

ROMANS

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL

SMALL GROUPS

FALL 2021 STUDY

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RESOURCES

FOR STUDYING ROMANS:

A useful resource is the Bible Project videos on Romans. If you're interested in reviewing that material, there are two videos, about 9 minutes each, available at [Watch: Romans | BibleProject™](#).

All quality study Bibles will have helpful notes and introductory material about Romans. If you don't have a study Bible, we recommend *The CEB Study Bible*.

If you want a readable, relatively compact commentary on Romans, check out N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans*. It's available in paperback through The Well or in Kindle format.

A helpful approach to encourage your group to follow would be to ask, after reading each week's Scripture passage and reflection:

1. What stood out to you from today's reading?
2. What did you learn about Jesus in this passage?
3. What did you learn about people/humanity in this passage?
4. What is God asking you to do, be, embrace, change and/or believe from today's reading?

In addition, each week's reading includes specific discussion questions for you to use as they are helpful to your group.

For additional tools and tips for group leaders, visit [Leader Resources - Small Groups at Resurrection \(cor.org\)](#).

IDEAS

FOR GROUP LEADERS:

BE A GOOD COMMUNICATOR. Send reminders for your group a few days before to remind them what chapter you will be discussing at your next meeting. This may also be an opportunity to share prayer requests with the whole group, even those who may have missed a previous week. If meeting online, make sure everyone has the link to join.

SET THE STAGE. While we know that things pop up and may mean that someone will miss a week, we also know that consistency is key to getting the most out of the study and the group time. From the beginning of your class and communications with your group, please encourage people to attend as regularly as possible.

START AND END ON TIME. This honors everyone's time.

BEGIN AND END WITH PRAYER. Recognize that not everyone is comfortable praying out loud.

As the leader you may need to model this for the first week or two but then you can encourage other members of the group to pray as well. We will provide sample prayers and you can choose to use them or create your own. Please choose a way to capture prayer requests so that you can check in on them the following week.

BE INCLUSIVE. The goal is to get everyone participating in group discussion. Some people naturally jump in to answer a question while others may need prompting. Work hard to include everyone.

CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT. Authenticity grows out of feeling safe. As the leader please be aware of creating an environment where people feel free to share their opinions and ask their questions. It helps to have that conversation at your first meeting.

WEEK 1

ROMANS 1-3

SERMON: We're ALL in Big Trouble

MEMORY VERSE: Romans 3:23

STUDY GUIDE SCRIPTURE: Romans 3:23-28

²³All have sinned and fall short of God's glory, ²⁴but all are treated as righteous freely by his grace because of a ransom that was paid by Christ Jesus. ²⁵Through his faithfulness, God displayed Jesus as the place of sacrifice where mercy is found by means of his blood. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness in passing over sins that happened before, ²⁶during the time of God's patient tolerance. He also did this to demonstrate that he is righteous in the present time, and to treat the one who has faith in Jesus as righteous.

²⁷What happens to our bragging? It's thrown out. With which law? With what we have accomplished under the Law? ²⁸No, not at all, but through the law of faith. We consider that a person is treated as righteous by faith, apart from what is accomplished under the Law.



REFLECTION:

by Matt Bisel, Adult Discipleship Lead Director

I consider myself a super-navigator. In my humble opinion, it is not an overstatement to say I always make it to my destination on time. I don't get turned around, stuck in traffic, lost, or distracted. So, as I headed west to Dodge City on I-70 recently on my way to a mid-week funeral, I did so confident in my ability to make it to where I was going. However, I was fully absorbed in a worship planning call, and about 100 miles outside of Dodge City the paved road came to an end. I had missed a turn and fallen short of my destination. To make a long story short, it was unfortunate that there had been heavy rain earlier that morning; it was fortunate that my 4-Runner has 4-wheel-drive. I managed to make it on time to the funeral. But I felt frazzled, and my car was a muddy mess, evidence that I had clearly lost my way.

