



Relentless

a study through

Romans

Grace

RCC
Women's Bible Study
2019 – 2020

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a study through **Romans**

RCC
Women's Bible Study
2019 – 2020

Hope in Action

a study through 1st & 2nd

Peter



Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 1 – The Man and His Message | Romans Chapter 1:1–17

Romans may be the most important letter you will ever read. In it you will discover who you are and where you stand with God. There will be consistent opportunities to consider what God has done *for* you and what God expects *from* you. Paul takes time to explain the basis of the Christian faith without avoiding tough issues or soft-selling the gospel. Instead, Paul skillfully navigates the deep waters of doctrine so that his readers will be anchored in faith.

Romans may also be the most challenging letter you will ever read. Just know that you're in good company. Even the apostle Peter said that Paul's letters contain some things that are hard to understand (see 2 Peter 3:16). With that in mind, here are some tips to help you get the most out of this study.

- **Be patient.** Unrealistic goals can hinder growth. Don't expect to master everything you read in one week. Better to get one or two clear insights than to cram your mind with more details than you can process.
- **Stay curious.** Resist the tendency to skim over familiar verses. God's Word does not change, but *you* do. There will always be something else to see, something more to learn.
- **Be open.** Truth be told, God's Word can make us uncomfortable. When truth gets convicting, we're quick to put up our defenses. Choose from the start to talk honestly with God. Be open and willing to accept God's gracious reproof and correction (see 2 Timothy 3:16–17).
- **Stretch! Think! Pray!** Ask for wisdom. God will never berate you because you don't "get it" (see James 1:5). He freely reveals deep things to us by His Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 2:10–12). Just keep in mind that—while it's important to carefully think it through—we can't rely on logic alone to make sense of the Bible. To know *spiritual* things, we must listen with *spiritual* ears that are tuned in through prayer, obedience, and a yielded will.
- **Commit to see it through.** Do you really need to know your Bible? Only if you intend to grow! Plant yourself, heart and mind, in God's Word and your faith *will* grow. Your life *will* bear fruit. You won't always be aware of it, but your investment in God's Word will bless and benefit not only your life, but the lives of those around you.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what preaching the gospel meant for the apostle Paul.
- Consider how the power of the gospel has changed everything for you.
- Pray for ways and opportunities to share the gospel.

The Letter and the Church

- Written from Corinth in AD 57 toward the end of Paul's third missionary journey.
- Unlike most of the churches he wrote to, Paul did not plant the church in Rome. It may have been started by Roman Jews who heard Peter preach while they were in Jerusalem for Passover (see Acts 2:5,10). As the gospel spread, Gentiles in Rome also became Christians.
- About ten years after the church began, Emperor Claudius ordered all Jews to leave Rome (see Acts 18:2). When they were allowed to return, Jewish believers came back to a church community that was now being led by Gentiles. Cultural differences were bound to create social tensions, and Paul addresses some of these issues in his letter.

The Back Story on Paul

When Paul wrote this letter, he was approaching a new chapter in his life and ministry. Nearly twenty-five years of tireless travel, gospel preaching, and church planting all over the eastern Mediterranean was behind him. Paul could honestly say, "I have fully presented the Good News of Christ from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum" (Romans 15:19 NLT). But Paul had no intention of retiring. People in Spain still needed to hear the gospel, and Paul hoped the church in Rome would partner with him in that mission (see Romans 15:24).

Since Paul had yet to visit Rome, most of the Christians there only knew him by name; but he prayed for this church and wanted to encourage them in their faith. He understood what Jewish and Gentile believers experienced as they tried to live together in Christian harmony. Paul was uniquely suited to reconcile their differences and help them to focus on their common vision of living for Jesus and sharing the gospel with others. This was another reason for his letter, and he surely expected to continue the conversation later on when he visited Rome in person. But first, he needed to deliver famine-relief money collected for believers suffering in Jerusalem (see Romans 15:25). The difficult 2300-mile journey (by land and sea) from Corinth to Jerusalem and on to Rome would take several weeks at least, even with the best conditions.

Circumstances didn't go according to Paul's plan. In Jerusalem, Paul was confronted by an angry mob; a riot broke out and he was arrested. Paul was left to languish in jail while government officials tried to decide what to do with him. Eventually, he exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal his case to Caesar (see Acts 25:11).

After three years, four trials, an assassination plot, a terrifying hurricane at sea, shipwreck, and a life-threatening snakebite, Paul finally arrived in Rome—where he was kept under house arrest for two years. None of this was what Paul had in mind for his visit to Rome, but it didn't hinder his determined purpose. During this time, Paul wrote to his Philippian friends that, "My circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel" (Philippians 1:12 NASB). After all, no one can arrest the Good News of Jesus Christ!

Paul and the Gospel

Read Romans 1:1–17

Paul introduces himself to the church in Rome. After reading these opening verses, what is your impression of Paul and his purpose for writing this letter?

1. Our study theme is *how the gospel changes everything*—so let’s take some time to consider how the gospel changed everything for Paul. In verse 1, what three things does Paul say to describe who he is and what he does?

→I

→I

→I

2. If we could spend one week with Paul, observing him from sunup to sundown, the way he describes himself would come alive for us.

A servant of Christ Jesus. Paul was born into privilege. He had an elite pedigree, a stellar education, and a tireless work ethic that served him well in advancing his career. After his conversion, he was still full of energy and vision, but what had changed and why? Read the verses below for help with your answer.

Acts 22:1–21

Acts 23:11

Philippians 3:4–11

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

“servant” (doúlos) A slave who chose voluntarily to remain in lifetime service to his master (see Deuteronomy 15:16-17).

“apostle” A general term for “one sent”; and a specific term to designate Paul’s credentials as an apostle, hand-picked by the risen Lord Jesus. He was given the same authority/assignment as the Twelve (see Luke 6:13; Acts 1:21-22; Acts 26:15-18).

“set apart” (aphorízo) Pharisees (lit. “separated ones”) took their name from this word. Prior to conversion, Paul’s identity was wrapped up in being an expert in the Law; now his identity was in Christ and his calling to preach the gospel.

3. **Set apart for the gospel.** What gets you out of bed in the morning? An alarm clock? Or a calling? Paul understood what he had been called and sent out to do. He was a servant with a specific assignment from God. What would Paul say got him out of bed in the morning? Use Colossians 1:28–29 for help with your answer.
4. Let's acknowledge the obvious: Paul was an extraordinary man called by God to fulfill a unique role in the church. No one will be filling his shoes. But you have something in common with the apostle Paul. (Wait...what?) Think about it.
- a. Paul was *sent out* to share the gospel. What are we sent out to do?
- Matthew 28:19–20
- 2 Corinthians 5:20
- 1 Peter 3:15
- b. Paul's assignment to share the gospel took him all over the known world. Where does your assignment to share the gospel take you?
- c. We've considered how the gospel changed everything for Paul. What about you? If you were asked to describe yourself (similar to how Paul did in verse 1) what would you say?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

Romans 1:16 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Given the opportunity, how would you share the truth in this verse with someone who needs to hear it?

The Power of the Gospel

Romans 1:1–7

For Paul, even a simple introduction is an opportunity to share the gospel.

1. Consider what these verses tell us about the gospel.
 - a. Who did God use to declare the promise of the gospel? How was it communicated?
 - b. What evidence does Paul cite to show that Jesus fulfilled the promise (prophecy) and is the Son of God?
 - c. What does true faith in the gospel result in?

Romans 1:8–13

Paul expresses why he is longing to visit the church in Rome.

2. How does Paul view the believers in Rome? What does he appreciate about them?
3. How is he praying for them? What does he anticipate will happen when he is able to come visit them in person?
 - a. As the church, we are called to encourage one another. In what ways?

Hebrews 10:23–25

Colossians 3:12–17

- b. Can you give a recent example of when you have personally been encouraged, or were able to encourage another believer? Briefly share how it strengthened you.

Romans 1:14–17

Paul expected his visit to Rome would bring spiritual fruit and further preaching of the gospel.

4. Remember, Paul did not plant the church in Rome, so why would he be under obligation to preach there? He already had a lot on his plate—why take on the additional work? Consider what you read in the following verses to help with your answer.

Acts 26:14–18

1 Corinthians 9:16

5. **I’m not ashamed of the gospel.** In a city like Rome, where gods were a dime-a-dozen and Christians were deemed (at best) a public nuisance and scrutinized for any sign of criminal activity, Paul’s declaration was not a passing comment. It breathed courage and hope into every Christian who heard his words.

- a. In your own words, simply explain how the power of the gospel changed everything *for you*.

“It seems today that it’s open season on Christians. People attack us as intolerant, Bible-thumping bigots. Because we believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, we are dismissed as simple-minded fools.

What are we to do? We should keep praying. We should keep preaching. And we should keep living the Christian life and not compromise our principles.

Don’t be ashamed of the gospel of Christ.”

Greg Laurie

*Harvest Daily Devotion
February 22, 2017*

- b. When are you most eager to share the gospel?

- c. When are you most likely to be unsure or reluctant to share the gospel?



Gospel at a Glance | One way to explain the gospel is called the Romans Road. It goes like this:

- ¹ The Problem: Romans 3:10 – No one is righteous; not even one. Romans 3:23 – All have sinned.
- ² The Cause: Romans 5:12 – Sin entered the world through one man, and death came to all.
- ³ The Consequence: Romans 6:23 – Sin brings death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- ⁴ The Solution: Romans 5:8 – God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. Romans 10:9–10 – Openly confess Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and you will be saved.
- ⁵ The Result: Romans 10:13 – Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
- ⁶ The Peace: Romans 5:1 – Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. Romans 8:1 – There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.
- ⁷ The Confidence: Romans 8:38-39 – Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____



Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 2 – Who Needs the Gospel? | Romans Chapter 1:18–32

Our first session finished on a high note, with Paul saying that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. The good news is that anyone can be saved by putting their faith in Jesus. It really is amazing when you consider that God has given us this life-changing, eternity-altering relationship with Him when, in fact, the only thing we deserve is punishment for our sin. But to fully appreciate and share the good news, we need to acknowledge the bad news.

The church in Rome quickly discovered Paul's capacity to get to the root of a problem and waste no time doing it. Imagine these believers crowded into someone's house, hearing Paul's letter for the first time. They nod and smile as Paul commends them for their faith, blessed to hear that the preacher prays for them. He is anxious to visit, and for their part, they're happy for him to come. Then Paul's words take a serious turn and so does the mood. Listeners swallow hard at Paul's candid portrayal of sin. Some shift uncomfortably. A mother cups hands over her child's ears. Some piously shake their head at the tawdry description of *other* people's sins. With typical candor, Paul speaks directly to them in the next chapter. For now, he is just getting started but his objective is clear: *everyone* needs the gospel.

Icebreaker

"I have good news and bad news." Which would you rather hear first, and why?

Goals for this Session:

- Discover the reason for God's wrath and what that means for our world.
- Consider the consequences of exchanging truth for a lie.
- Pray authentic prayers that embrace the truth and live out the gospel.

What's the Problem?

Read Romans 1:18–32

Paul describes what happens when people willfully suppress the truth. After reading this passage, would you say the human condition has changed much from Paul's day to ours? Why or why not?

Paul takes a closer look at the root cause of rebellion against God.

1. These verses are difficult to read, and we can be sure Paul did not write them casually. Paul was not on a rant against people he didn't like—he was acknowledging our desperate need for the gospel (as stated previously in verse 16). In verse 17, Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4 to make his point that rebellion against God was nothing new and righteous living will never happen apart from a saving faith in God.

- a. *Why doesn't God do something?* In Habakkuk's day, Judah was on the brink of collapse. Israel's long pattern of rebellion was wreaking havoc in society. In Habakkuk 1:2–4, what did the prophet complain about to God?

- b. God's answer must have astounded Habakkuk. Simply put, the situation would get worse before it got better. God's plan to deal with wickedness and make His people righteous went further than the frustrated prophet could see. God would address the sinful rebellion of humanity on a much bigger scale in *His perfect time* (see Habakkuk 2:2–4). In the meantime, God told Habakkuk, you need to trust Me and live by faith. God didn't ignore Habakkuk's complaint, He answered. Ultimately, what was Habakkuk's response? For help with your answer, read Habakkuk 3:2, 17–19.

- c. Now back to Rome, in Paul's day. The world that Roman believers were living in was not so different, but Paul had good news! Jesus Christ came into this world of wickedness to give people a way—the *only* way—out of darkness into light. Paul wasn't ashamed and he didn't water down the reality that God holds every person accountable for their choice. What about now? Is our world much different? Why is the gospel still good news?

John 3:16–21

1 John 1:8–9

2 Corinthians 5:17

Good to Know

Says who? – This was Paul's first direct contact with the church in Rome. They knew of him through Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2; Romans 16:3) but Paul didn't rely on his reputation to persuade them. The weight of his words rested firmly on the foundation of Scripture. In fact, 35% of what Paul wrote in Romans are direct quotes or references to the Old Testament.

2. **The wrath of God.** One of the main ideas in Romans is that God does not tolerate or ignore sin. The wrath of God is not a popular topic, even in some churches. Wrath is a word that conjures up violent images of sinful, human anger—but God’s wrath is not vindictive, impulsive, or out of character with His righteousness and love. Let’s consider what we need to understand about God’s wrath.

- a. There will be a future “day of God’s wrath” when those who don’t repent will be punished and those who have believed will be spared from God’s wrath (see Romans 2:5–10).

But the wrath that Paul is talking about in verse 18 is God’s expressed anger toward unbelief and sin during the present time. What makes God angry? Use verses 18–25 for help and answer in your own words.

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

“**wrath**” (orgé) Divine judgment; God’s settled and just response to the violation of His righteous standard.

“**glorify**” (doxazo) Esteem; give honor to; recognize God for who He is and what He does.

“**suppress**” (katécho) Hold back or hold down; to deliberately silence, withhold, or restrain.

“**debased**” (adokimos) Unworthy; corrupt; degenerate; detestable to God.

- b. Paul used two words to identify what would motivate a person to *suppress* the truth. A basic definition helps to show how one leads to the other and perpetuates a cycle of unbelief. Add your thoughts to the definitions below and give some examples of what this might look like in daily life.

Ungodliness (attitude): Neglect towards, and lack of reverence for, God.

Unrighteousness (actions): Disregarding what is right; doing what is wrong.

- c. As believers, we still have a human inclination to explain away truth that is difficult or that we would rather avoid. What guides and guards us from suppressing truth?

Psalm 119:9–11

Proverbs 4:23–27

2 Timothy 3:16–17

3. In what way does creation reveal something about God's eternal power and divine nature? List some things that are evident about God by observing nature.

a. Can you count the stars? Two thousand years before Paul, God took Abraham outside to look up at the night sky (see Genesis 15:1–6). If you could ask Abraham what an attempt to count stars taught him about God that night, what might his answer be?

b. One thousand years before Paul, David was so inspired by God's genius for detail, beauty, and power in creation that he wrote a song about it (see Psalm 19). Also consider the scriptures below and briefly explain what creation can teach us about God if we will take time to listen, observe, and think.*

Psalm 8:3–4

Psalm 139:3–16

Isaiah 55:8–11

Matthew 6:26–30

c. Nature itself speaks of its Creator. Evidence of God's existence and character in nature (the term for this is general revelation) is all around us. Instead of acknowledging God, what other things do people choose to worship? In what way? Use verses 20–25 for help with your answer.

People will look at something as intricate and amazing as the human body or creation around us and say it all came about randomly. The Bible says, "Only fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 53:1).

Greg Laurie
Harvest Daily Devotion
July 1, 2013

* If you want to look more at what creation reveals about God, read the dialogue in Job 38–41 and Job's final answer: "I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted...I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You. Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:2, 5–6 NASB).

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.
Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge.
Psalm 19:1–2 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Observing God’s creation is good for your soul. When you’re out in nature, where are you likely to feel closest and most drawn to worship God?

What’s the Solution?

Romans 1:24–32

When people fail to acknowledge and obey their Creator, navigating life becomes a search for truth with a broken compass.

1. What repeated phrase describes God’s response toward rebellious individuals who reject truth and persist in sinful living? Read verses 24, 26, and 28 for help with your answer.
 - a. Does this mean that God is passive or disinterested in people who reject Him? Do your best to explain why, or why not.

Consider the following verses for help with your answer.

Isaiah 55:6–7

Luke 19:10

2 Peter 3:9

- b. God does not violate a person’s free will, even if they choose to reject Him. But when people cut themselves off from their Creator and exchange truth for a lie, what do they consign themselves to?

Ezekiel 18:4

John 3:36

2. “Sin is not a trifle—it’s a terror.”¹ How do we define right from wrong? Paul traces what happens when people (as individuals and as a society) reject God and choose their own way instead. In effect, God allows the downward spiral of sin to be its own punishment.

a. **Futile thoughts and foolish hearts** (verses 20–23). When God is removed, humans come up with their own answers and explanations about life. Use a dictionary to define *futile* and *foolish*.

b. **Exchanged the truth of God for a lie** (verses 24–27). Reading this passage in the climate of our culture can be difficult. Not for lack of clarity—but because it *is* clear. Paul ties previous comments on idolatry (rejecting the Creator to seek satisfaction elsewhere) with unrestrained sexual impurity. Homosexuality, Paul says, is a stark depiction of this. Our world, and even some in the church, take issue with this. But the Bible is clear, and the gospel is not silent about calling people to forsake sin.

As society continues to shift the moral and ethical boundaries, we are being pressed to know what we believe and believe what we know. This is a good thing, but speaking the truth is sometimes uncomfortable. What is necessary when we speak truth?

Colossians 4:5–6

1 Peter 3:15–16

2 Timothy 4:1–5

It’s been said that truth without grace is *mean*—and grace without truth is *meaningless*. For you personally, what aspect of speaking truth needs development? In what way?

c. **Debased minds and wicked living** (verses 28–32). If anyone is inclined to think that God finds certain sins more offensive than others, Paul corrects that. God fiercely hates *all* sin. Read these verses several times and note which behaviors are:

Socially acceptable in our culture . . .

Tacitly tolerated and/or practiced by some believers . . .

Easily overcome with a little time and effort . . .

Have affected you personally in some way . . .

Cherished enough for you to say “*no*” to God over . . .

“Sin is a disease that affects the entire human race. Our sinful nature often sides with the devil’s lie instead of God’s truth because we are sinners.

To those involved in this dying world, Satan will come with evil’s undiluted power to deceive, for they have refused the truth which can save them.

They see truth as a lie, and the lie as the truth.”

Billy Graham
©1985 BGEA

¹ James MacDonald, *10 Choices: A Proven Plan to Change Your Life Forever*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2008), p.42.

3. *How the gospel changes everything.* When we spend time thinking, observing, and seriously considering the outcome of living (and dying) guilty before God, the power of the gospel is good news all over again. No wonder Paul declared, “I am not ashamed of the gospel!”
 - a. God’s wrath is incentive to live a holy life. Not because we fear punishment but because we aim to be well pleasing to God (2 Corinthians 5:9). Are you willing to ask God to make you uncomfortable with a particular sin? Why or why not?
 - b. God’s wrath is incentive to share the gospel, knowing that everyone must answer for our response to Jesus. “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord,” Paul wrote, “we persuade others” (2 Corinthians 5:11). Who needs to hear *and see* the gospel lived out from you? Write down one person you will specifically pray for and reach out to this week.



Gospel at a Glance: Righteous Anger | Because God is holy, He hates sin. “Your eyes are too pure to behold evil,” Habakkuk wrote. “You cannot look on wickedness” (Habakkuk 1:13). This is why, when all the sin of the world was transferred onto Jesus during His crucifixion, God the Father turned away (Matthew 27:46). Jesus took the full brunt of God’s righteous anger and judgment that we deserved. Because God is just, there is a penalty for sin. Because God is loving, there is a Savior who died in our place. Do you want to see God’s wrath? Look to the Cross. Do you want to see God’s love? Look to the Cross.

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

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Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 3 – The Gospel vs. Hypocrisy | Romans Chapter 2

If we could go back in time and visit the church in Rome, who would we be sitting with? There would be families and young adults, widows, and aging parents. Some worked a trade (Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers) or in the marketplace but most would have been house slaves and manual laborers. Many were devout Jews and probably more were converted Gentiles.

The church was a network of home fellowships (at least five according to Romans 16) scattered throughout the city. From what Paul mentions in his letter, they dealt with issues that naturally come up when people with differing backgrounds and strong opinions do life together. These faithful believers were known for proclaiming the gospel—and when a church has that kind of influence on the world, the enemy takes notice and stirs trouble wherever he can. So in this chapter, Paul explicitly calls out an attitude that he could personally speak of from past experience. Religious snobbery, he warns, is not something that God will overlook.

Icebreaker (Choose one.)

Growing up, did you go to church regularly? Why, or why not?

Before you accepted the Lord, describe your opinion of Christians and what it was based on.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover why sharing the gospel means practicing what we preach.
- Consider the difference between pleasing God or simply doing business with Him.
- Pray honest prayers that frequently express gratitude and freely extend grace.

Who, Me?

