Kelsey and I have recently started running together. Our goal right now is to run four times a week, right after we get home from work. We are trying to keep up this habit, even though it can really be a struggle. Some days, we are ready to go, full of energy and looking forward to complete another run. Then there are other days, maybe the weather isn’t as nice as we wish it was or we’re just really tired from work, when we really would rather stay inside or go get Cook-Out instead of going for a run.

Even though we know that the run would be better for us, we honestly would like to go for a run, we struggle over whether or not we should lace up our shoes and head out the door. We know there is always tomorrow. We can try and reason our way out of skipping the run, but in the end, we know that it is a better idea to do the run. It is an inner struggle that we live with as we try and start this habit. It is a tension that we have to try and deal with.

We all live in tension. Wanting to do what is right, yet many times falling short. It is an inner struggle of knowing what is good, doing our best to accomplish that but never quite getting it right. This is something that we all live with as humans in a sinful world. It is a daily struggle of knowing what is right, knowing the commands of God, yet never being able to fulfill those commands. We know we have fallen short, while at the same time we know we want to do good.

But we also know that our trying will never help us accomplish the perfection that we are called to. No matter how bad we really want to do what is right, we will continually fall short. We will continually be reminded of our sinful condition and our need for deliverance. Our need for something that we can never do on our own. It is the tension of knowing that we are called to live lives that are in line with God’s commandments, yet also knowing that on our we will never be able to live up to that calling.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul is speaking directly to this tension that we live in, wanting to do good but never being able to live up to that. In Romans 7:15, Paul gets right to the point saying, “For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” He is expressing his desire to do what is right, to follow the commands of God and His law, yet Paul continues to fall short. This is more than just an outward failure to do what is right. Paul is expressing his complete inability to even come close to do what God has called him to do. Paul is describing the sinful condition that we all suffer from.

We can relate to this on many different levels in our own lives. The struggle of whether or not to go on a run that Kelsey and I have is a simple example but it takes place to varying degrees in all of our lives. We all have many different roles that we live in, different vocations, whether they be parent, spouse, sibling, child, coworker, boss, whatever it may be we are called to “be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect” to “love your neighbor as yourself” to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” We are called to live out the commands of God that are ultimately too much for us to handle. We may want to do what is good, but we continually fall short, we do the very thing that we hate.

It’s just easier for me to put my own wants and desires before those of my family and friends. It’s easier for me to put my own decision making abilities before the commands of our heavenly Father. I may be called to serve Him above all things and to love my neighbor as myself, but too often I end up looking after my own interests. And many times it isn’t even out of any malicious intent. I all want to do what is right, but it is just easier to slide into my own desires, rather than serving others.

You want to get off the couch to help your spouse, but you’ve had a long day so you let them take care of things. You want to make some phone calls and see how family and friends are doing, but it’s just as easy to look on Facebook. You know you should keep up with school work, but it’s easy to just think, “What’s the point.” You really would like to read your Bible more, but the day just gets too busy and you run out of time.

Paul says it perfectly, “I do not do what I want…” We truly do desire to do what is right, but we constantly fail and as Paul says, “I do not understand my own actions.” It is a constant struggle, a constant tension that we all live with. In the midst of this tension, right in the middle of our struggle, we are reminded of our sinfulness. We end up looking our failure right in the face and we see how sinful we are. For Paul continues in verse 17, “So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”

As Christians, we know that our failures are a result of sin. We know that beginning with Adam and Eve, sin has entered the world, ruining God’s perfect creation and breaking that perfect relationship they had with the Father. Because of that sin, humanity now lives in this tension of wanting to do good, but continually failing. And Paul names his failure perfectly. It is the sin that dwells, lives, within us as humans that is the cause of our failures.

He continues in verse 18, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” There is a very harsh reality to this verse. Paul doesn’t beat around the bush at all by saying that nothing good at all is in us. Our very flesh is sinful. And we see this reality in our everyday lives. Everywhere in our world we see the effects of sin. We live in the daily struggle to follow the commands of God, yet our sin pulls us away.

Paul points to the reality that *on our own*, we do not have the ability to do what is right. On our own we will continually fall short of the servant life we are called to lead. This verse cuts right to the heart, showing us who we really are on our own. Showing us our need for a Savior.

When we come face to face with our failures and complete inability to do what is right we see our need for the saving grace of our Lord. We see our need for the gracious love of our heavenly Father. For His love is greater than our failures. His love has conquered our sin. So, living in this tension, we know that all we can do is come before the cross where our Lord shed His blood for us.

Once again Paul puts this tension to words perfectly. In the midst of our sin, when we feel like we are at our wits end, like we can’t live in this tension anymore, always coming up short and never living as the perfect Christian is called to live, we cry out to our Father in prayer and confession, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Our very flesh is sinful, that sin in our flesh leads to death. We know that on our own we will die in this sin, so we call out to God. Admitting our sinfulness and inability to live in this tension on our own.

As we come before God, in our desperation and need for what only He can give us, we fall before Him and He answers. He hears our prayer of confession, our cry for His mercy and grace and He generously pours out His love upon us. Now we no longer look upon our own failures and shortcomings. It is no longer about what we can’t do, instead it is about what our God has already done for us. Now we cry out, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

We have seen what our Savior has done for us. We now look to the love of the Father. The sacrifice that won us peace and forgiveness, points us to the love that is given to us. Our heavenly Father knows that we cannot live this life on our own. He knows that we will continually fall short, no matter how bad we may want to do good, so He sent His Son into this world to do what we could never do. Our Lord lived the perfect life, becoming the perfect, sinless life, becoming the perfect sacrifice for our imperfections and failures.

Now that our Lord, Jesus Christ, has died on the cross for our sins, we receive the free gift of our Savior’s forgiveness. The grace and love of Jesus is now our own. We are now clean before our heavenly Father. Though we still sin, though we still come up short, our Father sees us as holy for the sake of Jesus Christ.

We still live in the tension, coming up short, yet being forgiven. We still struggle with our sin, but we know that our Lord has conquered our sin. We can now come face to face with our loving Savior, who has defeated sin, death, and the devil on the cross. He has claimed us as His own and by His blood we are healed. We are wrapped in the loving arms of our Father, who comforts us with His perfect grace. Because of what our Savior has done for us we cry out, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”