

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

ROMANS

HOW TO BE IMMORTAL



A PRIMER ON THE IMPOSSIBLE

ROMANS 01/03: **HOW TO BE BOLD**

Have you ever had an experience so big and significant that you felt the need to change something about yourself? I get it. You may be scratching your head, but this is more common than you think. People often cut their hair after a breakup. Some people get really into a hobby like fishing or basketweaving after a career change. Some folks even decide to move to a new city when situations shift. It's normal to try to change something about yourself after experiencing a major change within yourself.

We can see this all over history. Malcolm X serves as a great example. He decided to shed his birth name, Malcolm Little, as an act of civil disobedience. Due to the heart-breaking reality of slavery, he never knew his true African surname. It was stolen from his family. Thus, he added an "X" to his driver's license as an act of activism.

When someone experiences a major change in their life, you can usually notice it right away. Whether it's the way they dress, the way they carry themselves, or just the way they talk, you can see the transformation all over them. However, have you ever experienced a change so massive that you felt the need to change your entire identity — name included? That happened to our friend the Apostle Paul.

Before going on missionary journeys and writing most of the New Testament, Paul went by a different name. His name was Saul. In the early first century, Saul despised the followers of Jesus so much that he wanted them all exterminated like termites. He deeply desired to take every Christian prisoner, torture them, and murder them. Let's just say it like it is: Saul was a terrorist who wanted to see every believer burned alive...or worse.

Everything changed when he met Jesus. While traveling to Damascus, Saul experienced a vision where a radical rabbi he hated, Jesus of Nazareth, appeared to him. Jesus prodded, "Why are you persecuting me?" Seeing a man he assumed to be dead shook him to his core, so he passed out and went blind. After gaining his composure and vision, Saul turned his life over to Christ and decided to go by another name thereafter—Paul (Acts 9:1-17; Acts 13:9).

Eventually, Paul became the greatest apostle, missionary, and minister to ever step foot on earth. He trailblazed the same movement that he tried to terminate. Today, we are

about to embark on a short journey through the book of Romans— Paul’s thesis statement.

Reformer Martin Luther explained that Romans is “the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. We can never read it or ponder over it too much.”¹ The book of Romans is beautiful in its explanation and exploration of the gospel and Jesus. Before we get into the book’s content, though, I want to circle back to the author. The apostle formally known as Saul wrote this book, and that should give us hope. The “purest gospel” was written by a man who was anything but pure. He murdered, tortured, and hurt people before he met Jesus.

You may have done some bad things in your past, but I doubt you have ever murdered Christians, been a terrorist, or committed any of the atrocities that Saul did. However, he ended up becoming a central figure in the early movement of the Church. This fact just goes to show that no one is too broken, too lost, or too far gone for God to do amazing things through their lives. You are never too damaged to be restored. You are never too lost to be found. You are never too bad to be pursued by our Father.

Why do I bring this up? This context makes the opening of Romans cut to the core. Paul, a man who once hated Christ, opened his letter to the Romans with an exclamation about his boldness and adoration for Jesus. It points to two crucial characteristics we should all strive to live out.

READ: Romans 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”

We Should Be Unashamed

Do you know that guy Saul? The one who was killing Christians almost like it was a twisted sport? That is the same man who wrote these words. How amazing is that? He went from hating the gospel to being unashamed of his love for Jesus. Paul begins by boldly proclaiming, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel” (Romans 1:16a). His words

¹ Martin Luther, *Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans*, 1483-1546.

emphasize his unwavering commitment to the gospel message. Yes, the same message that he sought to extinguish. This declaration is a powerful reminder that the truth is the ultimate source of hope and transformation for everyone from every nation. Romans 1:16 calls for believers to stand firm in their faith, unashamed to share the good news even in the face of inevitable ridicule.

Where on earth does this confidence come from, though? Paul continues, “for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). God’s power is the source of his security and exuberance. God’s power can rescue anyone, save anyone, heal anyone, forgive anyone, and set anyone free. There is no room for shame, so we should be completely confident moving forward.

What is the opposite of unashamed? Well, it’s ashamed.