Romans 2:1–16

Paul dismisses the notion of any double-standard with God.

1. What reason does Paul give for rebuking those who pass judgment on others?

- a. When, and in what way, is it right to judge?

- b. When, and in what way, is it wrong to judge?

2. Paul didn't need to be in the same room to know that some who had agreed with his remarks in the first chapter weren't saying "amen" now. *Who does he think he's talking to?* It turns out that Paul was aiming at *self-righteous* people too.

- a. Keep in mind that Paul is talking to a group who would identify as clean living, morally upright people. What did Paul want them to understand?

In what way do Paul's comments line up with what Jesus taught?

Luke 18:9–14

Mark 7:5–9

- b. It's easy to think that being a Christian and knowing what the Bible says qualifies us to identify and correctly analyze sin in other people. We can quickly spot sin in someone else but tend to excuse or avoid our own.

When you're in a position to exhort someone about sin, how do you usually go about it?

When you need to be exhorted about sin, how do you usually receive it?

Good to Know

I'm talking to you . . .

If the "they" Paul spoke about in chapter one is the world apart from God, who is this "you" he turns to rebuke in chapter two? Was Paul talking to a specific individual? Not likely.

Paul is using a style of argument (diatribe) so his readers can "listen in" while he exposes and corrects the wrong assumptions of any self-righteous person—in this case, the one who assumes that being a good Jew is what makes them righteous.

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

"judge" (krinó) To form an opinion about someone or something; in this case, an unfavorable one.

"condemn" (katakrinó) To declare guilt and inflict penalty; to doom.

"Gentile"/"Greeks" Anyone not a descendent of Abraham (Jewish).

"justified" When the penalty for a crime was paid, the guilty person would be "justified"; declared free from condemnation.

Evaluating right from wrong is part of being faithful to God's Word. If we are unwilling to ever speak up or be spoken to about sin, we're like those in Romans 1:32 giving tacit approval of sin. That being said, calling out sin is one thing—but condemning someone is another.

3. Paul reminds his readers that it's God's kindness (goodness) that leads us to repentance. What does that mean? Consider the following verses for help with your answer.

Psalm 145:17–19

Titus 3:4–7

Do your best to describe, from your own experience, how God's kindness and goodness leads us to repentance.

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

“Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering,
not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”

Romans 2:4 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Look up. What does this verse teach you about God?

Look around. What does this indicate about the world and people in general?

Look within. What does this teach you about yourself?

Look ahead. Does this verse give you a reason to hope? In what way?

Look alive! Given the opportunity, how would you express the truth in this verse to someone who needs to hear it?

Planks and Prodigals

Romans 2:17–29

Paul speaks directly to his Jewish brothers with a challenge to practice what they preach.

1. Paul understood what Jewish and Gentile believers faced as they tried to live together in Christian harmony. How does he describe the common Jewish mindset in verses 17–20?
 - a. The advantage of a Jewish upbringing gave these believers an edge in knowing Scripture (having heard it all their life) and the confidence that came with their heritage of being chosen and loved by God (see Deuteronomy 7:6–8). But by his questions in verses 21–24, Paul also points out a common hazard of being raised Jewish. What was it?
 - b. In your estimation, what are some advantages of being brought up in a Christian home? What are the potential hazards?
 - c. If you are (or plan someday to be) a parent, what would you say is the most effective thing you can do to raise your children in the Lord? Make your answer practical and specific.
2. Wherever Paul preached the gospel, he got pushback from Jewish legalists who believed putting Jews and Gentiles on equal footing diluted their religion.* Paul rebuked them for priding themselves on being keepers (guardians) of the Law even though they weren't being keepers (obedient) of the Law. Is there a lesson here for us?

“This year, or this month, or more likely this very day, we have failed to practice the kind of behavior we expect from other people.”

C. S. Lewis

 - a. **Planks** – In Matthew 7:1–5, Jesus warns that the way we measure others is the same measuring stick God will use with us. Pharisees were chronic nitpickers who added rules upon rules (read Matthew 23 for goodness sake) and kept a critical eye on everybody else. If you could identify something (maybe an opinion or expectation) that has the potential to become a plank for you, what would it be? What would remove it?

* See Acts 13:38–50 and Acts 15:1–12 for example; and even in Rome (Acts 28:11–29) a few years after Paul wrote this letter.

- b. **Prodigals** – This familiar story that Jesus told is a favorite (see Luke 15:11–32). We focus on the younger son’s trail of poor choices and bad habits that led to ruin and heartache. What about the older brother? He stayed home, did the chores, worked the field. He was the “good” son, but was he any closer to his father? Think about it.

When his father comes looking for him also, there is no hint of gratitude or love in his response. “All these years I’ve *served* you, I *never* disobeyed your command, yet you *never* gave me...” Who speaks that way unless they’ve been earning and keeping score? Was he devoted to pleasing his father, or was he simply doing business with him? The elder son thought he was doing all the right things but he scorned his brother and refused the feast that his father prepared.

“But I’m a good person.” If someone asked you why being a good person is not enough, how would you explain it? Use the verses below for help ...

Matthew 7:21

Romans 3:10, 23

Ephesians 2:8–9

... but answer in your own words.

It’s been said that no one is too bad to be saved, but many will think themselves too good. This was the issue that Paul addressed with his Jewish brothers and sisters.

3. *How the gospel changes everything.* The two sons in Jesus’ parable are like the people Paul describes in Romans 1 and 2. To some degree, we have all been one or the other—or both—at some point in our lives. When we remember that who we are and what we’ve been given is a gift from God (see 1 Corinthians 4:7), the power of the gospel is good news all over again.
- a. The gospel is incentive to live a grateful life. According to Hebrews 12:28, a grateful heart is what makes our worship and service acceptable to God. Does gratitude come easily for you? Why or why not?
- b. The gospel is incentive to live an authentic life. Jesus warned the Pharisees to first wash the inside of the cup and then the outside will also be clean (Matthew 23:26). Does self-examination and repentance come easily for you? Why or why not?



Gospel at a Glance: Circumcision of the Heart | Circumcision was God’s appointed “sign of the covenant” (Genesis 17:1–2, 11) made with Abraham. God considered Abraham righteous because of his *believing faith* in the Lord’s promise (see Genesis 15:6) and circumcision was merely the outward, physical mark of belonging to Him. Over time, the significance of circumcision was lost on generations of Jews who thought it identified them as being righteous by birth and guaranteed a place in Heaven. Paul reminded them that a circumcision of the heart was needed—not performed by human hands, but by the Spirit of God through Christ.

“Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins” (Colossians 2:11, 13 NIV).

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Notes

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SMALL GROUPS

Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 4 – Sinners, One and All | Romans Chapter 3

Paul had always been one to speak his mind. He was trained to think a matter through and explain it decisively. His brilliance as a teacher/lawyer (that's what a rabbi was) set him apart as a young man. Paul arrogantly pursued all the ceremony and demands of the Law, fully convinced that he was earning God's approval. Then one day, on the Damascus Road, God knocked him down and turned his whole life right side up. The zeal remained, but the rage was gone.

No one gets to Heaven on their own. This was the message beating out of Paul's heart for his Jewish brothers. His passion for truth and bulldogged determination is legendary, but his exceptional skills of persuasion isn't what changes hearts and minds. It is simply the power of the gospel. Nothing more and nothing else.

Icebreaker

Which most closely describes your natural disposition toward rules?

- ☐ I try to follow rules. ☐ Rules are made to be broken. ☐ Rules are useful if they make sense.
☐ I love rules! Make me the hall monitor. ☐ Rules? What rules?

Goals for this Session:

- Discover the purpose of the Law and what makes it vital to the gospel.
- Consider the difference between doing right things and being redeemed.
- Pray honest prayers that embrace redemption and redeem the time.

Guilty as Charged

Romans 3:1–20

Wherever Paul preached, there were critics. They claimed that he preached a false gospel. He got used to it. He anticipated it. In so many years, Paul had enough heated discussions with actual critics to know what their objections would be. So this chapter opens with an imagined debate.

1. Being a Jew had advantages, and Paul mentions their greatest privilege here. The “oracles of God” refers to the entire Old Testament with all the laws and covenants and blessings that God Himself gave to the descendants of Abraham.

- a. **National treasure.** No other people had ever been given direct access to know God the way the Jews did. Let that sink in and consider what the following verses say about it.

Deuteronomy 4:5–10

Deuteronomy 11:18–19

Psalms 147:19–20

- b. The Jews were *entrusted* with the Scripture. What does that mean, and how does it apply to us today, as believers?

2. Paul anticipates the critic’s response. There’s always an excuse!

- a. **But what about . . .** (verses 3–4). When truth gets uncomfortable, we change the subject. The woman at the well did this with Jesus (see John 4:19–20). But Paul wouldn’t let critics make this a debate about God’s faithfulness when man’s failure was the point.

When the teaching of God’s Word strikes close to home, what is your first response? What would you like it to be?

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

justified (dikaióo) Legal term which means “to acquit” or declare free of guilt.

redemption (apolutrósis) To be set free on account of the ransom paid.

propitiation (hilasterion) To atone for; to appease and satisfy an offense in order to restore favor.

- b. ***How could a God of love . . .*** (verses 5–8). Apparently there were some who tried to excuse sin.* Imagine that. We’re more prone to rationalize sin than repent of it. But Paul wouldn’t let critics make this a debate about God’s fairness. Their faulty logic went something like this:

- 1) *Why would God make impossible rules and then punish people for failing? That’s unfair.*
2) *Nobody’s perfect, so why try? God’s got you covered, so go ahead. Sin. Repent. Repeat.*

Sound familiar? What helps us to resist falling for these rational lies?

John 14:15, 23

1 Corinthians 10:12–14

1 Peter 1:14–16

3. Paul brings this debate full circle, back to his opening question. Did Jews have an advantage? Yes. Did it make them better than everyone else? *No*.

- a. *As it is written . . .* (verses 10–18). This is no *take-my-word-for-it* speech. Paul knows his Bible, and he cites Scripture to support his claim. If you’d like, write the Old Testament reference next to each of the Romans verses in your Bible.

- Romans 3:10–12 | Psalm 14:1–3, Psalm 53:1–3, Ecclesiastes 7:20
- Romans 3:13 | Psalm 5:9, Psalm 140:3
- Romans 3:14 | Psalm 10:7
- Romans 3:15–17 | Isaiah 59:7–8
- Romans 3:18 | Psalm 36:1

- b. In one simple sentence, how would you describe Paul’s conclusion about the condition of every person?

- c. For Paul to call *everyone* a sinner was a foreign concept to the typical Jew of his day. They identified “sinners” in terms of ethnic identity, not personal conduct. Simply put, Gentiles were “sinners” and Jews were “righteous.”

Are we sinners? To the average person, that just means admitting you aren’t perfect. In a recent survey, 74% of Americans think that most people are basically good, and that “small” sins are no big deal and certainly won’t keep you out of Heaven.

“The Law is like a moral mirror. It shuts our mouths and opens our eyes. It condemns, but does not convert. It challenges, but does not change. It points the finger but can’t give mercy. And it drives us to Jesus, who has the answer we are looking for.”

Greg Laurie

When it comes down to it, many people don’t see themselves as sinners in need of salvation. How would you try to overcome this obstacle when you’re sharing the gospel?

* Paul talks more about this in chapter 6.

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

Romans 3:23–24 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Which part of this scripture resonates the most with you today?

But Now . . .

Romans 3:21–31

Paul concludes his description of sinful humanity with God’s final answer to man’s total failure.

1. Paul has already demonstrated that no one can ever fully obey the Law to be righteous and acceptable in God’s sight.
 - a. God’s Law was never given to make a person righteous. What is the purpose of the Law? Look back at verse 20 for help with your answer.
 - b. **But now.** If we could hear Paul dictating this letter, we would catch the emphasis on these words in his voice. This is good news! The Law can never set things right, but God has done it *for* you. From verses 22–26, explain the *who*, *what*, *when*, and *how* of the gospel.
2. Have you ever wondered how people in the Old Testament were saved? Was it by keeping the Law? We might say, all they *had* was the Law—but now we have grace. The short answer is that God has always been gracious and people have always been saved through faith (Paul explains this a bit more in the next chapter). Even those who didn’t have the advantage of seeing how Jesus accomplished their salvation.
 - a. Paul mentioned that the Law and Prophets (a common term for Old Testament scripture) testified that salvation would not come through the Law. The apostle Peter said much the same thing in 1 Peter 1:10–13. Briefly add what you find there.

- b. It was important for these believers (particularly Jews) to know that Paul’s teaching was totally in line with Scripture. Simply put, God’s plan of salvation was not an afterthought! For people who all their life were told that *doing all the right things* makes you righteous, this was a game-changer. In this respect, how has the gospel been a game-changer for you?

3. *How the gospel changes everything.* Because He is just, God does not lower His standard of perfection to accommodate our sinfulness. When we remember that the Law was given to expose sin and prove our guilt, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

No matter how long or how far I’ve walked with God, I am *and always will be* a sinner, saved by grace. Paul knew this about himself (Romans 7:18, 1 Timothy 1:15) and it kept him from taking God’s gift of salvation for granted.

- a. The gospel is incentive to stay grateful. God declares us “*not guilty*” because Jesus paid our debt. It was nothing we did ourselves; He did it for us.

Sometimes we forget. Like the lepers who were so relieved and happy to get on with life after Jesus cleansed them, we forget to come back and give glory to God (Luke 17:17–18).

Take time to meditate on these verses . . .

Isaiah 53:4–6, 11

1 Peter 1:18–19

Hebrews 12:2–3

. . . and express your gratitude in a sentence or two.

Good to Know

In pagan religions (think of Greek mythology for example) the only way to satisfy the gods and stay on their good side was through an act of **propitiation**—making a sacrifice, bringing a gift, doing a good deed to appease anger and curry favor. Humans could never be quite sure where they stood with their deities. What made the gods angry? What put them back in a good mood? But this is not what **propitiation** means in the Bible.

God is not moody, arbitrary, or easily provoked. He is holy and just. There is no service, sacrifice, or gift we can offer to satisfy His perfect justice and reconcile us to Him.

So God did what we could not do. God paid the price.

Jesus is the costly and perfect sacrifice. He met all the righteous requirements of the Law to be **propitiation** for our sin, so that we can be reconciled to God.

- b. The gospel is incentive to live with purpose. We were rescued from a life of “aimless conduct” empty of any power to change (see 1 Peter 1:18). Jesus redeemed our life so that we can redeem the time (see Ephesians 5:15–16). Simply put, that means investing your life in ways that will outlast it. When you think about your life and loved ones, what kind of legacy matters most?

When you think of *knowing God and making Him known*, what does that look like to you?



Gospel at a Glance: Day of Atonement | “Salvation is free, but it is not cheap. The word *blood* tells us what the price was. Jesus had to die on the cross in order to satisfy the Law and justify lost sinners. The best illustration of this is the Jewish Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16.”—Warren Wiersbe¹

For the atonement offering, two goats were brought to the altar. One was slain and the blood was taken into the holy of holies and sprinkled on the *mercy seat*. God’s presence rested above (Exodus 25:22) and the mercy seat fit perfectly on top of the ark, with the tablets of Law inside. In this way, when sacrificial blood was sprinkled, it covered the law and atoned for sin. Judgment was deserved, but this was a place of mercy. Then the priest would lay his hands on the head of the live goat and confess the sins of the people. The animal would then be sent away into the wilderness, a *scapegoat* set free to represent what God does with the sins of a pardoned sinner. **“He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12 NLT).**

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary/New Testament, Volume 1*, (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Cook Communications, 2001), p.523.

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Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 5 – Credit on Christ's Account | Romans Chapter 4

Sometimes the truth is hiding in plain sight. We miss it because we think it has to be more complicated. Sometimes the truth gets buried in tradition; opinions passed down for so long they're accepted without question and defended to death. No one knew this better than Paul, a former Pharisee.

In the first three chapters, Paul dismantled secular and religious beliefs about life that pass for truth but never deliver. If Paul was giving a TED talk just to prove we're all sinners in the same sinking boat, this is where he would drop the mic. No one is good enough to earn God's approval.

OK Paul, you have our attention. Where's the hope? How is that good news? *I'm glad you asked. Let's talk about faith.*

Icebreaker

If you could start a new tradition, what would it be?

If you could do away with an old tradition, what would it be?

Goals for this Session:

- Discover how Abraham came to be known as the father of faith.
- Consider what it means to be justified by grace through faith.
- Pray for ways and opportunity to live out the gospel.

Dues and Don'ts

Romans 4:1–12

Paul takes this conversation about faith all the way back to Abraham.

1. Paul already established that salvation is offered to everyone, whether Jew or Gentile. Now he devotes an entire chapter to reinforce the necessity of faith.

- a. Why is faith necessary for salvation? Review Paul's statement in Romans 3:28–30 for help with your answer.

- b. "If Abraham was justified by works . . ." (verses 2–3) Paul raised the question because this *opinion* was deeply embedded in Jewish tradition. The rabbis claimed that Abraham earned righteous status by instinctively keeping the Law before it was given. * What was Paul's response? Explain how Abraham was justified.

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

account/impute (logizomai)
God credits the righteousness of Christ to our account.

justified/righteous (dikaios)
Declared in good standing with God by grace, through faith in Jesus.

faith/believe (pisteos) A firm conviction and trust in God, knowing He is always true.

How are we justified? Note what the following verses say.

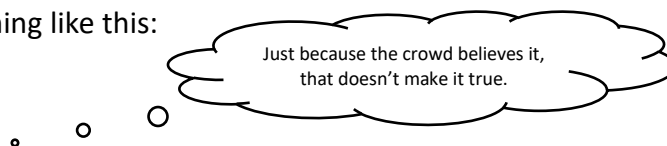
John 1:12–13

Ephesians 2:8–9

Titus 3:5–7

- c. Have you noticed how frequently Paul goes to Scripture for answers? He kept his faith and beliefs tethered to God's Word. It's where he went to filter the voices—and *be* a voice—in the world he inhabited.

Look at verse 3. If the original manuscript included thought bubbles, we're pretty sure it would look something like this:



"What does the Scripture say?" Paul anticipated pushback for his comments about Abraham's faith versus the Jewish mainstream of works-based tradition. We'll look at that in a minute. But first, give thought to what fuels your own beliefs. Where do you find truth?

2 Timothy 3:16–17

Romans 12:2

* The Law was given 430 years after Abraham (Galatians 3:17). In Paul's day, Abraham was considered a model of perfect obedience to God. For example, Jubilees 23:10 says, "Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life."

2. **Dues and Don'ts.** For centuries, every good Jew spent their life trying to achieve righteous status by obeying the Law and observing rituals. The Jewish Christians in Rome were still trying to wrap their minds around this “new” teaching that righteousness is a gift of God.

- a. **Dues.** Nothing we do can earn righteousness. It's credited to us. How does that work? Christ took on the debt of our sin and He gave us His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Paul's explanation is clear and simple to grasp. We see our sin as a pile of unpaid bills, past due accounts, accumulating debt, dwindling resources. Christ pays off our debt and gives us free access to His unlimited righteousness—in spite of our lousy credit score. It's a great picture of justification for us to hold in our mind.

The Bible gives another picture of Christ taking our debt to give us His righteousness. This one is more graphic and behind-the-scenes personal. You'll find it in Isaiah 53. As you look at it, write what you see and record your thoughts.

Isaiah 53:3–9 | Read this vivid description of what Christ took on for you. Don't rush.

Isaiah 53:11 | Why did Jesus endure this? What came out of it? Let that sink in.

- b. **Don'ts.** What's in your wallet? Working *for* righteous status carries an impossible to-do list. But working *from* a righteous status comes with its own to-*don't* list. Here are just a few (in no particular order) but there are many more! Finish the thought for each one.

Colossians 2:13–14 – Don't forget . . .

2 Corinthians 5:17 – Don't remember . . .

Psalms 103:10–12 – Don't forget . . .

Romans 6:12–14 – Don't let . . .

Romans 12:2 – Don't be . . .

Philippians 1:6 – Don't forget . . .

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;
blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”

Romans 4:7–8 NKJV

Think About It . . .

What three things does David tell us God has done with our sins?

The Promise

Romans 4:13–25

Paul shows that what God promises to give by grace must be received by faith.

1. Paul traces the details and sequence of events in Abraham's story.
 - a. When was Abraham credited righteous? Was it before, at the same time, or after he was circumcised? What does that indicate about who is eligible to be Abraham's descendants and heirs to the promise?
 - b. *Was Abraham obediently living by the Law when God credited him? Why or why not?
 - c. What do you find most compelling about Abraham's story? Share one or two insights or inspiration you can take from his example.
2. *How the gospel changes everything.* Paul's description of Abraham in his closing statement is amazing. When we consider the testimony of God's life-giving promise to Abraham, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

- a. The gospel is incentive to view circumstances through eyes of faith. That's what truly pleases God and enables us to benefit from what He allows and uses in our life (see Hebrews 11:6).

Identify one situation that seems *impossible* to you right now. How will you respond to God in faith about it? Be specific.

