

The Monster Within  
[Romans 7:21-25a](#), [Matthew 11:28-30](#)

At some point in our lives we all struggle with our sinful nature – the desire to do what we know is wrong – The ‘Monster Within’. Sometimes we have seen it portrayed as a character with a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other. The character is clearly wrestling between the two concerning a particular situation. Even when the character knows the angel presents what is the right thing to do, the character will often make the wrong choice.

Our scripture lesson from Romans depicts Paul wrestling with his faith. I believe the overall message is clear – our nature is not necessarily to do the right thing, even when we know better. We each may be housing ‘A Monster Within’.

Paul states the problem is not with the law but with his slavery to sin. He may have the desire to do what is good, but his sinful nature cannot carry it out. I think we may also find ourselves in line with this as we go about our daily lives. What happens to us when we find money and know we should turn it in to authorities, or when we get angry with someone for their driving habits, or when we are tempted to cheat on our time at work? The monster wins. We have succumbed to the seduction of sin.

You may be familiar with the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, by Robert Louis Stevenson. When asked about the inspiration for his story, he said, "I found it in my nature." As the story goes, Dr. Jekyll creates a potion that turns him into the monster Mr. Hyde. At first, Dr. Jekyll is able to maintain control of Mr. Hyde and reserve the transformation for specific times. As time progresses, Dr.

Jekyll begins to lose control of Mr. Hyde and eventually the monster of Mr. Hyde takes over. The author Robert Stevenson was a Christian that also must have wrestled with 'The Monster Within'.

Many of us see Paul as a model Christian and yet he too struggled with his own personal monster. As Christians we know to put God first. We know the importance of loving and caring for our neighbor. We know that giving in to sin and selfishness is not what God desires for us. And yet time and again we find ourselves asking forgiveness for our shortcomings. We once again allow 'The Monster Within' to win.

So why bother? Why should we even continue to try to live a Christian life when we know that most likely the monster will win? Why don't we just give up? I'm sure many of us have watched babies as they learn to walk. As

parents we may want to hold them back to protect them from falling. But with each fall, the child learns what works and what doesn't. The child gets stronger and more determined. Finally, the child finds some inner bravery and launches across the room (and as ever parent knows, then the REAL adventure begins!).

I believe our Christian journey is a learning process. When we stumble, fall, get up, brush ourselves off and keep going, we are actually growing and learning from those experiences. God does not want us to remain as crawling babies – he wants us to get up and walk. Our journey involves a process of refining – God is helping us to grow spiritually stronger day by day.

I think at times we may forget just how amazing God's love for us truly is. A popular contemporary Christian song states, "Amazing love, how can it be? That

you my king should die for me. Amazing love, I know its true, and it's my joy to honor you in all I do." I think we need to be reminded that God's love for us did not stop at the cross. God is not a distant being existing only in lofty heights. God is a partner in our daily lives. There is book called Forty Days to a Closer Walk with God, by J. David Muyskens. The author describes a vacation trip to Washington State:

One summer my wife, Donna, and I visited a cousin and her husband in Gig Harbor, Washington. We stayed overnight with them. In the morning we expressed a desire to drive to Mount Rainier, which was visible from our cousin's kitchen window on this clear morning. Often cloudy in the region, many many days the mountain is not seen. My cousin encouraged us in our plans for the day. She looked out the window and said, "Today the mountain is out." The mountain is always there, of course, but fog can Obscure the view. God's loving presence is always there; God is not absent. The triune God is always with us and at work in every moment. But the fog of anxiety and attachment obscures our view.

Our scripture lesson from Matthew reveals Jesus talking to his disciples about taking up the challenge of following him, for his yolk is easy and his burden is light. However, following Jesus may seem difficult at times. It can seem as if we have been abandoned – that the mountain is hidden behind the fog. In those instances, we can struggle with our nature and allow the monster within to win. Yet when we see an end to a particular struggle, we can look back with a sense of accomplishment and thanksgiving to God. Perhaps we did stumble, perhaps the ‘monster within’ won a few rounds, but in the end if we have put our faith in God we can overcome.

Tackling our personal ‘monster within’ can be a significant challenge to us as we struggle to do what is right. We need to remember that God’s love and forgiveness is so much greater that we can imagine. If we

stumble 99 times and ask forgiveness, God is ready to forgive us for time 100. The children of Israel stumbled and fell numerous times, yet God was always ready to accept them as His children when they asked for forgiveness. But they had to ask. They had to make a conscience decision to put the monster within aside and follow God.

Sometimes the true stumbling block can be our own resistance to forgive ourselves. We can be our own worst enemy. We may be able to see the good in others when they fail, but we can only see our own personal monster. We need to remember that God has forgiven us. We are truly set free when we can learn to forgive ourselves and move on. We need to acknowledge our sinful nature and trust God to continue refining us in our spiritual journey. Even Paul had to forgive himself and continue on his path

to serve God. We are going to stumble – perhaps we are suppose to, because each time we get up, seek forgiveness from God and ourselves and move on we become stronger, wiser and closer to God.

A pastor once told me that we travel through life with our low-beam lights on. If God would allow us to turn on the high-beams, I'm guessing we would turn around and choose an easier path. But once we have come down the mountain and God allows us to see the path we had just overcome, we can feel the additional strength, courage and boldness that come with experiencing some difficult paths. The 'monster within' still wins on occasion, but what we do when we hit bottom is what will determine the outcome of our journey. Do we get up or do we stay down? Does the 'monster within' take over or do we turn back to God and keep going? Do we continue to wallow in misery or do

we get up and accept the yolk of kindness and forgiveness?  
God loves us where we are not where we think we ought to  
be to deserve that love. God is our partner in our journey,  
ready to provide support and comfort when the path gets  
rocky. We need to trust Him. We need to truly believe that  
no matter what trials we face, God is with us. God's grace  
cannot be earned – it is a gift given to us without price.  
God's grace is powerful enough to help us conquer our  
'monster within' and continue perfecting our faith in God.  
Amen.