



### Introduction

This fall my husband and I started a middle school boys small group at our home. Every other Sunday afternoon ten 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade boys gather at our house for some "guy time" together and for a look into God's Word. Sounds like a wonderful way to spend your Sunday afternoon doesn't it? Actually it is and we are praying that God will use it in great ways. Now you may wonder where I fit into the picture of "guy time". Let's just say that I am the snack server! This past Sunday was very interesting to say the least. The other "guy" leader, Tom, and his son had constructed some launchers. My husband and son supplied the tomatoes! Can you see where this is going and do you see why I am simply the snack server? The plan was for the boys to trek down to the field and launch tomatoes in the air. Typical behavior for middle school and middle age boys don't you think? As it turned out, it culminated in a tomato attack war and a great time was had by all!

Now what in the world does that have to do with Romans 12:14-16 that we are memorizing this week? Actually, a lot. After they returned from battle, they gathered in a circle in our driveway. As I poured out orange soda and listened in on their conversation, God challenged my heart by their words in relation to verses 14-16. You see apparently they also had shields and the boys were encouraged to run head on in attack as the tomatoes were launched. As they sat in our driveway reading Ephesians 6 about the weapons of our spiritual warfare, my husband challenged the boys with these questions:

- What are some temptations that Satan launches into your lives?
- How can you run full force ahead in attacking them?

As I stood there listening to their answers God showed me something very important about Romans 12:14-16 and I am anxious to share it with you here!

### Looking at the verses and looking at our lives

First of all let's take a look at these verses in some different versions:

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.* (NIV)

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.* (NASV)

*Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.* (The Message)

*Wish good for those who harm you; wish them well and do not curse them. Be happy with those who are happy, and be sad with those who are sad. Live in peace with each other. Do not be proud, but make friends with those who seem unimportant. Do not think how smart you are.* (NCV)

*Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.* (KJV)

And now let's see how this all fits together with tomato launchers and a full force forward attack on the temptations of our lives! The more I study this passage, the more I notice that Paul sees us as having one major temptation attack in our walk with Christ. He calls it different things, beginning with the "pattern of this world" back in verse two, but almost every issue that he mentions has

its negative root in a self focus. Having a self focus is the pattern of the world and it is the root of most every temptation attack we encounter. Take a moment and read back through Romans 12 with that mindset. Do you see it? We are self focused when we:

- Think of ourselves more highly than we ought (verse 3)
- Don't value others in the body of Christ (verses 4-5)
- Don't use our gifts with excellence (verses 6-8)
- Show love only for appearance sake (verse 9)
- Become indulgent in evil things (verse 9)
- Are devoted to ourselves more than others (verse 10)
- Lose our spiritual fervor (verses 11-12)
- Are not wanting to share with God's people who are in need (verse 13)

A self focus is the tomato being launched right into our lives again and again throughout our day. So how do we fight it? Should we cower and run from it. God challenged me with these verses. Cowering will not work. Verses 14-16 give us some full force forward attacks that we can fight with! We can:

### **Bless those who persecute us**

It is challenging to do this but it is a proactive way to get our mind off ourselves. When someone hurts us, God is saying turn around and give them a blessing. That is running full force ahead to fight the self focus.

### **Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn.**

Sometimes we just want life to be about us. Paul is saying, make it a point to focus on what others are experiencing. Join with them, get your focus off yourself. Really rejoicing takes effort and really mourning takes energy too. What are some creative ways that you could attack your self focus in this way?

### **Live in harmony with one another**

Some of the versions said, "get along with one another". We can do this, but we have to pursue it, we have to attack a self focus head on if we are going to be at peace with others. We will have to sacrifice our wants and desires at times to do this! It is worth it!

### **Do not be proud or conceited but be willing to associate with people of low position**

I love the wording of the KJV here. It says "*mind not the high things*". That is a great way to attack a self focus. In our affluent culture our minds often stay focused on things that seem to have influence and prestige and worldly value. As a result, we find it difficult to associate with those of low position because we are always focused on moving up higher, and the better "places" of life in our world. Jesus did the exact opposite. He focused on us, those of low position. We need to realize that there will always be someone in a higher position than us and someone in a lower position than us, but the only position that really matters is our position in relation to God. He will always be higher than us but He set the standard for us in this area. He ran full force forward in attack as He came to earth on our behalf and walked among us, associating with us, ministering to us, washing our feet and even dying for us. He set the example for us in this. In fact a good companion passage for this phrase is Philippians 2:1-11. We need to remember to "mind not the high things" but have the "same mind as Christ".

### **Consider**

So do you still think I am crazy to link tomato launchers and Romans 12:14-16 together? Even if you do, I hope you get God's point! Do you see it? These are some full force forward attacks against the self focus being launched at us daily. Instead of just saying, "I need to have more of God and less of me;" instead of just wishing that would happen; these are some real things we can do in the fight! We need to pick up our shields of faith and run right toward the self focus that is being launched at us each day. We can do that by blessing people who hurt us, celebrating with others, mourning with others, purposing peace in our relationships in every detail and being willing to associate with people of low position. The battle plan against self – attack it head on with these principles of faith! Are you up for the challenge?

### **Pray**

**"Lord I want to get my focus off myself. Everyday that kind of attitude is being launched at me. I have hidden your Word in my heart and I am going to use it to fight in this battle. Help me to fight!"**