- b. The gospel is incentive to live in resurrection power. This is no small thing, is it? This is God saying to Abraham *you will be My canvas* to illustrate faith and new life through the resurrection of Christ.

For believers, when it comes time to leave this life, we will (literally) be eternally grateful to live in resurrection power. But is that kind of power only for Heaven or can we access it now? Paul certainly thought so. How does he describe this in Philippians 3:7–14?

"If you ask someone in heaven why they're there, you're going to get the same answer every time—Jesus.

No one gets to heaven by amassing an awesome reputation.

No one gets to God by being good enough.

We get there by grace and God gets the glory."

J.D. Greear

* Trick question!



Gospel at a Glance: Justification | “Justification means that in our standing before God, we are righteous in His sight. We obviously are not righteous in our daily experience any more than Christ was sinful in His daily experience. But when by faith we trust in Him, God regards us as righteous because He has credited to us the righteousness of Christ. There is an old play on the word *justified*, that it means ‘just as if I’d never sinned.’ The penalty has been paid. God’s justice is satisfied. His judicial wrath has been fully exhausted on His Son. Truly we stand before Him just as if we’d never sinned! But there is another play on the word *justification*, that it also means ‘just as if I’d always obeyed.’ That is also a glorious truth that is based on the perfect obedience of Christ—the obedience that, as we have already seen, was lived out over thirty-three years of real human life in a real world.” —Jerry Bridges¹

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

¹ Jerry Bridges, *The Transforming Power of the Gospel*, (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NAVPRESS, 2012), p.50.

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Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 6 – Peace with God | Romans Chapter 5

How are you doing so far in our Romans studies? We've been following Paul, step by logical step through some pretty steep terrain. Like a seasoned guide, Paul walked us through the first four chapters mapping out dead-end trails and superficial shortcuts that lost men follow. By now, we know that the only clear path to God is by grace through faith in Jesus.

What makes a strenuous hike worth the effort? The view of course! In chapter five, we reach a summit. It's a good place to stop and take it all in. From this vantage point the gospel, switchbacks and all, is beginning to make sense. See how one man's sin brought death. See the One whose death brought life. Absorb the scenery of God's surrounding grace.

Icebreaker

Up to this point, what has been a highlight of studying Romans?

Goals for this Session:

- Discover the benefits and results of being justified by faith.
- Consider how God uses trials to shape our character.
- Pray for grace and opportunities to live out the gospel in daily life.

Peace with God

Romans 5:1–11

Paul describes the benefits and results of being justified by faith.

1. We have peace with God, here and now. And we rejoice in anticipation (hope) of the glory of the God.

- a. What terms does Paul use to describe our condition before salvation? (verses 8, 10)

What grace does ...

Grace brings you to the cross where you see Jesus, exposed and shamed, disfigured by every filthy thought and vile act ever committed. So repugnant that the Father turns away from His Son. “That’s *my* sin,” you say. “I’m the guilty one.”

Grace brings you to the empty grave where you see Jesus, resurrected and victorious. “All is forgiven,” He says. “The Father’s arms are opened wide.”

- b. What does it mean to have peace and be reconciled with God?

- c. What is this “hope of glory” that Paul refers to in verse 2? Note the verses below, then answer in your own words.

Mark 13:26

Colossians 3:4

1 John 3:2

2. **What’s the point?** (verses 3–5) Life is trouble, guaranteed. But we tend to take the Dr. Seuss approach: “If I watch out for rocks with my eyes straight ahead, I’ll keep out of trouble forever,” I said.¹

Paul doesn’t explain what causes trouble or if some trials can be avoided (more on that later in the letter). He explains what trials produce.

- a. How do trials shape our character?

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

peace (eirene) Not a feeling, a fact; being at peace with God.

tribulation (thlipsis) Pressure, anguish, distress of all kinds.

perseverance (hupomone) A quality that does not succumb, quit, or lose hope in the midst of trouble.

character (dokime) A quality or trait that has been proven true through fire, combat, or competition.

hope (elpis) Sure expectation of a promised outcome.

¹ Dr. Seuss, *I Had Trouble in Getting to Solla Sollew* (New York: Random House, 1965).

- b. Remember, being *justified* means we don't have to earn God's love and forgiveness. How does knowing this shape our response to trials? Give a simple answer in your own words.

Hebrews 12:7, 10–11

1 Peter 4:12–13, 19

2 Timothy 2:1–6

3. How is God's love for us different than any human love? Consider verses 6–8 for help with your answer.

"Do you realize how much you are loved by God? Despite our sin, God never stops loving us. That's the gospel. You were worse off than you thought you were, but God has loved you more than you could ever have imagined."

Greg Laurie

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

"God demonstrates His own love toward us,
in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:8 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Look up. What does this verse teach you about God?

Look around. What does this indicate about the world and people in general?

Look within. What does this teach you about yourself?

Look ahead. Does this verse give you a reason to hope? In what way?

Look alive! Given the opportunity, how would you express the truth in this verse to someone who needs to hear it?

Diagram of the Gospel

Romans 5:12–21

Paul reviews how Adam's sin brought death and Christ's death brought life.

1. The rest of this chapter is a comparison of **one man** (Adam) and **one Man** (Christ). In essence, Paul draws us a diagram of the gospel and grace. Write down the actions of each one and what came as a result. (Verses 18–19 are similar statements with a different emphasis.)

	Adam	Christ
v.15		
v.16		
v.17		
v.18		
v.19		

Paul took five chapters to give a clear and complete explanation of the gospel. Adam brought sin into the world and immediately tried to hide it. Tried to excuse it. We have all inherited that sin nature.

2. *How the gospel changes everything.* Paul finishes this section with an astounding statement: “Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.” When we consider the big picture and our own pin-dot experience in it, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.
- a. The gospel is incentive to live a guilt-free life. By this, we mean coming to God with no fear of rejection or judgment (see Hebrews 10:19–22). It’s a rare individual who never struggles with feelings of guilt (Paul addresses that more later). But is there ever a time we should hesitate to approach our heavenly Father? Why or why not?
 - b. The gospel is incentive to live a grace-abounding life. Paul talks more about grace in the next chapter, but for now consider what he says here. Simply put, grace is greater than our sin. In fact, the term Paul uses means “super-abounding.” Where, and in what way, could you use some super-abounding grace today? Be practical and specific.

1 John 4:7–8

Ephesians 4:32

Colossians 4:5–6



Gospel at a Glance: Guilt or Grace? | “God’s answer to Adam’s sin could have been swift and severe. He could have spoken the universe out of existence as easily as He had created it, and He would have been no less holy to do so. How can a good, all-powerful God tolerate the presence of evil? The answer is . . .

Grace. Undeserved favor. Inexplicable mercy. The Lord, moved by love, confronted Adam with his sin. *Where are you?* It was a bold invitation to come out of hiding. At the right time, God confronted humanity with our sin by giving us the Law. Through the Law, His wrath blows into our garden and boldly urges us to come out of hiding. We are right to fear His wrath, but foolish to distrust His grace. After all, if His chief desire were to execute the just penalty of sin, He would have done that already.

God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to live the guiltless life we cannot live, to die the atoning death we deserve, to rise again and claim new life on our behalf, and to usher those who believe in Him into a completely new kind of existence. His gift is free, extended by grace, received through faith. So the choice is yours. Guilt or grace?”

- Charles Swindoll*

* Charles Swindoll, *Insights on Romans* (Illinois: Tyndale House, 2015), 133.

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

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Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 7 – Free to Be a Slave | Romans Chapter 6

carte blanche / kärt bläSH **noun**

Complete freedom to act as one wishes or thinks best; writing one's own terms for an agreement.

Synonyms: free rein; a free hand; a blank check

To hear some people tell it, this is the definition of grace. Since God's grace is inexhaustible, why worry about living a holy life? Paul knew that some would misinterpret his statement that, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20 *ESV*).

People have a strong tendency to overcorrect one mistake by swinging to the opposite extreme. Live long enough and you just might see it swing back again!

Grace frees us from a legalistic, work-for-your-salvation mentality. In this chapter, Paul explains that grace frees us from sin so that we can pursue holiness. Spoiler alert! Pursuing holiness is not a dour, teeth-clenching resistance to sin. As Jesus said in John 8:36, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (*NIV*).

Icebreaker

If you could break one bad habit this year, what would it be?

Goals for this Session:

- Discover the meaning and significance of water baptism.
- Consider how relentless grace gives us freedom to live obediently.
- Pray honest prayers that embrace grace and reflect righteousness.

Dead . . . and Alive!

Romans 6:1–14

Paul explains what God has done for all believers, and what our response should be.

1. What does Paul ask and how does he answer his own questions? (verses 1–2)

- a. Paul used two metaphors to explain freedom from sin. The first one is *baptism* (verses 3–11). What does *water baptism* symbolize? Explain each aspect in your own words.

Death

Burial

Resurrection

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

baptized (baptizo) Immersed in, fully absorbed; identified with.

continue in sin (epimeno) Persist in; live in a state of habitual sin.

dead to sin (apothnesko) Reject and renounce sin's power to rule in you.

slave (doulos) A willing servant.

dominion (kurieuso) Control; to exercise rule over.

holiness (hagiasmos) Set apart to God (sanctified). A position *and* a process. In relation to God, we are made holy because of Christ. In life, the continuing process of becoming more like Christ in character and action.

- b. *Reckon yourselves dead.* This is the same word Paul used back in chapter four to describe what God did with Abraham's faith. God *credited* (reckoned) Abraham's faith to him as righteousness. Paul says, *you are dead to the old life*. Sin no longer has any authority over you. It may not always feel like it, but it's a fact. Count on it and live it out. Use the verses below to write a simple explanation of how we do that.

Galatians 2:20

Ephesians 2:1–5

Colossians 3:3–5

"Reckoning is not claiming a promise as much as it is acting on a fact. God does not command us to be dead to sin. Rather, He tells us that we *are* dead to sin and alive to God. Then He commands us to act on it."

Greg Laurie

2. **Dead to sin.** Paul repeatedly says that Christians have “died to sin.” What does that mean? Put a **T** (true) or **F** (false) next to the following statements. Then briefly explain your response. Being dead to sin means that:

___ Christians no longer have sinful desires or inclinations.

___ Christians can sin when they want to; but if they repent, there’ll be no consequences.

___ Christians get sick of sinning and eventually decide to give it up.

___ Christians no longer have to live under the dominating power of sin.

3. **Alive in Christ.** How would you explain what being “alive in Christ” means? Use the following verses for help with your answer.

John 1:12–13

John 3:5–6

John 5:24

2 Corinthians 5:17

→ How would you explain being “alive in Christ” from your own personal experience?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

Romans 6:14 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? In what way?

True Freedom

Romans 6:15–23

Paul explains that grace gives us freedom to live obediently and become the person God designed us to be.

1. What does Paul ask, and how does he answer his own question? (verses 15–16)

a. The first illustration Paul used to explain freedom from sin was baptism. The second one is *slavery* (verses 16–18). What point is Paul making here?

Good to Know

Paul's illustration of slavery was easy for his readers to grasp. Nearly half the people in Rome were slaves. Some were slaves against their will (war captives), some were born slaves, and some chose slavery just to survive. There was no "middle class" in Rome and all the menial jobs were done by slaves. So even a free man had few options to make a living.

b. Does grace mean that you can live however you want, as long as you're comfortable with it? Why or why not?

Rome's version of welfare was for wealthy men (patrons) to aid poor men (clients). Having lots of clients was a status symbol. They created a fanfare wherever their patron went and loudly cheered him in court to sway the jury in his favor. In return, the patron doled out a meager allowance and a daily meal. This arrangement was demeaning but it seemed unavoidable. Needless to say, Paul's slavery illustration struck a chord with his listeners.

c. *Slaves to whom you obey*. What motivates us to obey—or for that matter, to disobey? It comes down to this: we are all followers going after fulfillment. What we find depends on who we follow (verses 19–21).

To *yield* or "present your members" describes an intentional act of the will. Paul is saying, offer yourself to God—all in, no holding back.

Paul asks his readers (including you) to think back on what it was like to be a slave of sin. What did it accomplish? What did it fail to deliver? Looking back at your life before salvation, how would you describe it?

What is one valuable lesson you can share about finding fulfillment in yielding yourself obediently to God?

2. **But now . . .** (verse 22) Paul leans in to remind us of the benefits of grace. Grace isn't a license to do whatever you want; actually it's so much more than that. When we *offer ourselves* in obedience to God, an incredible transformation begins to happen.

Paul writes more about this later, but for now he calls this *your fruit to holiness*. He is talking about sanctification, the ongoing process of becoming more like Christ in character and behavior (see Gospel at a Glance).

Galatians 5:22–24 – Producing fruit is the Holy Spirit's work in us, but our part is to tend the soil, water the roots, pull weeds, and fully cooperate with the process of growth.

- a. List and briefly describe each fruit of the Spirit.

"This world is no friend to grace. One harmful aspect is assuming that anything worthwhile can be acquired at once, quickly and efficiently.

There is a great market for religious experience in our world, but little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue; and little inclination to sign up for the long apprenticeship of holiness.

We are people who spend our lives apprenticed to our master, Jesus Christ. We are in a growing, learning relationship always."

Eugene Peterson

A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

- b. Consider this. Spiritual fruit is not the same as spiritual gifts. There are a variety of spiritual gifts and God chooses who gets what (see Romans 12:6). But the Holy Spirit is intent on growing *every* spiritual fruit in *every* Christian.

Remember this too. Spiritual fruit is not rooted in emotion. You may not feel particularly patient or inclined toward self-control, but when you offer yourself in obedience, that trait will begin to develop in you because it reflects the character of God.

Take time to inspect your spiritual fruit. Ask for feedback from someone close to you.

→¹ Which traits seem to grow easily for you?

→¹ Which traits need more cultivating?

→¹ In what ways is the Lord pruning you to bear more fruit?

→¹ Are you reaping the benefits of spiritual fruit in your life? Are others? In what way?

3. *How the gospel changes everything.* Paul boldly declared that sin doesn't own you anymore. Trouble is, your old nature isn't done with you. When we remember that in Christ, the old life is gone and a new life has begun, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

- a. The gospel is incentive to break old patterns and behavior. Paul calls it pulling down strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4). Strongholds take many shapes, but are formed when we believe a lie—about God, about life, about ourselves. When the serpent approached Eve, he smoothly convinced her there was more to life than God was letting them in on (Genesis 3:1–7). *Do it your way to get what you need.*

We're all wired for something. It might be approval, or comfort, or control. These can be good things but they will never satisfy the core need of our heart. Jesus said, "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life" (John 10:10 NLT).

"Strongholds put a chokehold on the joy, growth, freedom, and strength you are meant to experience. They neutralize your effectiveness and lock you in a state of arrested development. This much is for sure—you'll never experience all that life holds if you're living with strongholds."

Levi Lusko
I Declare War

Anything that consistently pulls us in the wrong direction gives sin a foothold. Left unchecked, it will become a stronghold. Like the **HOME** app on an iPhone programmed to run your house ("just set it and forget it") sin still wants to control your life and automate your behavior. Ask the Lord to show you hidden sins or neglected strengths in your life.

Lights (truth/culture/opinions)

Locks (morals/integrity/standards)

Thermostat (passions/desires/dreams)

Public zones (relationships/habits/pursuits)

Private zones (thought life)

- b. The gospel is incentive to live obediently. Earlier, Paul described holiness (sanctification) as spiritual fruit. Jesus said that fruit comes from abiding in Him (John 15:4–5). What does "abiding" look like? Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a leading voice in the 20th century church, described it as, "Not passive and clinging—it is to do what He tells you to do, positively, and to pray without ceasing. Abiding is a tremendously active thing."

In Colossians 3:12–14, Paul distills these virtues in a condensed list and makes it practical. What would your life look like if you consistently obeyed this command?

What would be different? What would be the same?



Gospel at a Glance: Sanctification | “Sanctification is one of the key words we learn from Scripture that helps us understand what our salvation means. It covers the space of time between our *justification* (the moment of conversion when God declares us righteous through our faith in Christ’s payment for sin) and our *glorification* (when we stand before Him in eternity). Sanctification means *to make holy*—a process that is crucially important for us since by nature we are *not* holy, and we *need* to be holy. More and more holy. In every place . . . to increasingly conform ourselves to the Word of God, living with a pure conscience, being quick to respond to the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

So this is what God is doing with us right now as we wait for Christ’s return. We’re being sanctified. Little by little. Day by day. One step at a time.” —James MacDonald*

“We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV).

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

* James MacDonald, *Our Journey Devotional*, Walk in the Word (Elgin, Illinois), November 16, 2018



Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 8 – What the Law Can and Can't Do | Romans Chapter 7

How do we wrap our minds around grace? If facts were enough, Romans 6 and 7 would only need to be two short sentences: *Sin can't control you. The Law won't save you.* But Paul isn't dispensing facts—he is relating to real life. And living by grace is more caught than taught.

Put yourself in with the Christians hearing Paul's letter for the first time. The room is crowded and you're lucky to get a spot on the floor near a corner. You've been sitting, cross-legged and leaning against the wall, intently listening for a few hours. You could read it faster by yourself, without interruption—but this letter is for *everyone*. Besides, these people feel like family.

You're tracking with Paul's train of thought (mostly) and wishing you could write this stuff down. You would've brought a journal or your smart phone but they aren't invented yet. So a few take turns reading aloud. Occasionally they stop and discuss what Paul wrote, then spend some time praying together. Turns out, this first-century small group is a lot like yours back home!

Icebreaker

You're in class and the teacher is explaining a complex equation or subject. What are you doing?

☐ Taking notes ☐ Being Politely Attentive ☐ Texting ☐ Daydreaming ☐ Nodding off

Goals for this Session:

- Discover the distinctions between grace, law, and legalism.
- Consider how a new life in Christ is possible and what it produces.
- Pray for grit and grace to live out the gospel in your sphere of influence.

Grace, Law, and Legalism

Romans 7:1–13

The Bible conveys truth in simple ways we can understand. In chapter 6, Paul’s analogy of a slave emphasized his point that sin is not your Master. In this chapter, Paul uses the analogy of marriage to emphasize his point that the law is not your Master.

1. Since Paul is focused on explaining our relationship with Christ, he does not sidetrack into a detailed discussion of marital law.* He’s still talking about grace.

- a. **A simple illustration** (verses 1–6). Paul knew how difficult it was to unlearn deeply held convictions, particularly when it came to the Law. Even though he was frequently accused of teaching against the Law (Romans 3:8) it was *legalism* he preached against.

Paul did *not* say that the Law died—it still lives! What purpose does it serve? Use the following verses for help with your answer.

Matthew 5:17–18

Hebrews 4:12–13

2 Timothy 3:16–17

- b. **A new life** (verses 4–6). Paul uses marriage to illustrate how a new life in Christ is possible and what an intimate relationship with Him produces. If someone who is unfamiliar with Bible language asked, would you be able to explain what Paul was talking about? Do your best to explain (or find out for yourself) what this means.

- c. **Old habits die hard.** When it comes to doing the same things, we’re prone to do them the same way. What parts, if any, of Paul’s teaching are new to you, or different in some way? What parts, if any, are “fuzzy”?

How did Paul say essentially the same thing to a different church on another occasion? (Try reading it in a different version, like the New Living Translation or *The Message*.)

Galatians 3:2–6

Good to Know

Legalism is excessive or improper use of the Law. It’s thinking that obeying the Law is what saves you, or keeps you saved. It is a flawed system of gauging God’s acceptance of you based on how good you are at following the rules.

* The topic of marriage and divorce is covered in Matthew 5, Matthew 19, 1 Corinthians 7, and Ephesians 5.

2. Even from 600 miles away in Corinth, Paul could still see the elephant in the room! “I know what you’re thinking,” says Paul, “and the answer is no. The Law is certainly not sin.”

- a. Read verses 7–13 a few times to catch the drift of what Paul says about the function of the Law. If possible, read it in a few different versions. Consider the following statements.

The Law is good and exposes sin. In what way?

Sin is a parasite, using the Law to produce death. In what way?

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

covet (*epithuméo*) Inner desire so strong that it dominates your thoughts and actions.

flesh (*sarkós*) Unsaved; sinful nature; the “natural” man.

newness (*kainótes*) of Spirit; the “spiritual” man; saved.

carnal (*sarkikós*) Weak; human nature is still subject to fleshly desires.

inward man (*anthropos*) Mind, soul and spirit which is being renewed and strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

- b. Paul chose the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet” (Deuteronomy 5:21) for his example. When you think about it, coveting is a *gateway sin* to the other sins. How so?

- c. In a way, the Law is God’s diagnostic tool. God’s Word reveals all that is in our heart, good and bad (Hebrews 4:12). It gives us insight into our own life—what’s broken, what needs to change, and what absolutely must go.

Do you have a particular Bible verse or section of Scripture that has been like a diagnostic tool for you? In what way? Note it here.

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

Romans 7:6 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Given the opportunity, how would you express the truth found in this verse to someone who needs to hear it?

The Conflict of Two Natures

Romans 7:14–25

Some people stir up trouble and make our lives difficult. We would do anything to please them, but they always take advantage. We go along with their schemes—and to our dismay, we end up being used and confused. What came over us? *Never again*, we say. But we can't seem to get away from that troublemaker. Why? (You guessed it.) They are us.

