Friday, May 1, 2026 for students grades 7 and up. An invitation letter, schedule of events, and online registration can be found at www.ilc.edu. Please register students and chaperones by Friday, April 24.

Voting Membership Application – Mark Freadhoff has applied for voting membership at St Paul.