This was Paul's observation as he wrote to the Romans: "all have sinned and fall short of God's glory." The muddy messes of the

world and our personal lives are easy enough to see. The morning news feed, which really reflects the nature within each one of us, makes it clear that we all fall short of any kind of divine glory. We are all in this mess together and no measure of right-living will make us immune. But does that mean we are all hopelessly lost? No.

Paul said God is up to something, a singular plan that makes things right again. It gets us back on track and in relationship with God. God's plan is Jesus! Where we fall short, Christ fills the gap. When we put our faith in Jesus, recognizing his grace and love for us, we begin to see that the road we are on is a well-worn one. We begin to realize that the only reason we can make it down this road at all, through the valleys, over the mountain tops and all life's twists and turns, is because Christ has gone before us, making the way. Though our journeys may differ in detail, because of God's grace through Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, we will all make it to the places God is calling us to be, being transformed along the way.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

- *Read Romans 3:23-28 again. What does this passage say about Jesus? What does this passage say about us? What does it say about the relationship between us and God?*
- *How are we to live our lives in response to the ransom paid by Christ on our behalf? How does that differ from "right-living?"*
- *In verses 27 & 28, what do you think Paul means by "law of faith?"*
- *Personal Reflection/Confession: Are there ways in which you have fallen short in loving God and those around you?*

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, thank you that your grace and love never leaves us hopelessly stuck in the muddy messes we make in life. Thank you for your mercy and faithfulness in giving yourself to offer us life. Amen.

WEEK 2

ROMANS 4-6

SERMON: Accepting a Very Expensive Gift

MEMORY VERSE: Romans 5:8

STUDY GUIDE SCRIPTURE: Romans 5:1-10

¹Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness [or through faith], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand through him, and we boast in the hope of God's glory.

³But not only that! We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, ⁴endurance produces character, and character produces hope. ⁵This hope doesn't put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

⁶While we were still weak, at the right moment, Christ died for ungodly people. ⁷It isn't often that someone will die for a righteous person, though maybe someone might dare to die for a good person. ⁸But God shows his love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us. ⁹So, now that we have been made righteous by his blood, we can be even more certain that we will be saved from God's wrath through him. ¹⁰If we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son while we were still enemies, now that we have been reconciled, how much more certain is it that we will be saved by his life?



REFLECTION:

by Jeff Kirby, Connection & Care Pastor, Leawood

In our text this week Paul laid out the saving benefits of the new relationship with God which he had portrayed in the first chapters of the letter. These benefits begin with "peace with God" (5:1). That gift of peace results in transformed character shaping our lives (5:2-4), with character ultimately leading to hope. As we live in peace and hope, the love of God pours out into our hearts, filled with God's presence in the Holy Spirit (5:5).

Paul had set the stage in chapter 4 for these wonderful benefits by highlighting Abraham's remarkable faith. All three of the world's main

monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) honor and celebrate Father Abraham as the father of all who believe, and as their founding patriarch. Paul quoted Genesis 15:6 ("Abraham had faith in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness") as the same principle of faith that applied to his Gentile converts (and applies to Christ-followers today). When we hear the gospel message and let it move us to put our trust, to exercise faith in God's grace rather than trusting in our own goodness, God welcomes us into a new relationship with God. This new relationship has the transforming power that produces the benefits Paul described in our passage for this week.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

- *Why do you think Paul chose Abraham to hold up as the great historical example as faith? What did he see in Genesis 15:6 that he believed applied to all who exercised faith in Christ?*
- *In two key verses in Romans Paul used a phrase that began with "But...":*
 - "But now" (Romans 3:21)
 - "But God" (Romans 5:8)
- *What do these verses teach us about how God graciously took the initiative to bring us into a relationship with Himself?*
- *How can we experience God pouring His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit? What actions, attitudes or beliefs might help us to experience this? What can you share with others about this experience in your life?*

PRAYER:

God of love and grace, you do not offer me forgiveness as an abstract, impersonal transaction. You pour your love out into my heart and life, and I offer you my praise and gratitude for that amazing gift. Amen.

WEEK 3

ROMANS 7-8

SERMON: No One and Nothing!