1. Paul explained that the Law exposes sin and draws it out of us like a magnet. Our trouble is not with the Law, which is holy and good. Our trouble is with our own sinful nature.

- a. When Paul said he was “of the flesh” (verse 14), what did he mean?

- b. How does Paul describe the conflict we experience (verses 15–17)?

“Satan’s only real hope to control my life is me. We labor under the misguided notion that Satan wants us to do his will. Satan has no will in our lives. He only wants us to do *our* will. We have met the enemy, and he is us.”

Mark Rutland

Holiness: The Perfect Word to Imperfect People

- c. How does Paul describe our sin nature (verses 18–23)?

2. Describing our sin nature, Paul said, “I find this principle at work: although I want to do good, evil is *right there with me*” (verse 21 NIV).

The Greek word for “evil” described what is rotten, decomposing, or corrupt. In military lingo, it was the term for a soldier who falls back and cowardly retreats in battle. In what way does this fit the kind of battle that Paul had in mind?

Ephesians 6:10–11, 13

2 Timothy 2:4

3. *How the gospel changes everything.* Paul's self-portrait demonstrates what every Christian must come to terms with. God saved us by grace. God grows us by grace. When we remember that God will be faithful to complete His good work in us (Philippians 1:6), the gospel is good news all over again.

- a. **The gospel is incentive to walk in the Spirit** (verse 24). God did not save us by grace and send us back to the Law. But sometimes we behave like it. When the enemy spots a chance to confuse our understanding of grace, he is faster than ants on a picnic.

Consider all the years Paul lived by the Law. Who tried harder than Paul? He could remember as a young man how hard he tried, and how vile he became (Acts 26:5–11).

Even as a mature Christian and chosen apostle, the drive to succeed was ingrained in Paul—strong traits used mightily by God, that he consistently needed to yield to the Holy Spirit's control.

"The desire to sin and to violate the loving, wise commandments of God is just our nature—the combustible, evil, sinful nature inside of us. No exceptions. We daily, even hourly, need the Holy Spirit's help to effectively live the Christian life."

Greg Laurie

Does any of this resonate with your experience? In what way?

Walking in the Spirit will keep us vigilant—but walking in the flesh can make us vigilantes. Explain the difference between trying to live for God in our own strength and letting God's Spirit live through you.

Ephesians 5:15–17

Galatians 5:16–18

- b. **The gospel is incentive to rejoice!** (verse 25). Paul gave us plenty of food for thought and prayer in this chapter. As the church, we are the Bride of Christ. How does the image of belonging to Christ in marriage motivate you to live to please Him?

Ephesians 5:25–27

Revelation 19:6–9



Gospel at a Glance: The Law Cannot Save from Sin | “Paul bemoaned his inability to help himself. Remember how he said it? “I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (Romans 7:15 NASB). If it were possible to do better on our own, we wouldn’t need God. We would simply follow the golden rule and all would be fine. The problem is that we are fallen and bent towards sinful choices. There are none who seek God; no, not one (Romans 3:10–12). If this weren’t the case, God never would have sent His Son to die for us; instead, he could have just told us to be good. As a matter of fact, that was what the whole *Moses on Mt. Sinai* thing was about. The Ten Commandments were essentially God telling us to help ourselves. It didn’t even last ten minutes, and then there was a drunken orgy and a golden calf followed by complete and total anarchy. Paul didn’t finish his outburst by saying, “I guess I’ll just try harder . . .” Instead he said, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25 NASB).

The message of the gospel isn’t try; it’s *trust*.” ¹

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” —Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another Scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

¹ Levi Lusko, *I Declare War: Four Keys to Winning the Battle with Yourself*, (Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing, an imprint of Thomas Nelson) ©2018 Levi Lusko

Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

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Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 9 – New Life in the Spirit | Romans Chapter 8:1–17

We are halfway through our study! This week we step into a favorite chapter, not only in Romans but in the Bible. For some of us, it will be a first-time read and more familiar for others. Either way, get ready for what's new. Not in the sacred page, but how it will speak to you amidst all the stuff and substance of your life and whatever is trending in your heart.

Icebreaker

What change is your favorite?

☐ Change of scenery ☐ Change of habit ☐ Change of mind ☐ Change of clothes

Goals for this Session:

- Discover that “no condemnation” means so much more than *don't feel bad about yourself*.
- Consider why “try harder” is different than *trust and obey*.
- Pray for strength to grow and relentless grace through the process.

The Spirit of Life

Romans 8:1–11

In chapter seven, Paul’s self-description illustrates the futility of trying to live the Christian life without the Spirit of God. “Who (not *what*) will deliver me from this body of death?” Paul answers his own question in these verses.

1. **Life in the Spirit** (verses 1–4). Paul makes a striking declaration about *every single Christian*. Finish the following sentence with the correct answer.

“So now, those who belong to Christ Jesus will never . . .”

- ☐ Make mistakes or do the wrong thing.
- ☐ Fail or neglect to do the right thing.
- ☐ Deliberately choose to sin.
- ☐ Be condemned and rejected by God.

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

condemnation (katákrima) Life in a perpetual cycle of judgment and rejection.

freedom (eleutheró) Liberation from the power/punishment of sin and condemnation.

For this to be true, what had to happen, and why? Use verses 2–4 for your answer.

2. **A New Mindset** (verses 5–8). Paul draws a clear contrast between those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the Spirit.*

- a. What does it mean to “live according to the flesh”? Explain this as best you can. Give one or two examples of what it might look like in everyday life.
- b. What does it mean to “live according to the Spirit”? Give some general examples of what this looks like in everyday life.

Good to Know

In verse 2, *law* refers to a principle or driving force. In verses 3–4, *law* refers to the Mosaic Law.

☞ ☞
“Set their minds” involves a person’s will, thoughts, emotions. It also includes a person’s values, desires, and motivation. Whatever preoccupies the mind will govern us.

☞ ☞
“In the flesh” is different from “walking according to flesh.” Being “in the flesh” (vs. 8) means being unregenerate.

The Nelson Study Bible

- c. What are some practical ways to set your mind on the things of the Spirit?

*Who, specifically, is Paul talking about in these verses? Some say Paul is contrasting the saved and unsaved. Others say this describes “spiritual” and “carnal” Christians. So which is it? Can it be both? If Paul was here, his answer might be, *you’re missing the point*. The focus is that a new life is only possible because of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit living in us.

3. **A New Power Source** (verses 9–11). If we asked for a quick show of hands between living according to the flesh or according to the Spirit, which would you choose? (We'll assume you prefer the Spirit.) Great! Now go do it. *But how?* That's what these verses speak to. You see, the choice is ours—but we can't do it alone.

- a. The Spirit of God lives in every believer. Paul uses the phrase “in you” four times in these verses. What can you always count on the Holy Spirit to do for you?

John 14:16–17

John 16:13–15

1 Corinthians 2:12

Galatians 5:16–18

- b. Paul uses the same phrase twice in one sentence to describe how powerful the Holy Spirit is (verse 11). Some say this refers to the promised resurrection after death—but it makes more sense that Paul is reminding them of the Spirit's *resurrection power* available to them—and us—*right now*.

We all have room for self-examination on this point. Ask the Lord to identify areas to relinquish your own efforts (trying harder) and actively lean into His strength (trust/obey).

Zechariah 4:6

Philippians 3:10–14

2 Corinthians 12:9–10

“We need to understand that when our life feels lacking in power, it's not because we haven't actualized our innate potential. When our life is lacking in power, it's typically because we are working in our own strength too much!”

Jared C. Wilson
*Supernatural Power for
Everyday People*

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”

Romans 8:2 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Does this verse give you a reason to hope? How and in what way?

Life in the Spirit

Romans 8:12–17

Paul packs a boatload of truth into two main points!

1. **No Obligation to Your Sin Nature** (verses 12–14). Take a few minutes to think about it and list what is significant to you.

a. In simple terms, how would you share this with someone who needs to hear it?

2. **A New Identification** (verses 15–17). What is most significant or encouraging to you?

a. How would you share it with someone who needs to hear it?

“When we come to Christ, God not only forgives us, He also adopts us. Through a dramatic series of events, we go from condemned orphans with no hope to adopted children with no fear.”

Max Lucado
The Great House of God

3. *How the gospel changes everything.* Because of Jesus, we have victory over sin. The black cloud of condemnation is blown away. When we exercise our freedom to walk according to the Spirit, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

a. **The gospel is incentive to live an overcoming life.** As one old saint put it, “The flesh is incurably bad—it is no use trying to improve the flesh. Its nature will always be incorrigibly the same. God does not improve it—He crucifies the old life with Christ and creates a new man in Christ Jesus.”* No matter what lies or temptations come our way, what will *always* be true? For help with your answer, read 1 John 4:1–4.

b. **The gospel is incentive to live a shame-free life.** Regrets, fears, and failures can dog us, just as they did the apostle Paul in Romans 7. We can lift our head and stand on truth. What will *always* be true? Read Romans 8:31–39.

* A. B. Simpson, *Days of Heaven on Earth*, Christian Publishers Inc., ©1886, 1945



Gospel at a Glance: Inner Conviction | “The Holy Spirit personally gives us the assurance that Christ has come into our lives—a wonderful inner conviction. You just know that you know. It is hard to explain, but it is as real as the breath you are drawing right now. The Holy Spirit delights to give you that inner witness that, yes, you are a child of God. And as part of this wonderful miracle of conversion, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit indwells us. When you become a Christian, the Spirit comes to live inside you.” Greg Laurie¹

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

¹ Greg Laurie, *Start! The Bible for New Believers*, Holy Bible, New King James Version, ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 10 – Hope, Help, and Invincible Love | Romans Chapter 8:18–39

Paul wrote this letter to hundreds of Roman Christians he didn't know. In his mind's eye, he wrote to his old friends Aquila and Priscilla and a roomful of faces he'd never met, in a house he'd never been to, in a city he'd never visited. But he loved them like family—pouring himself, body and soul, into the pages for their spiritual wellbeing. How could he know that countless multitudes, centuries later would still be poring over this letter, gleaning truth, puzzling and praying their way through his tightly reasoned rhetoric?

He knew he was preaching the gospel, sharing the inspired writings as the Spirit of God led him. But he had no idea how far and wide this letter would go. He had no idea (yet) what it would cost him in time, and travel, and trials, and terrors at sea to finally reach Rome—in chains, so he could meet a few hundred believers, only to be snubbed by some and devotedly loved by others.

Eventually he would be imprisoned a second time in Rome, in the notorious Mamertine Prison. At his preliminary hearing, no one came to his support. He was condemned on charges of treason against the emperor. As a Roman citizen, he was entitled to a private beheading instead of public crucifixion or thrown into the arena with wild animals.

The day before his execution, Paul would be marched three miles out of the city where he would be kept in a tiny cell overnight near a place of tombs. At dawn Paul would be stripped to the waist and tied, kneeling upright, to a low pillar that left his neck free. They would beat him with rods one last time; and then, with one sharp swing of the axe, Paul would leave this earthly life.

But for now, sitting in Corinth writing this letter, Paul didn't know exactly when or how his life would end. But he was ready for suffering (again) and ready whenever, and however, God would bring him home to glory. It was on his mind as he wrote Romans 8 . . .

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:18, 39)

Icebreaker

What is the greatest legacy you want to leave when the Lord calls you home?

Goals for this Session:

- Discover the role of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life and prayers.
- Consider why nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.
- Pray authentic prayers that cultivate hope, help, and invincible love.

The Hope of Glory

Romans 8:18–25

So far in this chapter, Paul has identified two truths that set a Christian apart in life. For one thing, we aren't condemned to live in a perpetual cycle of sin, defeat, and failure. Better yet, the Holy Spirit of God is living in us, just as Jesus promised (John 14:16–18). Because we are family, we have all the rights and privileges that come with being a child of God.

1. **Perspective is everything** (verse 18). What does Paul say about suffering and glory?

- a. What “glory that is to be revealed in us” is Paul talking about? (Paul mentions it again in verse 23.) Use the verses below for help with your answer.

1 John 3:2

2 Corinthians 4:17–18

- b. per·spec·tive | Viewing one thing in relationship to another. The ability to understand the relative importance of things; a sense of proportion.

Paul depicts all of creation as groaning in pain (verses 19–22). Science does too, but it sees a dying planet moving toward extinction. Both involve suffering but what is the difference? Simply said, “One is the pain of hopeless dread, while the other is the pain of hopeful anticipation.”³ Perspective.

Paul doesn't trivialize suffering, but hope puts it in perspective. From verses 23–25, would you say that Paul's hope was a soft sentiment—or a force to be reckoned with? How so?

Scientists have recently made new predictions about the end of our Solar System: In the process of dying itself, the sun will engulf our planet and life on earth will end. **“In fact, humanity only has about one billion years left unless we find a way off this rock.”**¹

“All good things must come to an end. One day earth will be inhospitable to anything resembling life as we know it.”² Error! Bookmark not

¹ Michelle Starr, *Scientists Have Figured Out When and How Our Sun Will Die, And It's Going to Be Epic*, ©May 7, 2018, www.sciencealert.com

² Dave Mosher, *8 Truly Horrifying Ways the Earth Could Die: What Can Kill Planet Earth*, ©March 12, 2018, www.businessinsider.com

³ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Eternal Perspective Ministries, 2004. All rights reserved. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), p. 132.

2. **Unseen hope and tangible faith** (verses 23–25). Paul never conveyed the idea that life for the believer, this side of Heaven, would be easy.
 - a. Do your best to explain how the Holy Spirit gives us a foretaste of Heaven. Why does His indwelling presence cause us to groan inwardly and wait eagerly?
 - b. Paul helps to answer a question that regularly comes up, one way or another, for every believer. Is suffering really necessary? Why can't we opt out? Use any (or all) of the verses below for help with your answer.

John 17:14–16

Philippians 1:29

1 Peter 1:6–7

1 Peter 4:12–13

James 1:2–4

A Very Present Help

Romans 8:26–30

Whether we are trying to make sense of the world around us or find meaning in our own life, we need to know that God is in control. The Holy Spirit joins us in our struggles and He doesn't come empty-handed.

1. **Perfect Prayers** (verses 26–27). When human words and wisdom fail—and even when they don't—how does the Holy Spirit (our Helper, Comforter, Advocate) intercede for us?
 - a. When you are particularly burdened to pray about something, but don't know what else to say, do you simply stop praying? Why or why not?

2. **Perfect Plans** (verses 28–30). As a believer looking back in our life, we learn to recognize how God’s hand fashioned our experiences for good. Time has a way of putting the correct price tag on most things, especially eternal things.

a. Long before the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write this letter, God was teaching the truth of Romans 8:28 in various times and ways. Choose any (or all) that minister to you in a special way. Share one in discussion time.

Genesis 50:20

Psalms 119:65–67

Proverbs 3:5–6

Philippians 1:12

Isaiah 46:4

Isaiah 55:8–11

Jeremiah 29:11

1 Thessalonians 5:18

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

hope (elpis) Unwavering expectation of an unseen reality.

foreknew (proginosko) Not simply what God knew in advance, but that which He favorably allowed.

predestined (proriso) Marked out beforehand. This is where our word “horizon” comes from. A Christian’s destiny or horizon is fixed by God to be made like His Son.

conformed (súmmorphos) To fashion into the likeness of; not forcibly; by cooperation.

glorified (doxázo) To esteem and honor; in this context, the believer’s place of honor in God’s family is because of saving faith in Jesus Christ and the refining work of the Holy Spirit.

b. Have you ever prayed for something you thought was best, but then God answered it differently? We all have, of course. Can you see God’s purpose in it now?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God,
to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

Romans 8:28 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Does this verse give you a reason to hope? How and in what way?

Invincible Love

Romans 8:31–39

Paul brings his meticulously laid out presentation of the gospel to a joyous conclusion. There is more to say, but for today Paul celebrates God's unshakeable, immovable, invincible love.

1. **Nothing can separate** (verses 31–39). If Paul had asked *who can be against us*, we would be back in a world of hurt. But the real question was **IF GOD IS FOR US** *who can be against us*?
 - a. In simple terms, how would you share this with someone who needs to hear it?
 - b. For you personally, what is the most encouraging takeaway point from this chapter?
2. *How the gospel changes everything*. Paul was no stranger to suffering. Physical pain. Financial hardship. Mental stress. These were familiar issues to Paul. When we remember that God causes all things to work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.
 - a. **The gospel is incentive to let hope shape our perspective.** The secret is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances (Colossians 1:27). Read Romans 8:28–29 once more and pay attention to the part about being *conformed to the image of His Son*. Since that's the goal, a small—but significant—shift in our perspective could make a difference.

From: "Lord, it's what You're trying to teach me."

To: "Lord, it's *who* You're *making* me."

- b. **The gospel is incentive to rely on God's Holy Spirit to pray through me.** Wordless prayers can accomplish so much more than prayerless words.

Identify a prayer that you have all but given up on. What might God want to do with that prayer?

Romans 8:26–27

James 5:15

"He confronted me with a life-changing question I would never have heard in the commotion of my happiness.

Do you want to know Me? The Holy Spirit groaned through my loneliness and disappointment with me. But where I would have given up all hope of joy, He interceded for me, praying the Father's will into my life on my behalf.

The Spirit tugged me in the direction of God's plan for my future."

Charles Swindoll



Gospel at a Glance: Predestination | “The believer never need faint in times of suffering and trial because he knows that God is at work in the world, and He has a perfect plan. God’s plan has two purposes: our good and His glory. Ultimately, He will make us like Jesus Christ! Best of all, God’s plan is going to succeed! It started in eternity past when He chose us in Christ (Ephesians 1:4–5). He predetermined that one day we would be like His Son. Predestination applies only to saved people. Nowhere are we taught that God predestines people to be eternally condemned. If they are condemned, it is because of their refusal to trust Christ (John 3:18–21). Those whom He chose, He called (2 Thessalonians 2:13–14); when they responded to His call, He justified them, and He glorified them. This means that the believer has already been glorified in Christ (John 17:22); the revelation of this glory awaits the coming of the Lord (Romans 8:21–23).⁴

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary/New Testament, Volume 1*, (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Cook Communications, 2001), p. 541.

Notes

Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

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Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 11 – The Grief of Unbelief | Romans Chapter 9

Chapter 8 finished on such a high note. *If God is for us, who can be against us? What can separate us from the love of God?* Every obstacle Paul could imagine—and he had experienced them all—evaporated in the light of God's unwavering love. He will never let go of you!

But Paul knew, all too well, that the gospel wasn't *good news* to everyone's way of thinking. This chapter begins on a sad note for Paul. He expresses grief and navigates the questions. Why were God's chosen people, the Jewish nation, estranged from God? Was God replacing them? For the next three chapters, Paul explains that God has not abandoned His people.

Icebreaker

On a serious note, when you think of friends and loved ones who resist the gospel, which is more difficult for you?

☐ Speaking the truth in love ☐ Persistently praying ☐ Believing they will ever come to faith

Goals for this Session:

- Discover why Paul wept for his own people.
- Consider the connection between God's sovereign purpose and longsuffering patience.
- Pray for resolve to speak the truth in love and live out the gospel in daily life.

When Wills Collide

Romans 9:1–18

Paul expresses personal anguish over Israel's rejection of Jesus.

1. **Privilege and Potential** (verses 1–5). Paul was considered an enemy by his own people for preaching the gospel. How did he feel about them?

- a. Paul thinks of the advantages and privileges that God gave to Israel from the beginning. All these blessings culminated in Jesus Himself (see Luke 4:18–21) but they rejected Him. Considering Paul's own upbringing and testimony, what kept him from being complacent or judgmental toward unbelieving Jews?

Acts 26:15–18

1 Corinthians 15:9

1 Timothy 1:12–15

- b. Can you relate with Paul? Why or why not? How would you explain your own emotions toward those who are callous or indifferent to the gospel?

2. **God's Children** (verses 6–18). Paul does a flyover of Israel's history to show salvation isn't a natural born right (verses 6–9); no one is chosen based on merit (verses 10–13); and salvation is *and always will be* an act of God's grace and mercy (verses 14–18).

- a. How does Romans 2:28–29 help you understand why Paul took time to explain that being a descendant of Abraham is not the same as inheriting God's promise to Abraham?

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

mercy (eleos) A freely chosen deed of grace, motivated by love. God's grace is shown in His willingness to extend mercy instead of wrath.

harden (skleruno) Same word for *sclerosis* which describes hardening of tissue that inhibits the body from its normal function. In the NT, the result of persisting in sin and unbelief which leads to death if one doesn't repent.

- b. How does Isaiah 55:8–11 help you understand why God chose Jacob over Esau before they were even born?

Good to Know

Did God hate Esau?

While hate can express intense displeasure, in ancient culture it also was a figure of speech to indicate giving priority for one thing over another. God's actions are filled with emotion but He is not ruled or run by it. Choosing one over the other ("hating") was a righteous act of God's sovereign will.