Talk about a complicated little emotion! Shame backs you into a corner, causes you to hide, and forces you to blend into the background. Shame is defined as “a feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong behavior.”² Paul had every reason to feel shame. The guy was a former murderer. However, thanks to the power of God, he could walk in true freedom and confidently say that he was unashamed. He was not unashamed of what he had done but of who had forgiven him for all those sins that inevitably kept him up at night.

You do not need to feel shame because God’s power takes the pressure off you and places it onto Him. He can handle it all. The only logical response is to respond like Paul—be completely unashamed of the message of Jesus. He set you free, so you should be full of faith.

We Should Be Full of Faith

In verse 17, Paul continues by explaining that in the gospel, “the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith” (Romans 1:17a). This statement highlights the central theme of the letter to the Romans—the righteousness that comes to us from God. When you experience salvation, it changes not only your eternal direction but also God’s perspective of you. He transfers His righteousness to you. Thanks to Jesus, He sees you as holy, pure, and righteous.

² Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "shame," accessed August 30, 2023, <https://www.oed.com>.

Through these verses, Paul reminds us that the gospel is not just a message to be believed but a power to be experienced. It brings salvation and divine righteousness to all who trust in Him. It calls for believers to live unashamedly and confidently in the transforming power of the gospel.

Have you ever had a crush on someone? At first, you are nervous around them. Your palms sweat. Your heart races. Your ears burn. You become very aware of the sriracha stain on your shirt. Having a crush makes you self-conscious. However, what happens when you find out your crush likes you back? Suddenly everything changes, and you begin to grow in boldness. You can speak to them, flirt with them, and may even decide to unashamedly ask them out. Where did this new burst of confidence come from? Clarity. You can see clearly, so you have newfound confidence.

How can Paul be so unashamed? He met Jesus. He experienced the power of the gospel. His encounters with Christ brought him clarity that helped him become confident. Ultimately, his faith flourished as a result. When writing Romans, Paul wanted to bring clarity to our theology. He wanted to help new Christ-followers truly understand what they believe and grow in their faith because of it. Because when you truly understand the power of the gospel, faith overflows.

As we continue our journey through Romans, it's my prayer that you encounter newfound clarity within your theology. As you do, your faith will start to flourish like a flower in spring. Your confidence in Christ will help you become confident in every part of life. It plays out like this. It's much easier to face hardship when you understand that God advocates for you (Romans 8:27). It's much easier to fight your battles when you understand that God made you an overcomer (Romans 8:37). It's much easier to walk through confusion when you have complete confidence in Christ (Romans 1:17). This is the gift that the book of Romans offers all of us. Allow Paul's powerful words to bring you clarity, which will ultimately bring you confidence.

TALK IT OUT

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week and the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What's one thing that stood out from today's message?

Q2: Have you ever experienced a major life change that prompted you to make a change? If so, what was the change, and how did it impact you?

Q3: Reflecting on the transformation of the Apostle Paul from a persecutor of Christians to a pastor, what aspects of his story resonate with the idea that no one is too broken for God's transformative power? How does this inspire you personally?

Q4: In Romans 1:16-17, Paul declares his lack of shame in sharing the gospel and emphasizes the power of God for salvation. How can we apply this to our lives, especially when sharing our faith?

Q5: Can you share a personal experience when your faith was strengthened or you gained clarity in your beliefs, leading to increased confidence in Christ?

Q6: How do you think clarity in your theology can impact your overall confidence in facing life's challenges and uncertainties?

Application: What's one way you can boldly live out your faith this week?

READING PLAN

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

Romans 1

Romans 2:1-17

Romans 2:18-29

Romans 3

Romans 4

Romans 5:1-11

Romans 5:12-21

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

ROMANS 02/03: **HOW TO BE FREE**

When I was 15, I purchased a little Ford truck that cost less than an iPhone 13. However cheap and rusty, I felt like a new man behind the wheel. I saw myself taking road trips, going on moderately-priced dates, and driving down winding backroads with my windows down while listening to country music on the radio. I don't even like country music. However, I quickly learned that all my fantasies were fictional.

