

Paul's concern for his kin (Romans 9:1-5)

This text is a painful confession.

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Whatever else this week's complicated Romans text is, it is a painful confession from the Apostle Paul—one that people in ministry may to some degree relate to. Whether it's a brother or sister in the church or a blood relative, most of us in ministry will experience a time when, though our work is vibrant and bearing fruit, people close to us reject it—reject what we understand as God's gracious invitation in Christ Jesus.

When Paul admits that he would exchange his own salvation for the Jews, I see an extension of the Spirit of God's mothering character and a facet of God's covenant of love. My mother often said that she would give her life's blood for her children. I know other mothers who would do the same, without hesitation.

Of course, that doesn't mean that the children see things the same way, that they appreciate the mother's devotion on her terms. This is a crushing truth, and one that Paul acknowledges. For as much as he cares for "my own people, my kindred according to the flesh," it is not his role to secure salvation for them. As the senior saints in my tradition would say, "Every tub must stand on their own bottom."

When I was 11, I publicly accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior and was baptized at my family's longtime church. But it wasn't until I was in my mid-20s that I joined a congregation on my own. I decided I needed to grow in my own relationship with God. This tub had to find her own standing.

I was 31 when my mother passed away, and it was only then that I realized just how much Jesus was directly and personally mine. He was my rock in that troubled time. Through the tumult of crushing grief, I experienced the joy of gratitude: my most precious inheritance from my mother was her introduction to the Lord.

My husband and I are now raising our own two sons. We pray that they too will walk in the fullness of their inheritance in Christ, "who is over all, God blessed forever."