- c. How does Titus 3:5 help you understand that salvation is an act of God's grace and mercy?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

"Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,
and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

Romans 9:33 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Answer any, or all, of the prompts below.

Look up. What does this verse teach you about God?

Look around. What does this indicate about the world and people in general?

Look within. What does this show you about yourself?

Look ahead. Does this verse give you a reason to hope? In what way?

Look alive! Given the opportunity, how would you express the truth of this verse to someone who needs to hear it?

Vessels of Wrath and Mercy

Romans 9:19–33

Earlier, Paul anticipated critics would blame God for unfairly judging sinners (Romans 3:5). This same complaint comes back with a twist. Now Paul answers those who would blame God for unfairly extending mercy to some but not others.

1. Paul knew he would get pushback for concluding that God decides when to give or withhold mercy. Describe how he sets up this part of the discussion and answers his own question (verses 19–21).
 - a. Did Paul mean that believers should never question something they don't understand? What made questioning God inappropriate in this instance? Explain your answer.
2. In verses 22–29, Paul prompts us to make the connection between God's sovereign purpose and His longsuffering patience. There is a lot to absorb here, but see if you can distill a few simple takeaway lessons. Consider them for yourself and write your response.

Verses 22–26

Verses 27–29

3. *How the gospel changes everything.* Who are we to argue with God? The Lord's mercies are over *all* His work (Psalm 145:9). When we remember that the Lord doesn't want anyone to perish, but for all to repent (2 Peter 3:9) the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

- a. **The gospel is incentive to pray for salvation for others.** Paul lived with grief for his Jewish kinsmen's unbelief. He was mystified how people with all the spiritual advantages can reject Jesus—while others, blindly following their own nose, can hear the gospel and see that Jesus is who they've been looking for all their life. Who needs mercy? All of us. Who deserves mercy? No one. No not one.*

We have every reason to be confident in Christ (see Romans 8:31–39), but confidence without gratitude breeds complacency. Gratitude is the oxygen that fuels prayer and passion for others to know Jesus. Use this section to breathe in grace and exhale gratitude to God for your salvation.

Who are you praying for? Take time in group to pray in unity (names only, no details) for unsaved or prodigal loved ones. Acts 26:18

"It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose His temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with incredible love, He embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did this on His own, with no help from us! Then He picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus our Messiah. Now God has us where He wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus."

- Ephesians 2:1-7 (The Message)

- b. **The gospel is incentive to live a surrendered life.** Pharaoh's hard heart is what we know and remember most about him. God gave him time to repent, but Pharaoh repeatedly resisted until finally, God hardened his heart. Pharaoh stubbornly asserted his will and God's response was *if that's your will, more power to you.* **

Consider this. If God strengthened Pharaoh's rebellious will, won't He also strengthen our surrendered will? When we surrender our will, God strengthens our resolve. In what way?

Matthew 26:39

Philippians 2:5–8, 12–13

James 4:6–7

"When God receives our will in honest surrender, He puts His will into it and makes it stronger than ever for Him. Having yielded to His choice and placed ourselves under His direction, He puts into us all the strength and intensity of His own great will and makes us positive, forceful, victorious and unmovable."

A.B. Simpson
Days of Heaven on Earth

* Romans 3:10-11, 23 **Recall Paul's description of unrepentant sinners in chapter 1, that God *gave them over* to their sin.



Gospel at a Glance: The Sovereignty of God and Evangelism | Did God choose us or did we choose God? I'm talking about predestination and divine election. Know this: Before the world was made, before sin came in, God chose you in Christ to be with Him through all eternity. Jesus said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). The great evangelist D.L. Moody said, "The 'whosoever will' are the elect. The 'whosoever won't' are the non-elect." I do not believe that God predestines certain people to be saved, and others to be damned. Scripture teaches, "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). It's been said, "God wants every man to be saved. The devil wants every man to be damned. Man has the casting vote."

It is clear in Scripture we are commanded to preach the gospel. I am the first to acknowledge that salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). We have nothing whatsoever to do with that. But as in most things, there is God's part and there is our part. Our part is to appeal to people. "We proclaim Christ, warning everyone we meet and teaching everyone we can, all that we know about Him ..." (Colossians 1:28).

So instead of trying to figure out how God chose us, let's rejoice that He did. And let's let other people know, without hesitation, that God loves them! Again, to quote D.L. Moody, "Lord, save the elect—and then elect some more!" – Greg Laurie¹

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people." Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

¹ Greg Laurie, *Why God Chose You*, (Greg's Blog, January 27, 2015)

Notes

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Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 12 – The Simplicity of the Gospel | Romans Chapter 10

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NIV).

Can you remember when those simple words first penetrated your heart? It probably wasn't the first time you heard them. Children are taught to recite this verse. If you're older than fifty, you've probably seen the words plastered on a roadside sign left to fade in the sun. John 3:16 is a favorite verse—but what do people actually *hear*? Skeptics hear a slogan. Disinterested masses hear a one-size-fits-all phrase. Pretenders hear the words they intend to fall back on someday. What do you hear?

Paul shared the gospel with anyone, anywhere, anytime. Sometimes his message was heard and accepted; sometimes it fell on deaf ears. That's what was troubling his mind in this chapter. He sadly acknowledged that the truth was all around, but some weren't listening.

Icebreaker

When are you most eager to share the gospel?

When are you most likely to be unsure or reluctant to share the gospel?

Goals for this Session:

- Discover why Paul's Jewish kinsmen rejected the gospel.
- Consider how and in what way God uses people to spread the gospel.
- Pray authentic prayers that embrace faith and produce disciples.

Zeal Without Knowledge

Romans 10:1–13

Zeal is not enough and ignorance is no excuse. Paul explains why Israel was accountable for rejecting the gospel.

1. **Paul's heart and prayer** (verses 1–3). What did Paul desire, more than anything, for his Jewish kinsmen? Explain why Paul was personally invested to keep praying for them.

- a. Do your best to explain what “zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” means. Give some current-day examples of what that might look like.

- b. Was there ever a time when you thought that living right or being open to spiritual things was enough to get to Heaven? What caused you to change your thinking?

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

confess (homologeó) Agree with; openly profess and say what you believe.

zeal (zélōs) Fervent; avidly devoted; passionate about.

ignorant (agnoéo) In context, to not perceive, recognize, or be familiar with.

believe (pisteúō) Faith in; to be firmly persuaded.

saved (sózō) Made whole; rescued from eternal death and penalty of sin.

2. **What Moses said** (verses 4–8). Everything about the Mosaic Law was intended to show they were sinners in need of a Savior, but Paul says *they missed the point*.^{*} Instead of letting the Law bring them to Christ (Galatians 3:24) they depended on themselves to keep the Law.

- a. What did Paul mean when he said that Christ is the “end” of the Law? Use Matthew 5:17 and Romans 8:3–4 for help with your answer.

- b. In verse 5, what point was Paul making about those who insist on living by the Law? Review Romans 2:17–24 and Romans 3:19–20 for help with your answer.

^{*} Paul's own experience proved how zealous, determined, and sincerely *wrong* a person can be (Acts 22:3; Galatians 1:14).

3. In verses 6–8, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 30, where Moses warned Israel as they were about to enter the land of Canaan. This is part of his “choose life or choose death” message. Simply put, Moses told the people they didn’t need to look high and low for what to do, because they already had the Word (God’s instructions). They could respond by faith and obedience in their heart and live (Deuteronomy 30:14).

For Paul, the gist of it all was to show that the *word of faith* (the gospel) wasn’t a complicated system of rules. Jesus had come, and He was the Word made flesh (John 1:14–17).

a. According to verses 9–13, who can be saved?

b. What is, and is not, required?

- c. When we believe and confess that Jesus is Lord, what are we saying about Him? Why is this difficult or unappealing for many people? Consider what the following verses say . . .

“True faith must touch the will and result in a changed life.”

Warren Wiersbe

John 14:6

Acts 4:12

Luke 6:46

. . . and answer in your own words.

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Romans 10:9 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? In what way?

Knowledge . . . With Zeal

Romans 10:14–21

All this talk of Israel's zeal without knowledge broke Paul's heart for sharing the gospel wide open. He traces the progression of the gospel back to the one being sent. But what if the one being sent never *went*? That would be knowledge without zeal. Good news is meant to be shared!

1. **Anatomy of sharing the gospel** (verses 14–15). Paul describes how God uses *people* to spread the gospel. Consider what this does and *does not* mean. Put a **T** (true) or **F** (false) next to the following statements. Then briefly explain your response.

___ I'm not qualified to share the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:26-27 and 2:1-5 | 2 Corinthians 3:5 and 4:7).

___ Sharing the gospel is easy—no preparation required (Acts 1:8 | 2 Timothy 2:15 | 1 Peter 3:15).

___ If I share the gospel but they don't pray to accept Jesus, I wasn't successful (1 Corinthians 3:6–9).

___ If they *do* pray, there's nothing more I need to do (Matthew 28:19–20 | Acts 2:42 and 11:20–23).

___ If I bring them to church, I don't need to share the gospel myself (Matthew 5:16 | Colossians 4:6).

2. If you could explain what belief in Jesus entails, in one sentence, what would you say?^{*}
 - a. What can you recall about someone sharing the gospel with you before you were saved? Did it make sense to you? Did you respond right away? Share why or why not.
 - b. How would you describe your first efforts to share the gospel with someone? Share one or two tips for someone just starting out.

^{*} Having a clear objective in mind can help us stay on point when talking about the gospel in normal conversation.

3. *How the gospel changes everything.* This chapter ends with a compelling image of God with His arms open wide, patiently waiting all the day long to draw Israel back to Himself. The picture was nearly a thousand years old when Paul found it in the prophet Isaiah's writings (Isaiah 65:1–2). It has been a long day and God is still holding out His hands. When we consider the patience of God, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

- a. The gospel is incentive to pray consistently and specifically to share the saving love of Christ with others. Identify three people you will commit to pray for, every day this month.

"I am convinced that the greatest act of love we can ever perform for people is to tell them about God's love for them in Christ."

Billy Graham

Give some thought to what course of action you will take. Be practical and specific.

- b. The gospel is incentive to willingly go out of our way to help someone begin to know and grow in their relationship with Jesus. Can you identify one person who consistently pointed you to God and helped you to grow spiritually? In what way?

Are you presently, or have you in the past, done this for someone else? What would be necessary in order for you to cultivate this kind of relationship?



Gospel at a Glance: People Proclaim the Gospel | From the original Greek, we could translate the final question in Romans 10:14 as, "How shall they hear without one preaching?" The Phillips translation puts it this way, "How can they hear unless someone proclaims Him?" Therefore, we see the emphasis is not on a preacher, but on preaching. In 1 Corinthians 1:21, it says, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." This means that we are to recognize the primary way God has chosen to reach the lost is through the proclamation of the gospel—by people. God has chosen the agency of His proclaimed Word to bring people to salvation. —Greg Laurie¹

¹ Greg Laurie, *The Message Proclaimed*, Harvest: Greg Laurie Daily Devotion, August 18, 2017

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

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Notes

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Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 13 – The Root and Branches | Romans Chapter 11

If you've seen *Fiddler on the Roof*, you remember Tevye saying to God, "I know we're the chosen people—but once in a while can't You choose someone else?" Some people do think that God rejected the Jews, took back all of the promises He made, and gave them to the church instead. But Paul (who never saw *Fiddler on the Roof*) takes care of that question in this chapter.

In this chapter, Paul explains the mystery of God's redemption plan. We admit it can be a brain teaser, but this we know. God does not break His promises and He has not abandoned His people.

Icebreaker

Which of these mysteries have you ever successfully solved?

☐ Escape Room ☐ Rubik's Cube ☐ Who built Stonehenge ☐ Mayan Calendar ☐ Where lost socks go

Goals for this Session:

- Discover the scope and magnitude of God's plan of redemption.
- Consider the perils of pride and complacency in a believer's life.
- Pray for the faithful remnant of Jewish believers to be salt and light for their people.

Rejected? No Way!

Romans 11:1–24

Paul didn't shy away from calling out Israel for rejecting the gospel, but he had more to say.

1. **What Paul remembered** (verses 1–10). Paul cites proof that God is not finished with Israel.
 - a. Paul starts with the most personal evidence he could offer. Himself! What made Paul living proof that God wasn't done with Jews? You can use the following references or simply list what comes to mind about Paul. (Acts 9; 1 Corinthians 15:1–10; 1 Timothy 1:16)
 - b. *Elijah and the remnant*. Read the story for yourself (1 Kings 19) but there's a reason Paul applies it to his own generation. Elijah thought all of Israel had rejected God—and from outward appearances, it sure looked that way. Elijah was ready to quit on his people (and life). So God kindly lifted Elijah out of his funk. God let the weary prophet know there was a faithful remnant. He wasn't alone. God had a plan, and it was time for Elijah to go home. There was still more work to be done.

For Paul, this was tremendously encouraging. Share one takeaway lesson for yourself.

2. **What Paul knew** (verses 11–15). For Paul, the rub of his kinsmen rejecting Jesus was hard; would they never respond? In these verses, Paul explains what he knew of God's master plan for His people.

- a. How did Israel's blindness result in blessing for the Gentiles?
- b. How did Paul see salvation among the Gentiles as ultimately working for the Jews' benefit?
- c. If we assume that because Paul knew God's plan, he never grappled with the hard parts, we forget how human he was. He already expressed his own grief and longing for the salvation of his people. According to verse 15, what did Paul take comfort in knowing?

Good to Know

Soon after his conversion, God told Paul that he would take the gospel to Gentiles (Acts 9:15-16). We see how this played out in Acts, in a familiar pattern wherever Paul went. He visited the synagogues first and gave the gospel to fellow Jews; they rejected it so he took it to Gentiles (Acts 13:42-52).

What painful situation has you leaning into God and looking ahead to better days? What brings you comfort?

Romans 8:28

Jeremiah 29:11

Isaiah 43:18–19

3. **What Paul warned** (verses 16–24). Paul taught that Israel’s rejection was temporary; one day the Jewish nation will be brought back to God. Two metaphors apply to Israel’s natural heritage as God’s chosen people. Again, Paul is showing that God is not done with Israel.

- a. The olive tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel.* The root is God’s promise to Abraham. God keeps His promises and this is what supports and sustains Israel to this day.

Paul pictures unbelieving Jews as broken off branches and believing Gentiles as wild branches grafted in. Paul reminds his Gentile friends what got Jews in trouble in the first place and warns them not to have the same attitude.** We have

touched on this before (Romans 2:1–4, Romans 3:27). Since most believers in Rome were Gentile, Paul’s concern was warranted. In your experience, what’s the harm of:

Being on the receiving end of a superior attitude:

Being on the giving end of a superior attitude:

First Fruits

It was Jewish custom to offer the first part of any produce to the Lord as a reminder that God is the source of all good things (Numbers 15:17-19). The sample represented the whole batch.

- b. What did Gentile believers need to remember about being given access (grafted in) to God’s covenant with Abraham? What had they done to deserve all of the advantages and privileges that God had promised Abraham? Please explain.

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

kindness (chrestos) goodness; absence of malice in thought, deed, and character

severity (apotomia) to cut off; as in the decisive removal of dead branches

- c. Paul seriously warns Gentiles that they have no room to be proud and good reason for reverent fear (verse 20). If God didn’t spare natural branches, He won’t spare you.[?] It was true in Paul’s day and true in ours.

mercy (eleeo) compassion; an active desire to remove man from the misery of sin

The Bible says what lies ahead for the church in the last days (1 Timothy 4; 2 Timothy 3). Jesus cautioned churches that grew complacent and self-satisfied that He would remove His presence and blessing if they didn’t repent (Revelation 2–3). This is the best, albeit unpleasant, warning! On the upside, the Bible gives us hope and practical ways to respond. How can we, as the church, remain spiritually active, healthy, and engaged?

Colossians 4:2–6

2 Timothy 4:1–5

Titus 2:11–13

* The olive tree is not a picture of the church; in the church, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile (Galatians 3:28). Paul is talking about Jews and Gentiles as people groups and their relative positions in God’s plan.

** Jews had always regarded themselves as God’s special favorites and they despised Gentiles; now the tables were turned.

[?] Paul is not raising the possibility of a person losing their salvation; nothing can separate a *true believer* from God (Romans 8).

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past founding out!”

Romans 11:33 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? How and in what way?

God’s Mercy

Romans 11:25–36

Paul explains that when salvation among the Gentiles is fulfilled, Israel will turn back to God and embrace the gospel of grace.

1. **The mystery of God’s mercy** (verses 25–32). Imagine how hard it must have been for a devout Jew like Paul, with the history and experience of his people flowing through his veins, to see them reject the gospel without a thought and refuse Jesus. *But it won’t always be so.*
 - a. What did Paul want his Gentile friends to understand about God’s love and purposes for the Jewish people?
 - b. Paul saw it was his responsibility and ours to arouse unbelieving Jews to envy (*I want what you’ve got*). What will compel anyone to want what we’ve got?

John 13:34–35

Ephesians 4:29

Titus 3:1–2

2. *How the gospel changes everything.* We can't prove it, but it's entirely likely that Paul was accustomed to puzzled stares and hands up for questions every time he spoke out the mystery of God's mercy. No one can grasp every nuance of His grace, but this we know. God never condemns men who want to be saved—He saves men who deserve to be lost. When we remember this, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

a. **The gospel is incentive to live in awe of God** (verses 33–36).

Take time to meditate on these verses. It will take more than a 30-second look to grasp the extent of what Paul is expressing here. What stands out to you about God's character? His wisdom? His ways? His mercy?

**"The reverential fear of God
mixed with love
and
fascination and astonishment
and devotion
is the most purifying emotion
the human soul can know."**

A.W. Tozer

- b. **The gospel is incentive to extend mercy and keep praying.** Paul emphasizes God's grace and patience towards Israel, even in their rebellion. At any time, when someone turns to Him, God will always forgive and welcome them back. Have you ever felt like giving up on someone who is calloused, unwilling to listen, and consistently rejects hearing the gospel? According to the verses below, what can you be sure is God's heart toward them?

Jeremiah 31:3

Isaiah 30:18

2 Peter 3:9

Does this realign your heart attitude to extend mercy and keep praying? In what way?



Gospel at a Glance: The Depth and Riches of God's Wisdom | "Having contemplated God's great plan of salvation for Jews and Gentiles, all Paul could do was sing a hymn of praise. Only a God as wise as our God could take the fall of Israel and turn it into salvation for the world! His plans will not be aborted nor will His purposes lack fulfillment. No human being can fully know the mind of the Lord; and the more we study His ways, the more we offer Him praise." – Warren Wiersbe¹

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary/New Testament, Volume 1*, (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Cook Communications, 2001), p. 553

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

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Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 14 – Transformed Living | Romans Chapter 12

Chapter 12 is a turning point in this letter—and Paul clearly wanted it to be a turning point in the life of every believer who reads it. Every topic he has touched on in Romans brings us to this place. It is safe to say that Paul was passionate about two things: Preaching the gospel to those who are lost; and teaching believers to live out the gospel in everyday life.

Icebreaker

When you think of *change* what comes to mind? Check what best describes your initial reaction.

- ☐ It's too much trouble. ☐ It's not likely to last. ☐ It's a little bit scary.
☐ It keeps life interesting. ☐ There's always room for improvement. ☐ Let's do this!

Goals for this Session:

- Discover the secret of a satisfied life.
- Consider ways to live out the gospel in community with others.
- Pray for opportunities to cultivate spiritual gifts and strong relationships.

Transformed for Life

Romans 12:1–2

Entire sermons have been preached on these verses. If we don't respond to Paul's plea here, any effort to obey the instructions in the rest of this chapter will be superficial.

1. *By the mercies of God.* What reasons can you think of for becoming a living sacrifice? Use Romans 11:33–36 for help with your answer.

- a. Explain in practical terms what Paul means when he describes our sacrifice as:

→¹ living

→¹ holy

"The real secret of an unsatisfied life is most often traced back to an unsundered will."

J. Hudson Taylor

- b. What are some things that indicate conformity to the world?

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

prove (dokimazo) determine value by observing behavior in intense heat or pressure.

conformed (syschematizo) to be shaped, like clay pressed into a mold; (a passive verb).

transformed (metamorpho) To be changed: in character, in substance, in nature.

perfect (teleios) complete; ultimate; lacking nothing.

- c. If you can identify what hinders you from presenting yourself as a living sacrifice, what would it be?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Romans 12:2 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? How and in what way?

Living in Community

Romans 12:3–21

The transforming power of God’s love changes how we think and live in community with others. We learn that every gift is not for every believer—but these commands are for us all.

1. **Here to serve** (verses 3–8). Paul cautions against thinking too highly of ourselves. That’s a mandate in every aspect of life, but Paul has the church specifically in mind.

- a. Who decides what gifts we are given—and for what purpose?

1 Corinthians 12:7, 11 | Ephesians 4:15–16 | 1 Peter 4:10

Paul describes some, but not all, spiritual gifts. Those mentioned here (some are highly visible, others are more behind the scenes) illustrate Paul’s point not to inflate or overestimate what we bring to the table as compared to someone else. More gifts are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and Ephesians 4:11-12.