With a car came a strict curfew, inflicted not just by my mother but by the government. I had to be home before 9:00 PM sharp every night. This was the exact opposite of the freedom I imagined, so I foolishly rebelled. When I was not the one driving, my curfew was 11:30, but with my brand-new (decades-old) car, I had to be home before the nightly news even came on.

One Saturday night, I checked my phone and saw that I was already 20 minutes past curfew. Did I immediately call my mother, hop in my car, and responsibly drive home? Nope. I thought, "Well, I've already broken curfew, so I might as well get the most out of it. Breaking the law by 20 minutes or 2 hours is still breaking the law. My mom will be furious regardless." Isn't it silly how awful my thinking was? One hour passed, and I was still there. Two hours passed; I was sticking it out. Nearly three hours and twelve phone calls passed, and I finally jumped in my car to drive home in time for my 11:30 curfew.

While driving home, I saw a number I didn't recognize pop up on my phone. I picked it up as my heart skipped a beat. It was the police. Turns out my mother wasn't merely mad; she was legitimately worried. Immediately, I felt like a bag of garbage. I explained to them that I was on my way home and very sorry. (Honestly, a small part of me hoped they'd arrest me to delay my exchange with my mom.) After sitting in the driveway wallowing in guilt for five minutes, I went inside to confront my sweet mother. When I walked into the house, she didn't yell. She didn't reprimand me. She didn't set my car on fire. She just said, "I am happy you're home. I was worried sick." Then she went to bed.

I didn't even want to see my mother for weeks after that. I wasn't angry; I was ashamed. My guilt was too strong. I just wanted to withdraw and hide. That is what sin almost always does—it sends us into hiding. We see this play out in the first sin in

human history. As we flip forward in Romans, the Apostle Paul takes us back to the Garden of Eden.

READ: Romans 5:12-17

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone’s account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!”

Sin freezes you.

Romans teaches that Jesus came to earth to restore our relationship with God and his people (Romans 5:12-17). After committing the first sin in the Garden, Adam and Eve tried to hide. Who were they hiding from? God. Talk about foolishness. Of course, God knew where they were, but that didn’t stop Him from calling out, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:8). This wasn’t an interrogation; it was an invitation. God was inviting them to come out of hiding. This is always how God responds to us in our sin. He says, “I know you feel guilty, I know you messed up, but I want to restore our relationship.” Even though they experienced punishment, God also gave them a promise. He promised to make everything right.

As we peer back to the first few pages of the Bible, we see God set a plan into motion. Eyes locked on the Devil, God proclaimed the first prophecy in Scripture: “He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15b). This prophecy speaks of Jesus, the perfect man who will make everything right in the end. Paul purposely used the parallel of Adam and Eve in the Garden to Jesus at Calvary. He wanted us to see that sin entered the world through one man, but the power of sin was also destroyed

by another man. Paul calls Him “the last Adam.” All the brokenness that came into our world through Adam will be put back together by Jesus.

Jesus Frees You

Talk about good news. There is no condemnation for you or me. Simply put, that means God says you’re set free. Christians are set free from sin, guilt, shame, and hiding. Yes, your sin makes you want to freeze, but God invites you to snap out of your shock and move forward. Whenever you sin, your natural instinct is to freeze, hide, or disappear. Shame does that to you. That sneaky snake in the Garden hatched the same plan he uses today. He wants to snare you toward sin, send you into hiding, and set you up to repeat the cycle.

The devil wants you to keep every sin a secret, but Jesus wants you to feel the freedom of confession. The enemy wants your shame to put you in isolation, but God wants to bring you transformation. Satan desires to see you frozen, but don’t forget that you were chosen by God.

After Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, God punished them, but He also gave them a promise. He promised to make everything right. The same can be said for us. When we sin, God may punish us to help refine us, but He also promises to make everything right in the end. So don’t let shame play its tricks on you. Instead, remember that God promises to make everything right.

Do you see the captivating contrast of these two men? Adam sinned. Jesus saved. Adam froze. Jesus freed. Adam brought death. Jesus brought life. Paul taught, “For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:15). Thanks to Jesus, God has removed the chains that lead to shame, discontentment, and separation. Jesus has set you free—helping you go from frozen to free. When humans sinned in the Garden, they were separated from God. Christ brought things full circle. When Jesus broke out of the Garden Tomb, we were reunited with our Heavenly Father.