MEMORY VERSE: Romans 8:38a

STUDY GUIDE SCRIPTURE: Romans 8:31-32, 35-39

³¹ So what are we going to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He didn't spare his own Son but gave him up for us all. Won't he also freely give us all things with him?

³⁵ Who will separate us from Christ's love? Will we be separated by trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, We are being put to death all day long for your sake.

We are treated like sheep for slaughter. [Psalm 44:22]

³⁷ But in all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us. ³⁸ I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers ³⁹ or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.



REFLECTION:

by Anne Williams, Downtown Location Pastor

Many of us spend much of our spiritual lives trying to connect with a God who can sometimes feel abstract, mysterious, or nebulous. Although God created us, made us in God's image, connecting with a God we can't see in the flesh can be tricky. We look for signs, ask for guidance, and seek assurance. We question or doubt our faithfulness when we don't receive what we are looking for. Yet God's promise is that God is always with us and will never stop seeking connection with us.

Why, then, do we have trouble experiencing God's presence? It's up to us to believe the promise and commit to not let any of life's complications sever the vine from the branches (cf. John 15:1-8). It's our work to identify and dismantle the inner structures that make us question that connection, so that we can accept and bask in God's loving presence.

Paul brain-dumped a long list of things that he personally must have thought could threaten his or his audience's connection with God. But his list isn't comprehensive—we could add to it. We often read this passage at funerals as a reminder that no sickness, no bodily ailment, no untimely death can keep any of us from God's eternal love. Sometimes the biggest barriers are the outward forces of the world like the ones Paul, who wrote this passage, faced. But sometimes they are silent hidden menaces like shame, fear, guilt, trauma, bitterness, a hardened heart, one-upping, scarcity mindset, negative self talk, perfectionism, rigid rule following, workaholism, chemical dependence, and the desire to earn God's favor. What ideas would you add that might separate you from God's love?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

- *Think of a time you felt abandoned by God. Why do you think you felt that way?*
- *What keeps us from simply receiving God's love for us? Why is it difficult for us to accept that gift?*
- *What habit(s) can you build into your spiritual life to grow your confidence that nothing has more power than Christ's love?*

PRAYER:

God, thank you for faithfully seeking us out, drawing us near, and never leaving our side. We confess we let certain elements of life separate us from you. Help us to simply receive your love, trust our connection with you, and block out any force that threatens our relationship with you. We love you and we are grateful that you are so powerful that nothing can separate us from your love. Amen.

WEEK 4

ROMANS 9–11

SERMON: Predestination and Olive Branches

MEMORY VERSE: Romans 10:9

STUDY GUIDE SCRIPTURE: Romans 10:9-17

⁹ Because if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord" and in your heart you have faith that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ Trusting with the heart leads to righteousness, and confessing with the mouth leads to salvation. ¹¹ The scripture says, All who have faith in him won't be put to shame [Isaiah 28:16]. ¹² There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all, who gives richly to all who call on him. ¹³ All who call on the Lord's name will be saved [Joel 2:32].

¹⁴ So how can they call on someone they don't have faith in? And how can they have faith in someone they haven't heard of? And how can they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the good news [Isaiah 52:7; Nahum 1:15].

¹⁶ But everyone hasn't obeyed the good news. As Isaiah says, Lord, who has had faith in our message? [Isaiah 53:1]. ¹⁷ So, faith comes from listening, but it's listening by means of Christ's message.



REFLECTION:

by Darrell Holtz, Curriculum Writer, Adult Discipleship

Too often, people read Romans 9 – 11 as an abstract essay on the spiritual fate of Jewish people. But there was nothing abstract about this for Paul. He began, "I have great sadness and constant pain in my heart. I wish I could be cursed, cut off from Christ if it helped my brothers and sisters, who are my flesh-and-blood relatives" (Romans 9:2-3). The contrast between his jubilant conclusion in Romans 8:31-39 and the painful, uncertain tone of these chapters is striking. He tried out various reasons in these chapters, and identified shifting meanings of the term "Israel" in the Hebrew Scriptures (which makes his exact point in "all Israel will be saved" in Romans 11:26 much less clear cut than some preachers admit). Like the Old Testament book of Job, he ended by trusting God's goodness to resolve a question he wasn't sure he knew how to answer: "God's riches, wisdom, and knowledge are so deep! They are as mysterious as his judgments, and they are as hard to track as his paths!" (Romans 11:33).