- b. A “measure of faith” is simply another term for a spiritual gift. When we regard the gifts as a measure of acceptance, or value, or visibility, trouble creeps in. Every spiritual gift is customized, but comes with the same specifications for use. Please explain.

Mark 10:42–45

Philippians 2:3–7

2. **Here to love** (verses 9–21). “Don’t think too highly” applies to more than self-promotion or chasing the spotlight. If we don’t see the need to be in community with other believers, we overestimate our own strength and abilities. We need each other!

Paul talks about breaking through the surface of casual acquaintance to put down roots of genuine love (verse 9).

- a. *Love in action* (verses 10–16). Reading this, what stands out? From personal experience, give an example of being on the *receiving* end of something mentioned here. Give an example of being on the *giving* end of something mentioned here.

- b. *Love under pressure* (verses 17–21). Life is messy, unfair, and imperfect. How would you compare Paul’s instructions here* to the advice we’d likely get from the world?

* Paul quotes Proverbs 25:21-22. Two possible meanings: 1) When a person’s fire went out, he needed to borrow live coals to restart his fire. Giving a person coals in a pan to carry home on their head was a neighborly, kind act; it made friends, not enemies. 2) An Egyptian ritual: If a person was guilty of wrongdoing, he would carry a pan of burning coals on his head to signal repentance.

3. *How the gospel changes everything.* People who live by the mercies of God never outgrow the gospel. It's not just how we become Christians, it compels us to live out our faith in every part of life. When God transforms us by changing the way we think, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

- a. **The gospel is incentive to lifelong change.** A *living* sacrifice means walking out our "yes, Lord" in daily surrender. The spiritual adage to *evangelize or fossilize* is as true for individual believers as it is for the church. When you think of the cross, does it still move you to believe and obey? Why or why not?

"If you look up into His face and say, 'Yes, Lord, whatever it costs,' at that moment He will flood your life with His presence and power."

Alan Redpath

In practical terms, what does it look like to present yourself to God as a living sacrifice?

James 1:22–24

2 Peter 1:5–8

- b. **The gospel is incentive to live in community.** As Paul said, we are many parts of one body and we belong to each other. That's why the Bible urges us to look for ways to come together and motivate one another to love and good deeds (see Hebrews 10:24–25).

What does that currently look like for you? Some aspects of living in community are listed below. How does active involvement in these areas help you to grow? How have you been able to encourage someone else's growth?

→¹ Sunday Worship / Bible Teaching

→¹ Midweek Service and/or Small Group

→¹ Serving / Using your spiritual gifts

→¹ Discipling / Mentoring

→¹ Prayer / Support

→¹ Hospitality / Fellowship/ Friendships

→¹ Gospel Sharing / Community Outreach

→¹ Other



Gospel at a Glance: A Life of Service | “God has enlisted us in His navy and placed us on His ship. The boat has one purpose—to carry us safely to the other shore. This is no cruise ship; it’s a battleship. We aren’t called to a life of leisure; we are called to a life of service. Each of us has a different task. Some, concerned with those who are drowning, are snatching people from the water. Others are occupied with the enemy, so they man the cannons of prayer and worship. Still others devote themselves to the crew, feeding and training the crew members.

Though different, we are the same. Each can tell of a personal encounter with the captain, for each has received a personal call . . . we each followed Him across the gangplank of His grace onto the same boat. There is one captain and one destination. Though the battle is fierce, the boat is safe, for our captain is God.” – Max Lucado¹

“In Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:5 niv).

¹ Max Lucado, *In the Grip of Grace*, (J.Countryman, a division of Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee), p. 303

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

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Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 15 – Citizens with Godly Influence | Romans Chapter 13

Nothing proves our Christian witness like the wear and tear of daily life. In chapter 12, Paul taught how we should treat one another in light of God's mercy to us. Love is the motive, and the specific instructions Paul gives encourage us to examine how we come across as individuals. Do we respond in ways that reveal the transforming power of God's love in our life?

In chapter 13, Paul continues to think about the implications of the gospel for daily life. We live in a time when people are losing faith and don't know where to find it. So let the church be known as respectful, law-abiding people who exert a godly influence on society. Above all, let Christians be known by their love.

Icebreaker

A recent poll asked Americans what they think is **very important** in order to be a good citizen. What do you think the top three answers were? See the answers by percentage below.*

- ☐ Vote ☐ Respect opinions of those who disagree ☐ Pay your taxes ☐ Display the flag
- ☐ Stay up with events in government/politics ☐ Always obey the law ☐ Volunteer

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what citizenship has to do with your Christian witness.
- Consider how the power of love motivates and enables us to fulfill the law.
- Pray for grace to be a godly influence wherever you are.

* **Vote:** 74% **Pay taxes:** 71% **Obey the law:** 69% **Respect opinions:** 61% **Volunteer:** 52% **Stay up with current events:** 49% **Display flag:** 36%
Pew Research Center: The Responsibilities of Citizenship, April 2018

Good to know . . .

Submit to governing authorities and practice love toward your fellow man. This wasn't an easy thing for Christians in Rome and Paul knew it. Their world was unfriendly—in fact, the political and social atmosphere in Rome was rapidly deteriorating. Every citizen was affected, and within a few years after Paul's writing, the emperor Nero began targeting Christians in particular. Here is a glimpse of what the church in Rome was confronted with.

- **Indifference.** In general, Romans were not religious. They borrowed religion and philosophy from the Greeks and shaped it to fit Roman interests. Romans valued the practice of worship mainly for what it contributed to community life; feeding the soul was secondary.
- **Suspicion.** In the public's perception, Christians were a fringe-group with dubious motives. Meeting in private homes was frowned upon, as it might foster rebellion. There were rumors of cannibalism (exaggerations about their observance of the Lord's Supper). Loyalty was an issue, since Christians avoided participation in community rituals and offerings to gods.
- **Political unrest.** Jewish zealots were stepping up their religious rhetoric and calling for the overthrow of Rome. Any act of civil disobedience (as defined by government) was taken seriously and harshly dealt with. Resistance to paying taxes was gaining momentum and by AD 58 (a year or two after Paul's letter) Rome had a full-blown tax revolt on its hands.

Model Citizens

Romans 13:1–7

Paul turns his attention to how believers must live and conduct themselves in society.

1. Governing authorities (verses 1–2). What command does Paul give in these verses?
 - a. Paul emphasizes why being a law-abiding citizen is essential. What is our first, and most important, motive for respecting authority?

Explain how resisting this command adversely affects our relationship with God.

- b. In verses 3–7, what follow-up reasons does Paul give in support of this command?
 - c. Consider how verses 3–5 can also be an instructive model for those in authority to follow. How should they lead? According to the Bible, what is the purpose of civil government?
2. Paul was not advocating blind obedience to governing authorities. We are responsible to live with our spiritual eyes open. What do examples from the Bible show us about the limits of our Christian duty to obey? Note how they responded in these situations.

Daniel 3:12, 16–18

Daniel 6:5, 10–13

Acts 4:18–20, 29–31

Acts 5:27–29

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

submit (hypotasso) Willing cooperation; in this context, to government authority.

put on (endúo) To be clothed in Christ; what we “put on” reminds us of who we are, which allows us to behave accordingly.

no provision (pronoia) In context, to make no plan or leave open the option to sin.

3. What does citizenship have to do with your Christian witness? Think of the various ways you have potential and the responsibility to be a godly influence.

1 Timothy 2:1–4

Titus 3:1–2

1 Peter 2:12–19

1 Peter 4:12–16

- a. Have you ever been required to comply with a specific command that goes directly against God’s Word? How did you respond? If you had it to do over, would you do anything differently? Why, or why not?
- b. In your observation, what attitudes or behaviors among believers tend to give the church a bad name and diminish the effective sharing of the gospel?

What attitudes or behaviors give us a solid witness and increase our influence in sharing the gospel in our communities? Share one or two specific examples you can think of.

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”
Romans 13:14 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? How and in what way?

Love's Duty

Romans 13:8–14

Since we are free from the law, why obey? Paul talks about fulfilling the law through love.

1. Love in action. If you could sum up our Christian responsibility from these verses, what would it be?

- a. From verses 8–10, how does love sum up the entire law? Put another way, how is being obedient to God's commands always the loving thing to do? Please explain.

- b. From verses 11–14, can you hear the urgency in Paul's words? In your own words, explain what it means to:

→ Wake up (verse 11).

→ Put on the armor of light (verse 12).

Use the following verses to add to your answer.

Ephesians 5:6–17

1 Peter 4:7–8

1 Peter 5:8–9

2. *How the gospel changes everything.* Never underestimate the impact of a loving and godly witness. Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35 esv). When we consider the effects of loving others, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

- a. **The gospel is incentive to love your neighbor.** The Jews thought of a neighbor as anyone who was Jewish, but Paul had the Lord’s definition in mind. According to Jesus, who is our neighbor and what is our responsibility toward them? Read Luke 10:25–37 for help with your answer.

“There is one debt which will always remain outstanding... And that is our duty to love. We can never stop loving others and say, *I have loved enough.*”

John R.W. Stott

Who do you “owe” love to today? Identify someone who is your neighbor (who knows, they may actually live right next door). List some practical ways that you can show love and take the opportunity to share the gospel with them.

- b. **The gospel is incentive to be properly dressed.** When Paul said, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” he wasn’t making a fashion statement—or was he? There’s an old saying that *“clothes make the man”* which sounds like a slick ad pitch from the fifties, but the phrase traces back to ancient Greece, long before Paul’s day. The idea being that the way we dress influences the way others perceive us, and even how we see ourselves. Think about that in terms of our life and witness.

From Colossians 3:8–9, what items need to be thrown out of our spiritual wardrobe?

From Colossians 3:12–14 what items should our spiritual wardrobe be bulging with?



Gospel at a Glance: Put on the Lord Jesus Christ | “To *put on the Lord Jesus Christ* conveys the idea of making Jesus a part of everything you say and do. Like a comfortable piece of clothing that you wear all day, Jesus wants to join your decision-making process. He wants to be Lord over your singleness or your marriage, over your career and free time, over what you hear and watch. By the way you live, you reveal that either He is Lord *of* all, or He is not Lord *at* all. This is especially true when it comes to the lust of the flesh. Some of us play around a little here; we set up our schedules or create certain routes that we *know* will take us past something we have a hard time resisting. And when we fall, we say, ‘I couldn’t help it.’ Yes, you could. Make no provision for the flesh! That’s part of *putting on Jesus*.” – Greg Laurie¹

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

¹ Greg Laurie, *Start! The Bible for New Believers*, (©2010, Holy Bible NKJV ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.) p. 197



Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 16 – Conscience and Considering Others | Romans Chapter 14

Few Bible commands are more difficult or more *essential* to follow through on than Christ's command to love one another. It's not always easy, is it? Sometimes arguing feels so much more satisfying. In this chapter, Paul talks about Christians living in unity without demanding uniformity. When it comes to matters of opinion that the Bible is silent on, we are given the freedom to choose—but not without considering others or compromising our Christian witness.

Icebreaker

If your conscience was a traffic light, describe how you personally know when the light is:

Red

Yellow

Green

Goals for this Session:

- Discover how to respond to differing opinions in a way that maintains unity.
- Consider what being “fully convinced” in matters of conscience requires.
- Pray honest prayers that extend grace and cultivate fellowship with one another.

Grace in Action

Romans 14:1–12

It's easy to connect with people who share a common perspective, but what about when we disagree? Paul discusses how to treat one another when we have differing points of view.

1. Matters of conscience (verses 1–6). What issues were a point of conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome?

Good to Know

Diets and holy days . . .

Meat in the Roman marketplace came from pagan temples. After a portion was offered to gods, the rest was sold. For some Gentile Christians, this couldn't be eaten in good conscience. Also, for a Jew who practiced strict dietary laws, anything that wasn't kosher was a problem.

Strict Sabbath regulations gave Gentiles a bone to pick with their Jewish brothers. Ancient secular writings indicate that Romans viewed Sabbath laws as nothing more than an excuse for Jews to avoid work.

- a. Did Paul instruct them to *agree* with each other? If not, why not? Explain what Paul was telling them to do in spite of their differences.*

- b. What bottom-line principle does Paul say should guide how we respond to differing opinions in a way that maintains unity? Review verse 1, 7–8, and 12 for your answer.

2. What point was Paul making? Check all that apply:

- ☐ Vegetarians are weak in faith.
- ☐ Being weak or strong refers to one's convictions about what faith allows them to do—not their belief in God.
- ☐ Don't judge others based on your weakness or belittle others based on your liberty.
- ☐ Never make spiritual maturity a condition for fellowship.

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

accept (proslambano) Admit into fellowship; receive and treat with kindness.

weak (asthenésō) A tendency for strict rules for conscience's sake.

doubtful things (dialogismós) Reasonings; opinions in non-essential matters; gray areas.

Give an example of something that would be considered a "matter of conscience" for Christians in our culture. Using the guidelines Paul lays out here, how should we respond?

*Paul is not talking about doctrines essential to salvation. He is referring to personal convictions on issues not explicitly commanded or prohibited in the Bible. Romans 14 does not restrict Christians from holding one another accountable for obvious sin. Paul never endorsed immoral practices among believers in the name of being tolerant.

3. What's involved in the process of being "fully convinced" in our own mind? Put another way, how do we determine where we stand in matters of conscience? Look for a *guiding principle* from the following scriptures for how to think a matter through. State it in one simple phrase.

Psalms 25:4

Psalms 119:105

James 1:5

Proverbs 19:20

James 4:17

1 Thessalonians 5:21–22

Romans 12:2–3

For you personally, how important is it to have a position on issues or cultural trends that affect the church and our witness in the world? What should be our main focus?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace
and the things by which one may edify another."

Romans 14:19 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? How and in what way?

Liberty and Pursuing Peace

Romans 14:13–23

Paul discusses the impact that our convictions, opinions, and actions have on each other.

1. Disagreeing graciously is a skill which many of us are still learning. When grace permeates our thoughts and attitude, it will come through in the way we respond to differing viewpoints with our brothers and sisters in the Lord (Colossians 4:6).

- a. Liberty (verses 13–18). Instead of judging, we are instructed to consider our own actions and how they affect others.* How and in what way?

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

obstacle (proskomma) A trip hazard or the result of taking a tumble.

stumbling block (skandalon) A trap; a baited cage that ensnares one passing by and brings them down.

- b. Peace with others (verses 19–21). What main reason does Paul give for pursuing things which make for peace among believers? Give some practical examples of how we can do this. Use the verses below for help with your answer.

Ephesians 4:29–32

Philippians 2:3–4

Hebrews 12:14–15

- c. Peace of mind (verses 22–23). Paul instructs believers to have their own convictions as an act of faith between themselves and God. This simply means we aren't to pressure others to live by our own personal convictions rather than theirs. Consider the following questions (sharing is optional).

Have you ever felt pressured to follow someone else's "do's and don'ts" list as a Christian? How did you respond? What did you learn from that experience?

Give an example of one thing that is on your personal "do's and don'ts" list as a Christian.

* Charles Swindoll gives a helpful illustration of obstacles and stumbling blocks. Picture a Christian running, enjoying their freedom in Christ; then imagine a legalist sticking his foot out. Picture a believer carefully trying to discern what is appropriate by observing other Christians; someone's reckless use of liberty becomes a trap they fall into.

2. *How the gospel changes everything.* Believers are not to condemn one another because all of us will be judged by Christ. As Paul says in this chapter, the day is coming when every believer will give a personal account to God for how we lived and what we did with the opportunities He gave us. When we remember that Christ delivered us from judgment, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

- a. **The gospel is incentive to put differing opinions in perspective.** That boisterous brother, that persnickety sister in Christ who gets on your last nerve today? Someday we'll all be shoulder to shoulder—arms raised, knees bowed—confessing together at the top of our lungs that “Jesus Christ is Lord”(Philippians 2:10–11). Our differences won't matter and we will see the good work that Jesus has completed in each one of us (Philippians 1:6). In the meantime, how shall we live and serve together to the glory of God?

Philippians 2:12–15

Colossians 3:12–14

God doesn't always give you the people you want, but He gives you the people you need.

- b. **The gospel is incentive to build up one another.** Imagine what could happen if we would trade in our judge's robe for a pair of work gloves? Apply yourself to help others move forward. Let's ask ourselves, are people better able to grow strong in their faith because of me? Or are they tripped up and hindered? Use the following verses to explain what will build up one another.

Ephesians 4:15–16

Ephesians 4:29–32

1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14



Gospel at a Glance: Pursue What Makes for Peace | “How many arguments and conflicts could we avoid if we followed Paul's simple instruction to ‘pursue the things that make for peace’? Life sometimes gets very hard for us, and painful, and full of anxiety simply because we don't ask ourselves, *Is what I'm about the say likely to cause problems or promote peace?* One hallmark of spiritual maturity is the commitment to doing what edifies others, regardless of the potential cost. And most of the time, what spiritually builds up and edifies others also tends to bring peace.” – Greg Laurie¹

“A harsh word stirs up anger, but a gentle answer turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1 NIV).

¹ Greg Laurie, *Start! The Bible for New Believers*, (©2010, Holy Bible NKJV ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.) p. 198

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

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S _____

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Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 17 – Christ's Example, Paul's Mission | Romans Chapter 15

In a way, this chapter is what Paul has been leading up to since his opening comments in chapter 1. Remember what Paul told them? *Your faith is being talked about all over the world.* Can that be said of us? With all that Paul has written, we know they faced challenges, needed instruction, and still had some growing to do. Can that be said of us? But their obedience to God was well known (Romans 16:19). Can that be said of us?

Paul anticipated taking the gospel into Spain, and he would need help to do it. He was certain the church in Rome would partner with him, because they were a faithful, obedient, gospel-driven church. May this always be said of us.

Icebreaker

(Paul wraps up his previous comments, telling the strong they have an obligation to help the weak.)

If you have siblings, where are you in the birth order? Describe how much influence an older sibling's example (good or bad) can have on their younger brothers and sisters.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what makes us stronger together.
- Consider what fuels and motivates a gospel-driven church.
- Pray honest prayers that cultivate unity, extend grace, and expand our gospel reach.

Living to Please Others

Romans 15:1–21

Love means that stronger believers should bear with weaker ones. In any case, *all* believers don't live to please themselves—we follow Christ's example.

1. **What love does** (verses 1–13). In this section, Paul urges the stronger (that is, more mature) Christian to be considerate and supportive in helping the weaker one. Why is this so needful?

- a. In what way is Jesus our example for living this way? Note what Paul says here, and also what you find in Philippians 2:5–8.

- b. Paul mentions two indispensable things for maintaining unity among believers. Explain how these strengthen us, individually and as a church. Give personal examples if you like.

God's Word (verse 4)

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

strong (dunatos) Established; to be capable, willing, and able.

bear with (bastazo) Take a burden on oneself so as to lighten the load of another.

please (aresko) Adapt in order to accommodate the needs of others for the benefit of all.

Prayer and Worship (verses 5–6)

- c. What happens when we channel our God-given strength and experience to benefit others instead of first looking out for ourselves? Explain how living to please others is not the same as being a "people pleaser."

2. **What love sees** (verses 14–21). Paul wrapped up the difficult topics he’d covered in the best possible way—with a stirring prayer (verse 13) and sincere commendation for this church.

- a. Paul expresses confidence in the Christians at Rome and mentions three vital areas that are signs of a healthy, growing church. So what does this look like in everyday life? Give some practical examples from personal experience or as part of a small group.

Full of goodness:

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

goodness (agathosune) Moral and ethical purity that stirs one to act on what they know.

knowledge (gnosis) In context, a clear grasp of Christian doctrine and how it relates to issues of daily life.

admonish (noutheteo) Impart understanding; to set right; to warn, remind, and correct.

Filled with knowledge:

Able to admonish:

- b. What reasons does Paul give for writing this letter? Why would he explain his reasons for having “written more boldly” to them?

- c. From verses 18–21, what does Paul see when he looks back over his ministry? What does he see when he looks ahead to the future? In both cases, what was his motivation?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 15:13 NKJV

Think About It . . .

If you knew someone was praying this for you, how would it most encourage you today?

Every time you practice memorizing this verse, think of one specific person you will pray it for.

Not Ready to Retire

Romans 15:22–33

Paul shares his future plans and expresses hope that the church in Rome will partner with him.

1. When Paul said, “I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” he was summing up more than twenty-five years of tireless travel, hardships, trials, life-altering events, unfailing provisions of grace, and a legacy of churches, all for the sake of the gospel. But he had no plans to retire!
 - a. From verses 22–29, what does Paul hope to accomplish on his trip to Jerusalem? What does he look forward to when he visits Rome?
 - b. What three things does Paul specifically request prayer for in verses 30–32?
 - c. To the best of your knowledge, were his prayers answered? In what way? (See Acts 21:30–32 and Acts 23:10–24.)

Good to Know

The unbelieving Jews were openly hostile toward Paul and wanted him dead.

Many of the Jewish believers resented him for insisting that Gentile converts did not have to live by Jewish regulations. It was unclear whether they would even accept a gift from the Gentile churches.