Where there once was shame, Jesus provides forgiveness. Where there was once hiding, Jesus gives acceptance. Where there was once death, Jesus gives life. Where

there was a disconnection from God, Jesus broke down the wall between you and God. Through the gift of the gospel, you can be free. Jesus moved you from captivity into liberty. Live in liberty.

TALK IT OUT

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week and the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What's one thing that stood out from today's message?

Q2: Can you tell a story about a time you thought something would give you more freedom but it actually led to more responsibility?

Q3: Reflecting on the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, can you relate to the instinct to hide or freeze when facing the consequences of your actions? How does God's response to Adam and Eve's sin provide insight into His character?

Q4: In Romans 5:12-17, the comparison between Adam and Jesus is highlighted, with Adam representing sin and death and Jesus representing life. How does this understanding impact your view of sin and salvation?

Q5: What words come to mind when you think of forgiveness? What does it have to do with freedom?

Q6: Reflect on moving from being "frozen" in shame to experiencing the freedom that Christ offers. How can you apply this understanding to your life and encourage others to do the same?

READING PLAN

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

Romans 6

Romans 7

Romans 8:1-17

Romans 8:18-39

Romans 9

Romans 10

Romans 11

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

ROMANS 03/03: **HOW TO BE IMMORTAL**

Imagine the perfect road trip. You snag some snacks from the grocery store, construct a flawless playlist, map out all your stops, and gather a group of friends to share the open road with. With Rascal Flats singing something about life being a highway in the background, you merge onto the interstate full of optimism. Your hometown disappears in the distance, trees pass like green blurs, and you enter an unfamiliar landscape. Everything is going perfectly.

Have you noticed that each person has a specific role on a road trip? The person in the driver's seat is in charge of, well, driving. The friend in the backseat is in charge of telling stories and not giving directions because backseat driving is the worst. And, in modern times, the person in the passenger seat is usually the DJ. Interestingly, I'm from an era when that wasn't always their only job. When I was a child, the passenger seat was reserved for a family member holding a map the size of a twin mattress.

Smartphones have made road trips so much easier, haven't they? However, they didn't exist until I turned 13. Before then, we used a map for road trips. How wild is that? Without it, we'd be lost, driving aimlessly without reaching our destination. Much like early 2000s road trips, we all need a roadmap in life, a guide to help us navigate our journey. This is where the book of Romans comes into play.

Now, let's take a step back in history. The Apostle Paul, a man who once relentlessly persecuted Christians, later became one of the most significant figures in spreading the message of Christ. His journey led him to Rome, the heart of an empire renowned for its elaborate road systems.

"All roads lead to Rome." This famous saying is more than a figure of speech. The Romans were pioneers in civil engineering and construction. They understood the importance of well-structured pathways for trade, military, and communication. Without the Romans, we might not be taking road trips at all. These roads, built robustly and strategically, connected vast regions of the empire, facilitating the spread of ideas, cultures, and—yes—even the gospel. Many scholars suggest that the rapid advancement of Christianity was heavily influenced by the Roman road systems, which allowed much easier missionary movement for the first time in history.

But here's the connection. Just as physical roads led people to Rome in Paul's day, the spiritual road, as laid out in Paul's letter to the Romans, leads us to salvation. Let's walk through this journey.

Like any journey, the Romans Road to salvation consists of several important steps. Think of this as the beginning of your journey, like your driveway or garage. Where do you start? You start by acknowledging your need for a change.

1. We Sinned

“For the wages of sin is death...” - Romans 6:23a

The first step on the Romans Road to salvation is to recognize our sin. Just as a road-tripper may realize they've gotten themselves lost, we need to acknowledge that we've gone astray from God's path. In the context of our spiritual journey, sin is the wrong turn that detours us from our destination—God's purpose for our lives. Sin separates us from God, which leads to spiritual death and, ultimately, eternal separation from Him. We are lost, and we need to find a way home.

Paul explains that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). All of us have been broken by the sinfulness of the world, and it has caused a chasm between us and God. Why is that? God is perfect, holy, pure, and just. If we want to be in union with Him, we need to be the same. However, that is not possible in our power.