But he was still sure of the gospel's truth: Jesus is the ultimate source of salvation for all people of every race and origin. "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all," said verse 12. That mattered for the Roman Christians. We'll see in chapters 14 and 15 that there was some tension between Christians with Hebrew and Gentile backgrounds. In Romans 2:14-16, Paul recognized that Gentiles could respond to God without sharing his spiritual heritage or his exact religious language. Here, in verse 13, he extended the same hope to his Hebrew relatives, quoting the Old Testament prophet Joel to the effect that "all who call on the Lord's [Yahweh's] name will be saved."

And he was sure that he (and all Christ followers) needed to keep sharing the good news. "How can they hear without a preacher?" he asked (verse 14). True, "everyone hasn't obeyed the good news" (verse 16). But that was no reason to stop sharing. Paul, "apostle to the Gentiles," knew firsthand that not every Gentile accepted the gospel message. He also knew his God had persistently worked with his Jewish ancestors through one apostasy after another, as shown in the Hebrew Scriptures' big story. If God didn't give up despite disappointment with human rejection, why should Paul? Why should we?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

- *Are there people you care about who do not share your faith in Jesus? If so, how does that affect their ways of relating to you and your ways of relating to them?*
- *Did you know and accept the good news from your earliest memories? If so, what people helped to deepen your understanding and commitment to it? If not, who were "those who announced the good news" to you, and what made their sharing effective in reaching you?*
- *Sometimes talk of sharing the good news brings up mental images of standing on a street corner handing out tracts, or going door-to-door talking to total strangers. Share with one another other more natural ways in which others have shared the good news with you or you with others.*

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, so many times in history, and even in our histories, you could have given up on us in despair—but you never did, never have, never will. Weave your good news so deeply into the fabric of who I am that it becomes more and more natural for me to share it with people I care about. Amen.

WEEK 5

ROMANS 12-13

SERMON: Defeating Evil with Good

MEMORY VERSE: Romans 12:21

STUDY GUIDE SCRIPTURE: Romans 12:9-21

⁹ Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil, and hold on to what is good. ¹⁰ Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other. ¹¹ Don't hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord! ¹² Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you're in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of God's people, and welcome strangers into your home. ¹⁴ Bless people who harass you—bless and don't curse them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying. ¹⁶ Consider everyone as equal, and don't think that you're better than anyone else. Instead, associate with people who have no status. Don't think that you're so smart. ¹⁷ Don't pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everyone else believes is good.

¹⁸ If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people. ¹⁹ Don't try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. It is written, Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back, says the Lord [Deuteronomy 32:35]. ²⁰ Instead, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. By doing this, you will pile burning coals of fire upon his head [Proverbs 25:21-22]. ²¹ Don't be defeated by evil, but defeat evil with good.



REFLECTION:

by Ellie Wells, Adult Discipleship Intern

In this Romans passage, Paul gave us practical, clear steps to loving as Jesus does. Verse 9 summarized this whole passage: "Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil, and hold on to what is good." This genuine love Paul described is not a passive quality that sugarcoats evil, but an active, dynamic quality that opposes evil. This love is a choice to put others before ourselves, to constantly look for the goodness that dwells within them. This love looks like showing

up for family members even when it's messy and hard, as well as welcoming strangers into the chaos of our homes. We can't very well sustain faith in God all by ourselves. It must live, work and grow in a real world of real people.