2. *How the gospel changes everything.* Paul had a plan to go to Rome and then to parts beyond. As usual, two things were on his itinerary: preach the gospel and strengthen the saints. As always, he counted on the help of people with hearts to serve. When we work together for the glory of God, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

- a. **The gospel is incentive to serve and pray for others.** Fervent prayer is a key to fruitful service. Paul frequently prayed for others (we count three in this chapter) and didn't hesitate to ask for prayer himself. Your small group is an excellent place to start!

What hurdles do you face in your efforts to serve and minister to others? Briefly share one request, specifically, that others can pray for you.

Note what you can pray for them.

- b. **The gospel is incentive to see the need and be part of the answer.** Without help and support from others, Paul wouldn't have been able to fully preach the gospel or gather a relief offering for the Christians in Jerusalem.

Identify one or two areas where you see a need and what you can do to help meet it.

**"We are the Bibles
the world is reading.
We are the creeds
the world is needing.
We are the sermons
the world is heeding."
Billy Graham**



Gospel at a Glance: Christ, our Example of Unselfish Love | "True Christian love is not selfish; rather, it seeks to share with others and make others happy. It is even willing to carry the younger Christians, to help them along in their spiritual development. We do not endure them, we encourage them! Of course, the great example in this is our Lord Jesus Christ. He paid a tremendous price in order to minister to us. Does a strong Christian think he is making a great sacrifice by giving up some food and drink? Then let him measure his sacrifice by the sacrifice of Christ. No sacrifice we could ever make could match Calvary." – Warren Wiersbe¹

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary/New Testament, Volume 1*, (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Cook Communications, 2001) p.562

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

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Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 18 – Gospel Hands and Feet | Romans Chapter 16

Congratulations! Upon completion of this last session through Paul's letter to the Romans, you will receive your **GOSPEL HANDS AND FEET CERTIFICATE** authorizing you to go into all *your* world and preach the Good News to everyone. Actually, the Lord has already commissioned every believer to do that in Mark 16:15 (see fine print provisions in Acts 1:8, John 17:17–18, Matthew 5:16).

Who needs the gospel?

What does the gospel look like in the everyday life of a believer?

You're ready. Get set. Go.

Icebreaker

When credits roll at the end of a movie do you head for the exit or stay to read them? What would motivate you to sit through reading a list of names?

Goals for this Session:

- Discover why Romans was written for people just like us.
- Consider what fueled Paul's capacity for long-term, long-distance friendships.
- Pray for fresh opportunities to cultivate community and demonstrate love.

Greetings to Rome

Romans 16:1–16

Paul sends personal greetings to friends in Rome. Though he had yet to visit Rome, some of the people living there now knew Paul and served with him over the course of his missionary travels.

1. Paul introduces Phoebe to the church in Rome. From what we know, she helped support her church in Cenchrea (a suburb of Corinth) as well as Paul's ministry. She may have been saved during Paul's year and a half ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:11). It's likely that she delivered this letter for Paul since she was traveling to Rome.

- a. What did Paul ask the church in Rome to do for Phoebe, and why?

Good to Know

Priscilla and Aquila were close friends with Paul. Originally from Rome, they migrated to Corinth and set up their tent making business; Paul lived with them for a time. They invested their lives in sharing the gospel and discipling believers (Acts 18).

- b. As you skim this list of names, what stands out to you from Paul's personal, affirming descriptions of these people?

Andronicus and Junias may have been a married couple. Paul used the Greek feminine (Junia) but later texts use the masculine (Junias). So they may have been missionary partners like Paul and Silas. Paul mentions they were Christians before he was, which may indicate they were saved during Pentecost (Acts 2). They were highly regarded by the apostles and spent time in prison with Paul.

Rufus may also be the one mentioned in Mark 15:21. If so, his father was Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross.

The rest of Paul's list gives us a snapshot of the church in Rome: Males, females, Jews, Gentiles, slaves, freedmen, free born, well-to-do. Three house churches (verses 5, 14-15) and possibly two more (verses 10-11). From Paul's instructions on "weak" and "strong" members in the church, it's likely that most of the house churches were a blend of Jews and Gentile believers.

- c. If you were on this list, what would you hope Paul would be able to say about you?

2. Paul's friends and fellow servants included singles, couples, widows, slaves, wealthy business owners, baby Christians, and mature believers. Some were related to Paul by blood or by tribe, and some were *like* family to Paul. What do all these ordinary people with diverse backgrounds have in common? They were actively serving the Lord, learning and growing as they went. They remind us that Romans was written for people like us.

"So we, being many, are one body in Christ." Paul's list of names is evidence that he practiced what he preached. Romans 12–15 is summed up in four commands.* What makes us a strong community of believers? Give some examples from scripture or your own experience.

a. **Accept one another** (Romans 15:7, 16:1–2).

b. **Be a servant** (Romans 12).

c. **Cultivate relationships** (Romans 14:7–8, 16:16).

"The church must be a place where words are reliable, worship is meaningful, faith is invincible, grace is noticeable, and love is tangible."

Charles Swindoll

d. **Demonstrate love** (Romans 13:10, 14:19, 15:1–2).

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

"Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ . . . to God, alone wise, be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ forever. Amen."

Romans 16:25, 27 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? How and in what way?

* Adapted from Charles Swindoll's **ABC's of Authentic Affection**, *Insights on Romans* (Illinois: Tyndale House, 2015), p. 366

Greetings from Corinth

Romans 16:17–27

Paul reminds the church to stay vigilant in the truth and sends greetings from others who were with him in Corinth.

1. A caution (verses 17–18). What potential trouble does Paul warn about, and who might be particularly vulnerable?

- a. What two things does Paul urge them to do in response?

“We need to take what God has given us and use it constructively in the lives of others. We’d better make sure we get our Bibles open and use the Word of God.”

Greg Laurie
Secrets to Spiritual Success

Use the following verses for additional insight and instruction.

1 Timothy 1:5–7

2 Timothy 2:15–16

2 Timothy 3:13–17

- b. Simple obedience (verses 19–20). A Sunday school teacher asked the class if they knew what false doctrine was. One little boy said, “It’s when the doctor gives the wrong stuff to people who are sick.” He thought she said false *doctoring*—but when you think about it, he’s right! When someone wants to get right with God, giving them wrong information only makes things worse.

Paul commends the Romans for their obedience and encourages them to keep being wise in what is good and simple (pure; undiluted) concerning evil. Accepting and obeying God’s Word may appear naïve to the world, but it will protect us from false *doctoring*.

What is one valuable lesson you’ve learned about obedience?

Share a valuable lesson you’ve learned about disobedience.

2. *How the gospel changes everything.* Paul sends greetings from friends who are with him in Corinth. Paul was planning to leave soon for Jerusalem and three of these men would go with him (Timothy for certain, possibly Sosipater and Gaius as well). Paul closes his letter with praise and glory to God for the gospel—especially grateful to be used by God!

Since this is our last session in Romans, now is a good time to go back over your own Romans Road.

We've seen how the gospel changes everything in every chapter of Romans. Now it's your turn to share something of how the gospel has changed everything *for you* as a result of this study through Romans.

Share at least two main takeaway points, insights, or life-changing experiences that has grown your faith.

a. **The gospel is incentive for me to . . .**

b. **The gospel is incentive for me to . . .**

Good to Know

Timothy was like a son to Paul and one of his most trusted assistants. He first joined Paul on his second missionary trip and served with him for the rest of Paul's earthly ministry.

Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater were Jewish friends and trusted aides.

Tertius ("third") was the scribe who penned this letter as Paul dictated.

Gaius was a convert from Paul's first trip to Corinth and one of only two men that Paul baptized personally. The church met in his home and he was Paul's host at the time Paul wrote Romans.

Quartus ("fourth") gets an honorable mention from Paul as a brother.



Gospel at a Glance: Wise in What Is Good | "We live in such a wicked time in which we are exposed to so many things that could be spiritually harmful. It seems that we are lacking purity today. But according to Romans 16:19, we as believers are 'to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.' Another translation reads, 'I would have you well versed and wise as to what is good and innocent and guileless as to what is evil' (AMP). God is offering you true happiness, which is not contingent on how much you have but on *whom* you know. If you don't get your life properly aligned with God, you will always be chasing an elusive dream. But if you get your life aligned with God and start seeking Him, you will find purpose in life. You will find the happiness you are seeking." – Greg Laurie¹

¹ Greg Laurie, *Every Day With Jesus: Forty Years of Favorite Devotions*, ©2013, 2018 by Greg Laurie, p. 61

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

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Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

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Hope in Action

1 Peter 1: Living in Hope

Lesson 1

1 Peter 1:1–25

Book Profile ~

This epistle was written to first-century Christians dispersed throughout the northern part of what is now modern Turkey, just prior to the outbreak of persecution from the infamous and terrible Emperor Nero, around A.D. 64. It was written from Babylon (or Rome—5:13) to an audience of both Jewish and Gentile believers who were undergoing a time of social, political, and personal persecution. The letter emphasizes the reality of suffering in the lives of all Christians, with the focus being on the challenge to stand firm and persevere in all circumstances of life.

Author Profile ~

Peter—also known as Simon—was a fisherman and follower of John the Baptist, who was led to the Lord Jesus by his brother Andrew. Known for being short-tempered and impulsive, he was singled out along with James and John for in-depth training by the Lord. Jesus changed his name to *Cephas*, an Aramaic word for *Petros* in the Greek, meaning a “stone” or a “rock.” Jesus called him *Peter* to signify the rock-like character that would distinguish his life, making him one of the founders of the early Christian church. He would emerge after Pentecost as the leading spokesperson for the disciples and was used mightily by the Lord to spread the Good News. History records that when he was sentenced to be crucified, Peter requested that he be hung upside down on the cross, considering himself unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord. He died in Rome around A.D. 68, during the persecution by Emperor Nero.

In a nutshell ~

Have you ever been the target of someone else’s unkind remarks? Do you know firsthand what it’s like to be persecuted for your faith? If so, this letter is for you. You may not have faced an ego-maniacal emperor, but you have felt the pain of ridicule, harassment, and conflict bearing down on you. Peter wrote this letter to encourage believers in whatever trials they may be facing. For Peter’s original audience as well as today’s, the recurring themes of his letter are the hope, security, peace and steadfastness that are ours through faith in Jesus Christ.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 1 Peter 1:1–25.

Peter begins his introduction with his title: “an *apostle* of Jesus Christ . . .” (v.1). It was not possible for a man to appoint himself to be an apostle. It was a divine calling, a commission by God to represent Christ. The job responsibility for this important office was unique and limited to the few hand-selected men who were called to fill it.

1. Using the resources you have on hand, look up the word *apostle* and write a definition for it.

Up close ~

The New Testament has much to say about the office of an *apostle*. Look up the following verses and briefly note what is revealed.

- a. Matthew 10:1–4 and 5–8
- b. Matthew 28:16–20
- c. Acts 1:22; 10:39–43
- d. Ephesians 3:4–5
- e. At approximately what point in His earthly ministry did Jesus give the title *Apostle* to His disciples? See Luke 6:12–16.

The word *apostle* literally means *one sent out on a mission*, such as an ambassador or envoy. The office carried with it the responsibility and authority to set up and supervise the church and to initiate discipline when necessary. Peter was sent out by none less than his Master and Lord, giving him the authority and power of Almighty God behind him. If you mention the Apostle Peter and most of us immediately think of a strong, impetuous fisherman who had a habit of putting his foot in his mouth by saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. Even those who don’t know much about the man recall that Peter denied the Lord Jesus three times. His life presents a vivid illustration of how we fail as human beings, but also how we can succeed and be victorious through the new nature that is ours in Christ. From his initial call by Jesus, to the Holy Spirit’s empowering at Pentecost, Peter experienced the unusual, such as what it was like to walk on water. He was a witness at the Transfiguration, recognizing and testifying to Christ’s deity. He was rebuked by his Lord and even denied Him, but he also repented and was restored, witnessing the Lord’s ascension to heaven.

Peter's life is a lesson in contrasts and his life stands as an example of what the Lord can do with a person determined to become all that God wants him to be!

2. Personal: Think about it . . . would *you* be willing to be remembered for your failures rather than your successes if your life served as an example to others? Please explain.

3. To whom is Peter writing? How does he describe them? vv. 1–2

These are “God’s elect” but they were also strangers. In his letter, Peter refers to them as *pilgrims* (1:1), and sojourners or tourists (2:11), people who were away from their homes. The terms he uses imply a temporary separation. These people were foreigners scattered abroad, but they belonged to God and would remain His while living in a world that was not their home.

4. Put yourself in the shoes of a tourist in a foreign land. What are a few of the things you would most be concerned about?

5. Now contrast that line of thought with that of being a pilgrim believer in this world. Currently, how tight would you label your grip and what is your world view? (Circle one.)

- a. *Tight grip*—I have eagerly sought the possessions, pleasures, and position this world has to offer me and I feel very much at home in it.
- b. *Moderate grip*—I am preoccupied with the busyness of daily life but wanting to find God’s place of peace and rest.
- c. *Loose grip*—The longer I walk with Christ I feel more out of place, like a foreigner who is just passing through this world.
- d. Personal: Please explain your answer in your own words . . .

If you have received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you are God’s elect; your citizenship has been transferred from this world to heaven! You have been chosen *according to the foreknowledge of the Father; through the sanctifying work of the Spirit; for obedience to Jesus Christ by the sprinkling of His blood*” (v. 2). Will you take a moment now and thank Him?

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) **1 Peter 1:15–16**

“But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week’s end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to it into practice. Note your results.

Our Living Hope

Read 1 Peter 1:3–12 for review.

In verses 3–12, Peter links salvation to what he refers as a “living hope” for every believer. The hope Peter has in mind is based on the confident expectation of life after death that is bestowed upon Christians.

1. Who has gifted believers with this inheritance and how? Where is it kept? vv. 3–4

The word *kept* means *to guard* or *reserve in place*. The tense of the verb indicates that this inheritance already exists; it continues to be there. The trials we experience in this life cannot undermine or diminish the inheritance kept for us in the next one.

2. Does being *kept* (*shielded*) by God’s power mean that His children will not have to go through pain or difficulty? What does it mean? v. 5

3. Based on this hope, what kind of response are we believers to have? vv. 6–7

Remember, Peter wrote this letter to people who were undergoing tremendous opposition. Some of what they endured included being wrapped in freshly slaughtered animal skins and fed to wild animals. Others were dipped in hot tar or pitch and set on fire as human torches that lit up Nero’s gardens at night. As horrific as these things are, Peter states that the suffering here upon the earth lasts only “a little while” in light of our inheritance, which lasts for eternity.

4. What is one of the main reasons for trials? How is the believer's faith tested? v. 7

The purification process for metal is always fire. When heated to a high temperature, the metal melts and the impurities rise to the surface and are skimmed off, resulting in a pure reflection on the surface.

- a. What is the lesson here for the believer as it pertains to the transforming process of sanctification? Whose reflection becomes more obvious over time?
- b. Personal: Can you share a time recently when your faith was put through the fire? What did you learn about your faith and how did it grow?
- c. What similar thread do you find in James 1:2–4 that compares to Peter's words of encouragement here in vv. 6–7?

Peter's focus now shifts from the difficulties of this present life to the day of Christ's return. His concern is that of our testimony: the fact that our faith, having been tested and proved genuine, will mean praise, honor, and glory when Jesus Christ is revealed. Choosing to believe in Him though we've not seen Him results in the joy that comes not from our circumstances but from our relationship with Him.

5. What is the end of our faith? v. 9
- a. Who is it that longed to know about God's salvation? v. 10
 - b. In their search to know more, what did they discover about Christ? v. 11
 - c. It was revealed that their service was not for themselves; who were they serving? v. 12

It's as if Peter asks, "*Do you realize how fortunate you are? Angels would have given anything to be in on this!*" You, dear believer, are a *full heir* to the message of hope the prophets preached thousands of years ago. Think about it: the *weakest* Christian today is capable through the Holy Spirit of understanding more than the greatest prophets who ever lived and who predicted Christ would come!

6. Personal: In your search to know more this week, what new discovery have you made about your salvation?

Touch point~

If you have received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you are one of God's elect and your citizenship has been transferred from this world to heaven. Peter states (v. 2) that all three persons of the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit—are working together to assure you of your salvation—to give you this *living hope*. If you have not yet prayed to receive Jesus Christ into your heart but would like to, just bow and pray the following to Him:

"Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner in need of Your grace and mercy today. I ask for Your forgiveness and cleansing and for You to fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Thank you for coming to live inside my heart and that I am born again! In Your name I pray. Amen."

A Holy Life

Read 1 Peter 1:13–25 for review.

The word "therefore" (v.13) is the pivotal bridge between what Peter has just stated regarding our *living hope* and the time in the not-too-distant future when Jesus Christ returns and we, as believers, enter into the reality of that hope. In the remainder of the chapter, Peter explains what is most important and what we are to be occupied with until the day of the Lord's return.

1. Use the following exercise to help you keep the main thing the main thing, reminding you of what matters most. In a sentence or two, write an explanation as to how you are doing with each one (a brief description is given to you). Be prepared to share with your group.

- a. **Be prepared** in your mind (*gird up the loins of your mind*); be alert and ready for action. v. 13
- b. **Be self-controlled** (*sober*); think and act straight. v. 13
- c. **Be hopeful** to the end (*rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you*); look forward to the special blessings that are yours. v. 13

d. **Be obedient** children (*not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance*); don't let our lives be controlled by your desires. v. 14

e. **Be holy** in all your behavior and manner of conversation (*in all your conduct*). v. 15

f. **Be holy, for I am holy**; so motivated because He is holy. v. 16

2. Start taking your spiritual character development as seriously as God takes it! What should be your motive for living a holy life as you await His return? v. 17

a. What realization should affect your perspective and make you *want* to change your behavior? vv. 18–19

b. Understand that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was foreordained prior to creation. For whose sake was it planned and made known? v. 20 (Share your thoughts.)

3. One of the best ways to demonstrate a love for God and practice a walk of holiness is to see that *we love one another fervently with a pure heart* (v. 22).
Personal: On a scale of 1–10, with 10 being best, how are *you* doing?

The instrument that brought about the new birth is the Word of God. Peter would have us remember two aspects about it: (1) it is living; (2) it is enduring.

a. *Living* suggests the power of the Word to do what?

b. *Enduring* reinforces the power of the Word to do what?

Verses 23–25 are closely linked to verses 3–4. The living, enduring Word is the agent God uses to give you a living hope and an imperishable inheritance. Cherish this gift and let it motivate you to holiness!

Notes

Hope in Action

1 Peter 2: Walking in Hope

Lesson 2

1 Peter 2:1–25

In a nutshell ~

In the closing verses of chapter one, Peter's audience is left with the understanding that our hope and inheritance are made real through God's living, enduring Word. Chapter two is all about growing spiritually, and it is here that we make the discovery that the process begins and continues through the daily application of God's Word. The moment a person accepts Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, they are reborn into the family of God as a life-long member of His master building program. As the process continues, the Holy Spirit is able to build believers into a spiritual house. Once the construction nears completion, the improvements and finishing touches become visible to others. Likewise, the believer's attitudes and actions are revealed for the better as we grow closer to completion and receiving our eternal inheritance.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 1 Peter 2:1–25.

The opening of chapter two immediately draws the reader's attention back to chapter one by Peter's use of the word "*therefore*" (v.1). Right away it connects the concept of our rebirth through God's Word (1:23) with the evidence of our new birth being lived out in daily life. Peter's use of the term "newborn babies" is not a reference to his readers being new Christians, but is rather an exhortation to all believers to *desire* or *crave long* the spiritual nourishment of God's Word in the same way a baby longs for milk in order to be satisfied and grow.

1. Peter lists five sins in verse 1 that we must be rid of before we can grow unhindered in the Christian life. List them in the space below.

To *rid* ourselves can also mean to "put off" or "put away." The same term is used in other places in the New Testament to indicate the decisive act of removing or taking off the believer's former sinful life.

2. What do you learn about this *putting off* from the following?

a. Romans 13:11–14

b. Colossians 3:6–10

- c. Why is this process so important to spiritual growth? See Ephesians 4:14–15.
- d. What important familiar warning is there in James 1:21–22?

Up close ~

Using the resources you have on hand, look up each of the five sins Peter lists in verse 1 and write down why it will hinder *your* spiritual growth as a Christian. Be specific in your answers. (Note: the first two, *malice* and *deceit* are general in nature. The last three, *hypocrisy*, *envy*, and *slander*, flow out of the first two.)

- a. *Malice will hinder my spiritual growth because* _____

- b. *Deceit will hinder my spiritual growth because* _____

- c. *Hypocrisy will hinder my spiritual growth because* _____

- d. *Envy will hinder my spiritual growth because* _____

- e. *Slander will hinder my spiritual growth because* _____

- f. Which, if any, of these sins is evident in your life right now? (Be honest with yourself; God already knows the answer.)

Selah ~ (Pause and think about it.)