Romans 6:23 stings a little, doesn't it? The sins you wrestle with, have committed, and will commit are spiritual assassins. They will ultimately kill you in the end. Romans is unapologetic in its message. Sin doesn't just hurt us—it kills us. It leads to death. Whether it's a lie, pride, greed, selfishness, hatred, immorality, or idolatry, sin seeks to destroy you. God, being a good Father, does not want that for His children. We were on the road to destruction, but God has made a way to escape. He offered an exit lane toward eternal life. That is found in the sacrifice of Jesus.

2. Jesus Saves

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” - Romans 6:23

What is God's gift to us? He gives us eternal life. God has made a way for us all to experience everlasting bliss and immortality. Jesus changes everything. God made a way to escape death. Christ took the death you deserved when He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins (Romans 6:23). There is no detour, shortcut, or alternate route. Our salvation rests solely in Jesus's sacrificial love. Jesus knew we'd fail on our own, so He made us failure-proof on the cross. He won. He defeated sin and death on your behalf.

Thanks to Jesus, death is not the end. Rather, it's the beginning of eternity. Immortality is a possibility. You leave behind a life full of problems, pain, car trouble, confusion, suffering, and humidity to be united with God in an afterlife full of joy, glory, and rejoicing. Through the power of Jesus, your last breath on earth leads to your first shout of praise in Heaven. That is the power of salvation. We can experience peace in all distress—even in death.

3. We Trust

"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."
- Romans 10:9-10

Jesus did all the work. All we need to do is put our trust in Him. Paul taught that we need to "call on His name" and "believe in Him," and we will be saved. We put our faith in Him, believing He died for our sins and that God raised Him from the dead. While that process unfolds in your mind, the Holy Spirit does a supernatural work within your heart. God begins to rewire you, transform you, and change you from the inside out. This isn't a temporary detour but a permanent change of direction, a divine transformation. We are not simply patched up and put back on the road; we are made completely new when Jesus saves us.

His desires will become your desires. Your character will begin to reflect Christ's. You will begin to hate what breaks His heart and love the same things He loves. The Holy Spirit will do exactly what His name suggests: help make you holy. Paul also taught that "to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:5). It's not about your good works but God's

goodness. Your trust triggers transformation. Like a road trip that changes us, our journey with God transforms us from the inside out. God credits our faith as righteousness, changing us from broken people into His holy people. This transformation isn't a result of our efforts but a gift from God as we trust Him.

Have you ever truly experienced the life-changing miracle of salvation? As Romans 10:9-10 explains, you simply need to confess, believe, and trust. It's not complicated to experience salvation. That's the process. There is no ten-step program. There is no magical saying. There is no purchase necessary. All you need to do is confess to Jesus through prayer and trust Him.

If you don't know what to pray, it can sound a little like this: "Jesus, I admit that I've made mistakes. I've sinned and need Your forgiveness. I believe You came to earth, died, and rose again to reunite me with God. I declare You as my Lord and commit my life to You. I give You my past, present, and future. Please use my life to bring You glory. I give it to You. Amen."

Just as Rome's physical roads led to the heart of the Roman Empire, the Romans Road of salvation leads us to the heart of God, offering us a way back from our sins and into a relationship with Him. And like any good road trip, it's a journey worth taking. Your destination is transformation. You're heading home to Heaven. When you start your journey with Jesus today, it literally never ends. Thanks to our loving Father, immortality is a possibility.

TALK IT OUT

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week and the lowest part of your week?

Q1: If you had to make the perfect road trip playlist, what songs would you include?

Q2: What's one thing that stood out from today's message?

Q3: The first step on the Romans Road to salvation is recognizing our sin. Why can this often be hard for some people to do?

Q4: Can you share a story of how Jesus has changed, helped, or transformed you since salvation?

Q5: Your journey with Jesus never ends because immortality is a possibility. How does the prospect of eternal life with God affect your perspective on your faith journey? How does it influence your daily life and choices?

READING PLAN

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

Romans 12:1-8

Romans 12:9-21

Romans 13

Romans 14

Romans 15:1-13

Romans 15:14-33

Romans 16

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.