In verse 15, Paul challenged us to be happy with those who are happy and to cry with those who are crying. Jesus set an example of this in the Gospel of John when he sat with Mary and Martha as they mourned the loss of their brother (and His friend), Lazarus, and Jesus wept (John 11:35). Despite knowing that in a few minutes Lazarus would return to them, Jesus was empathetic to their loss and suffered the pain of it with them. He's not afraid to meet us in the darkest of valleys, and he encouraged us to follow His example. Willingness to empathize with those who are suffering allows each of us to be a visible reminder of Christ's love and humility, and to share the goodness that He provides. By loving even when it's hard, we fight the evil of isolation and pride in order to create space for the love, healing, and goodness of God.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

- *What inner or outer barriers are keeping you from loving genuinely and authentically?*
- *What does it mean to "be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord"? What does that look like for you?*
- *Why do you think Christian community is important for us to see our hearts and behaviors change?*
- *Who do you know who models this description of love and goodness well? Do any aspects of this description of love seem uncomfortable to you? If so, what makes them uncomfortable?*

PRAYER:

God, thank you for being the goodness we can cling to as we face trials and struggle to love genuinely and selflessly. Thank you for sending your son, Jesus, to be the perfect example of how to live a life of goodness. Please strengthen us to live at peace with everyone we encounter and love more authentically every day. Amen.

WEEK 6

ROMANS 14–16

SERMON: Republicans, Democrats and Jesus

MEMORY VERSE: Romans 14:19

STUDY GUIDE SCRIPTURE: Romans 14:10-19

¹⁰ But why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you look down on your brother or sister? We all will stand in front of the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ Because it is written,

As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me,
and every tongue will give praise to God [Isaiah 45:23]

¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

¹³ So stop judging each other. Instead, this is what you should decide: never put a stumbling block or obstacle in the way of your brother or sister. ¹⁴ I know and I'm convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is wrong to eat in itself. But if someone thinks something is wrong to eat, it becomes wrong for that person. ¹⁵ If your brother or sister is upset by your food, you are no longer walking in love. Don't let your food destroy someone for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ And don't let something you consider to be good be criticized as wrong. ¹⁷ God's kingdom isn't about eating food and drinking but about righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever serves Christ this way pleases God and gets human approval.

¹⁹ So let's strive for the things that bring peace and the things that build each other up.



REFLECTION:

by Justin Schoolcraft, Small Groups & Young Adult Director, Leawood

One Sunday during my college years, I found myself in an uncomfortable situation at a country church in Kentucky. This church invited me to fill in for their pastor who was on vacation. It turned out this church was very charismatic—people strolling through aisles, spontaneous shouting, King James Version only. So imagine the looks on their faces when I preached a sermon that was academic, historically researched, and, well...dry. They did not like my scholarly take, and I was cocky enough that I wanted to prove that my refined style was superior to their—"free-spirited"

style. I used my sermon as a tool to prove my own superiority...and based on their grimaces, it did not go well.

In this week's reading, Paul urged the Romans not to use the freedom God had given them as a means of putting others down. It was a struggle for the Romans, and it's a struggle for us today. When faced with the freedom of the Gospel, many of us turn our attention to how to apply that message to the everyday details of life: political preferences, personal practices, and rules and regulations. Focusing on the details of our everyday lives is not bad—IF it doesn't choke out the Gospel truth of radical love for our neighbors in response to God's radical love for us. If we insult our neighbors because we think our opinions are superior, we miss the point: none of us deserve God's love in the first place! That's exactly what the congregation in Rome battled when petty debates divided the church. Paul writes that "we" are no better than "them" – yet isn't it remarkable how easy it is for us to twist the liberating truth of the Gospel into a trump card against others?

At the end of that service in Kentucky, the board chairman approached me with a furrowed brow. My heart started thumping with anxiety. He said, "A few of the board members got together, and we wanted to give you this." It was a check for 250 dollars. "It wasn't what we're used to, but we appreciate what you do." That act of kindness, choosing love over superiority, showed me that he, not I, was the best preacher in the room that day.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

- *Have you ever felt others judging you because of your personal beliefs or practices?*
- *How might our perspective on who we think is better or inferior shift when we realize that none of "deserve" God's love?*
- *Can you share an example of a Christlike person in your life whom you admire, and with whom you completely disagree on certain matters? How do you see Christ in them despite your differences?*

PRAYER:

God of grace, so often we think and act as though your kingdom is about so many things other than "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." Let the message of the gospel, as we've studied it in Romans, keep us laser-focused on how the way you treat us must shape the ways we treat each other. Amen.



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