What does *your* spiritual diet consist of? Are you malnourished because you're prone to skip meals in the Word? Are you perhaps "picky choosy," jumping from one section of the Bible that you like without perhaps taking in the whole counsel of God and savoring how it's nourishing you? As a child of God, it's not only a pleasure but a privilege to taste the Goodness of God's Word for yourself. To taste His goodness is to want more of His goodness. It means you will no longer be satisfied with anything less than God's best! How's your spiritual diet? Please share your thoughts.

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) **1 Peter 2:2–3** (NIV)

“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week’s end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to it into practice. Note your results.

Living Stones

Read 1 Peter 2:4–10 for review.

Christians grow up together—as *living stones*—having been built upon the foundation of Christ, the Cornerstone. Each time a new believer is admitted into God’s family, a new living stone is added to the building. Together, under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, we grow into the temple of God.

In order to emphasize the importance of Jesus Christ as the centerpiece of the church and the believer’s life, Peter wove together two portions of Old Testament prophecy from the books of Isaiah and Psalms.

1. What do you discover about the Lord Jesus from the verses Peter quoted?
 - a. v. 6: Isaiah 28:16 –
 - b. vv. 7–8: Isaiah 8:14 and Psalm 118:22 –

The structure and design of a building rest upon the foundation or cornerstone, with the capstone being the topmost piece or finishing touch. Peter’s point is that from its inception to its completion, the Church, which consists of these *living stones* is built upon THE Living Stone: “*For no one can lay any other foundation than the one we already have—Jesus Christ*” (1 Corinthians 3:11 NLT). He is both the *cornerstone* upon which it rests and the *capstone*—the point up to which it grows. He is the beginning and the end!

2. Not everyone chooses to “accept” the cornerstone God put in place. Finish the following . . .
 - a. v. 6: *Whoever believes in Him* _____
 - b. v. 7: *To you who believe* _____

The “builders” referred to in verse 7 are those who willfully choose to reject Christ. What does Peter say about them?

c. vv. 7–8: *To those who are disobedient (do not believe)* _____

Despite their rejection of God’s *chief cornerstone*, Jesus was given the preeminent position in the Church. When you come to Christ, you become part of a building—the Church. You also become part of a holy priesthood. As such, you have the privilege of gaining direct access to God anytime, anywhere. You also have the great honor of serving Him by bringing others to Him.

3. In this privileged position, what are you called to do? v. 5

In the Old Testament, the position of *priest* meant having an attitude of repentance, remaining pure, and continually offering prayers of supplication and thanksgiving to God. The New Testament goes somewhat further in its practical application to all believers.

Up close ~

In Romans 12:1–2, we find the ways we can offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God. What are they?

Although we will never achieve perfection this side of heaven, the standard for every believer is a walk of holiness. Remember, as a *priest*, you are set apart by God for His use. Your life’s purpose is to proclaim His praises. Your life’s goal is that when people look at *you*, they see and hear Jesus!

4. In verses 9–10, Peter specifically details the value that God places on you. How does Peter describe your relationship with God? Put these in your own words.

- a. When God called you out of darkness, from whose power were you released?
See Acts 26:18.
- b. Contrast who you were *before* with who you are *now*. What precious gift has God given you? v. 10

5. Peter refers to believers as “*sojourners*” and “*pilgrims*” in verse 11? (Remember to whom he was writing.) As one of today’s believers in a foreign land (a world to which you do not belong), from what must you abstain? Why?

a. What kind of example are you to be? Why?

Peter is referring in these verses about the quality of life that will cause non-believers to stand up take notice! He isn’t speaking of a one-time encounter with another person, but rather the process of being watched over a long period of time. He is emphasizing that we are to model the kind of behavior that is free of criticism or offense until the day of the Lord’s return.

b. Personal: Can you say that you are living up to your high calling? Yes or no?

Submitting to Authority

Read 1 Peter 2:13–25 for review.

Relationships can be difficult and sometimes very demanding, offering us the opportunity to really appreciate the difference God’s grace has made in our own lives. The remainder of chapter two deals with how Christians are to relate to one another and how we are to respond to those that don’t know Christ. In the final analysis, no matter what our circumstances may be at any given moment, we believers are God’s instruments to proclaim to the world who He is and what He’s done on our behalf. In other words, our lives should be a continual living testimony of His character and love.

In verses 13–25, Peter begins to illustrate the testimony of the life that is fully submitted to God. Although he wanted Christians to submit willingly, a closer look reveals that Peter’s words are not presented as an option but rather a command. In every area, we are called to follow in *His steps*!

The remainder of the chapter breaks nicely into three sections, each dealing with a different aspect of how the believer should respond to authority.

***Submission to government authorities* (vv. 13–17).**

Think about it: who are some of those in authority over your life? Name them below.

a. For whose sake are you asked to submit to these authorities?

b. Personal: What does your submission look like in practical everyday life.
Why does God want you to submit in this way? vv. 15–16

The spiritual freedom you enjoy as a Christian includes freedom from sin's rule, freedom from guilt because you are forgiven, and freedom from thinking you have to earn God's favor. In areas where the Word of God gives no guidance, you are free to make your choices responsibly. In all things you have the freedom to do—not what you *want*—but what you *ought*. This should be your code of conduct in everyday life.

Up close ~

In verse 17, Peter says every believer is to *fear God, love the brethren, and respect everyone else*. In order to live up to this calling, you will need to exhibit Christ's example of humility. Read through Philippians 2:3–8, and share what you discover about the Lord's example that ministers to you today.

Submission as an employee-servant (v. 18).

Peter does not attempt to condone slavery, but to encourage those who were suffering in a society that permitted it. Believers who were servants (slaves) were not free from serving their masters, but were free from the slavery of sin. Whether their employer was a Christian or non-believer, they were to be respectful and responsible in their behavior.

- a. What should a believer's heart-attitude be? Who are they ultimately serving? See Colossians 3:22–24.
- b. Personal: Have *you* ever worked for a harsh employer? How did it affect you? How did God's grace enable you?

Submission to unjust authorities (vv. 19–25).

The reality of life is—believers will suffer in this world. Sometimes we are even called to suffer at unjust hands for the greater glory of God and for our own maturity (v. 21).

- a. Peter isn't saying that it's commendable to endure punishment that is deserved; to what kind of suffering does he refer?
- b. What does Peter point to in these verses about Christ's own suffering?
- c. Personal: How does possessing an understanding of who/what you once were help to motivate you to adopt Christ's example?
- d. Take a moment to contemplate verse 25 in light of Psalm 23. How does the assurance that Christ is *your* Shepherd—*your* Overseer—encourage you today?

Notes

Hope in Action

1 Peter 3: Submitting in Hope

Lesson 3

1 Peter 3:1–22

In a nutshell ~

Peter began his letter by telling believers to live a life of holiness that is based upon the enduring Word of God, because at the end of that life we will see Him for who He is and receive what even angels desire to look into: the salvation of our souls! In chapter two he encouraged believers to realize that we are *chosen*, meaning we should conduct ourselves as people of God in this foreign world. As such, we are to live in a way that declares the praises of God within our relationships, both inside and outside of the church.

In chapter three, Peter focuses our attention on the relationship between a husband and his wife; that wives should submit to them and, in return, husbands should be respectful and considerate to their wives. Finally, he teaches that all Christians should live in harmony with one another and be ready at all times with an answer when asked for the reason of our hope in Christ.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 1 Peter 3:1–22.

From the perspective of our secular world, marriage is a two-way street down which man and woman walk together in a fifty-fifty partnership. In stark contrast to this, the biblical perspective requires each partner to give *one hundred percent* to the marriage relationship. Wives are called to submit, while husbands are called to respect, so that in all things harmony is the objective. But in a society where a woman is taught early on to believe “*you’ve come a long way baby*,” the word *submission* has become a hot-button topic. In fact, it could possibly be the least favorite Christian teaching in the church because it is so often misunderstood.

Biblical submission of the wife does not require blind obedience on her part, nor does it imply that she is inferior. Rather, the wife who is willing to accept her husband’s authority is also willing to accept God’s design for her marriage, allowing her husband his rightful place of responsibility and leadership in the home.

1. What is Peter’s primary reason in verse 1 for asking wives to submit to their husbands? What does he claim would “win over” the husbands?

It is worth noting that in Peter's day, the wives throughout most of the Roman Empire were expected to embrace the religion of their husbands. For many, the idea of wives submitting to Jesus Christ first—whether or not their husbands approved—was revolutionary. Peter's intended goal was that *without words* the wife would be able to influence or win over the unbelieving husband to Christ.

2. Peter did not intend that a wife was never to speak, but rather that she was not to resort to useless discussions and arguments or even nagging that became counter productive. What would win over a non-believing husband? v. 2

The phrase “conduct accompanied by fear” (v. 2), refers to a reverential fear, or a wholesome dread of displeasing the Lord.

3. What should a Christian wife not rely solely upon in order to get attention? v. 3
- a. If a woman relies only on her outward beauty regimen to make her beautiful, she ignores the most important aspect of beauty in God's eyes—what is it? v. 4
 - b. What value does Peter say God places upon the inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit? v. 4

Any Christian woman should be able to make her statement of beauty based upon the person she is on the *inside*, not merely on outward adornments or fashion trends. Her behavior as a Christian *silently speaks* volumes about the power of the Holy Spirit to exert great influence on her husband, whether or not he is a believer. But in the case of an unbelieving husband, God is able to use her to win him to the Lord.

Selah ~

Compare the time *you* spend on outward preparation and adornment to the amount of time you spend on cultivating your *inner beauty*. Think about it: is your priority your mirror or your Bible at the start of your day? How can James 1:21–26 encourage you to concentrate more on *your* inner beauty?

To support his teaching on the importance of wives submitting to husbands, Peter turns to the Old Testament example of Sarah as one of the holy women in Scripture who obeyed her husband (vv. 5–6). The word used for *obeyed* in verse 6 means: “to listen to.” In other words, Sarah took an interest in her husband's interests. She listened and responded in an appropriate way throughout the course of her married life to Abraham and she is remembered for it. Her response to Abraham as “master” is one of loving submission and willing acceptance to follow him into the unknown by doing what is right.

Nowhere in Scripture do we find the command for a wife to submit to her husband on the grounds of fear, intimidation, or abuse from him. In fact, the NIV translation of verse 6 says a woman's submission should *"not give way to fear."* A Christian wife should not be forced into submissive behavior at the hands of her husband. If she finds herself in that position, she should seek help from those in authority in the church.

4. Peter uses fewer words in addressing the husband (v.7), but the responsibility placed on him is greater and in ways more difficult. A husband should . . . (finish the sentences below by forming your answers from verse 7).

- a. *Live with his wife according to what?* (Try to give an example.)

- b. *Give her honor in what way?*

- c. *Treat her as equal in terms of what?* See Galatians 3:28–29.

- d. What aspect of a husband's spiritual life is dramatically affected by how he responds?

Up close ~

If the husband lives up to his role as stated in verse 7, what difference could it make in the marriage relationship? Please share your thoughts.

- a. Personal: If a wife, are *you* making it harder or easier for your husband to fulfill his role? Do you have the desire to get along with him and a willingness to be satisfied with less than you may want to have?

- b. If you are single, what are you learning now that will help you later on if you marry?

Modeling Christ-like behavior in the church setting means very little if we cannot, as God's chosen people, bring that same attitude and behavior into the home. The home-front is the greatest battlefield! It is here that often the most intense spiritual battles are won or lost!

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) 1 Peter 3:1

"Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even as some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives."

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week's end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to it into practice. Note your results.

Live in Harmony

Read 1 Peter 3:8-22 for review.

What believer isn't eager to receive a blessing from God? Peter realized that these believers were about to face some very hard times, causing him to reveal the secret to quietly trusting God, while at the same time living in harmony with others. The result of this kind of obedience will be God's blessing every time.

Try reading verse 8 in several different translations. Do the words Peter uses here suggest the idea of *teamwork*? Peter first approached the subject of loving one another in chapter one (v. 22). His emphasis here again suggests that harmony within the body of Christ is a deliberate choice that is made with concerted effort on the part of believers. Harmony is all about getting along and agreeing with one another, which does not happen by accident. Here we are given the *key* to harmony: five BE-attitudes that, if maintained, will help to build and strengthen unity in the body.

1. Look up each "*be-attitude*" from verse 8 in your dictionary or other Bible resource. Then look up the scriptural references indicated and write a brief statement about each one. Keep in mind that your goal is building harmony.

a. *Be of one mind* (Philippians 1:27) – _____

b. *Be compassionate* (1 Corinthians 12:26) – _____

c. *Be loving* (1 Thessalonians 4:9–10) – _____

d. *Be tenderhearted* (Ephesians 4:32) – _____

e. *Be courteous* (Philippians 2:2–4) – _____

- f. Personal: Do any of *your* “*be-attitudes*” need adjusting? _____

Right attitude is essential to maintaining right behavior, which brings God’s blessing. While it may be natural for people in the world to trade insult for insult and evil for evil, Jesus Christ taught otherwise, setting an example for all believers to follow.

2. According to verse 9, what does Peter instruct believers *to do* and *not to do*? Why?

- a. When did Peter first hear this lesson taught and by whom? See Matthew 5:44.

3. Verses 10–12 are quoted from Psalm 34:12–16. In them Peter gives the recipe for a happy life. List the four things we are told to do.

God-honoring speech followed by action leads to good deeds. Helping others leads to building good relationships, allowing us to anticipate problems and deal with them before they get out of hand.

- a. When we do our part, what truth can we hold onto? v. 12

- b. What is God’s position toward those who do evil? v. 12

At this point in Peter’s letter the subject of persecution comes into view. Peter’s question, “*Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?*” (v.13), is a rhetorical one. He is not saying that if believers do everything correctly they will not suffer persecution, but rather that they may suffer even if they do what is right.

4. What does Peter say about the one who suffers for righteousness sake? v.14
What word of encouragement does he quote from Isaiah 8:12?

The word “blessed” (v.14) can be defined as *highly privileged*. This has nothing to do with taking delight from circumstances; rather it refers to the fact that if a believer is living righteously and is persecuted, no one can harm them spiritually or keep them from God’s promises. The word “troubled” means to be *disturbed* or *shaken* by emotional turmoil. When we fear the Lord alone, we need not fear anything or become troubled by anyone else’s threats.

In verses 15–17, Peter lays out three specific actions on the believer's part that will free us from fear and equip us to handle difficult people and situations.

Up close ~

Set apart Christ as Lord in your heart (v.15).

Fear and faith cannot be present in your heart at the same moment—one will exclude the other. Isaiah 8:13 (NRSV) tells us: “*But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.*” Record your thoughts below . . .

- a. Have you given Christ His rightful place as Lord of your heart and life?

- b. Do you acknowledge that He is in control of the events of your life?

- c. Does *fear* or *faith* occupy your heart at this very moment?

Get ready to answer those that have questions (v.15).

Every Christian should be prepared at all times to give a clear and reasonable defense of their faith. We need not worry about being theologians, but we should be armed with the truth of Scripture and ready to give our reasons for believing in Jesus Christ.

- a. What two words should frame the composition of our presentation of the Gospel? (v.15) Why do you think this is important?

- b. If called upon, would you be able to give a concise five minute testimony of your faith that includes the main elements of how you came to Christ? In the space below practice this, using some bullet points that will help guide you. Carry with you a 3 x 5 card for review until you gain confidence and watch what opportunities God will give you!

Keep a clear conscience at all times (v.16).

Any time there is a check from the Holy Spirit in your heart, stop as soon as you recognize it and ask for God's forgiveness. That gentle inner conviction will help you to keep short accounts with God and keep the channel open for Him to use you.

- a. Not only is God working in your heart and mind through His Spirit, He is also working in others. When they insult or berate you as a believer, what effect will your testimony have upon them? v.16

- b. What conclusion does Peter draw in verse 17?

Peter goes on in verses 18–22, to speak about Christ's suffering on our behalf: *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit"* (v.18). We can never exhaust the end of this truth or its application to our hearts!

5. Personal: As you ponder the full significance of verses 18–22, consider whether *you* have entered the fullness of all that this means. Please share your thoughts.

Peter shares two illustrations in these verses to reassure us of Christ's victory and our eternal security: (1) After His resurrection but before His ascension into heaven, Christ descended (v.19) to proclaim His victory over death and God's judgment on the disobedient spirits or angels. (2) Just as Noah's family was shut into the ark of God's salvation, the moment a person accepts Jesus Christ as their Savior, they are placed securely into God's eternal keeping. The baptism referred to here (v. 21) is not that of water (the flood waters did not save Noah), but rather the power of the Holy Spirit. Water baptism does not provide believers with a clear conscience before God; the cleansing of the Holy Spirit does.

6. How does Titus 3:4–8 help with your understanding of this?

We have further assurance of our salvation in the fact that Jesus Christ is currently at God's right hand in heaven (v. 22). He has broken the power over evil. All authorities and powers—good and evil—are subject to Him. In the very near future, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

7. Is He *your* Lord? How does this knowledge strengthen your faith today?

Notes

Hope in Action

1 Peter 4: Suffering in Hope

Lesson 4

1 Peter 4:1–19

In a nutshell ~

The return of Christ is nearer than when we first believed. It's time for all Christians to stop living for self and become serious about living for God! Jesus suffered and we too must be prepared to suffer. We are called to suffer for doing what is right. We can commit ourselves to God, trusting Him to keep us—by any road, at any cost.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 1 Peter 4:1–19.

The suffering that Christ endured was due to the righteous life He lived. If we are to follow in His steps, we are to arm ourselves with the same attitude of mind and purpose Jesus had. We too must be willing to suffer; we too have been chosen to live holy lives. "*Being armed*" means being enabled and empowered through Christ to obey Him in every situation.

1. What does Peter say happens to the believer who has the same mind about suffering that Christ had? v. 1

Is Peter saying that suffering cleanses people from sin? No, 1 John 1:8 says that "*if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.*" Peter is not saying that when we suffer for doing what is right we will not stumble or sin again. What he does mean is since Christians have *died in Christ* and are *one with Him*, we are free from sin's power and penalty. We are finished with sin when our suffering causes us to obey God more faithfully.

2. When believers cease to live in the flesh, for whom do they live?

Peter states quite emphatically (v. 3) that our past experience with sin is enough for us to close the door on the examples he lists here. Notice that he does not go into detail defining these terms. His is readers would have understood exactly what he meant. (Note: the word *Gentiles* in this verse is a reference to non-Christians.)

3. What are the activities in which we as believers are not to indulge? v. 3 As you are writing these down, cross reference them using the resources you have on hand to uncover the depth of their meaning. Think about the toll they will take on the Christian's life if left unchecked over time.

- a. Personal: Can you point to any currently present in your own life that you need to get rid of?

Christians should realize that the attitudes and actions Peter mentions have no place in their lives. He says that non-believers will think it strange that we do not indulge with them (v. 4). They will even become offended when we refuse to do so.

- 4. Personal: Share a time when you have endured verbal abuse or slander because of your faith in Christ.

Non-believers tend to resent the *convicting purity* of the believer's life. Often without words, just the presence of a believer among non-believers is offensive to them. The resulting effect is often slander towards the Christian. If non-believers can make believers look bad, they tend to feel better or somehow justified in their own sinful behavior. Those who practice an ungodly lifestyle and who point fingers at Christians for refusing to do so seem at times to have the upper hand. Ultimately, God will have the last word. He will act on behalf of His own. The time is coming when everyone will give an account to God!

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) **1 Peter 4:19 (NLT)**

"So if you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right, and trust yourself to the God who made you, for he will never fail you."

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week's end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to put it into practice. Note your results.

Serving for God's Glory

Read 1 Peter 4:7-11 for review.

The fact that God is “ready to judge” means that the “end of all things is at hand” (v. 7). The early Christians Peter addressed in this letter were facing great persecution, needing to take comfort in the fact that their suffering would one day come to an end. We too must realize that Christ could come at any moment! The reality of this great truth should challenge us to be watchful and ready at all times.

In verses 7–11, Peter focuses on four ways we can prepare for Christ's coming. Use these points to determine how ready *you* are to see Him face to face.

1. *Be serious and watchful in your prayers* (v. 7).

The NIV translates *serious* and *watchful* as *clear minded* and *self-controlled*.

- a. How would these be important when engaging in spiritual warfare during prayer?
- b. What importance did Jesus place on these attitudes? Why? See Matthew 26:41

Peter knew from experience how weak and vulnerable a believer could become when facing temptation without being grounded in prayer. He had slept in the Garden instead of praying with Jesus and, when the trial came, Peter denied His Lord. He didn't want others to repeat his mistake but to be serious and prayed up!

- c. Personal: How are *you* able to maintain a clear head when you pray? Are you watchful for the Lord's return?

2. *Be fervent in your love for one another* (v. 8).

The deepest love one can have is forgiving love. This kind of *agape*' love is the basis for all relationships in the church. It is commanded of us because it is a deliberate decision we make and not a feeling we have. It is literally *God's love in action*. Its goal is always to seek the good of the other person involved.

- a. Why does Peter say it is important to love one another in this way?
- b. What similar statement do you find in Proverbs 10:12
- c. Personal: Is God asking you to *agape*' someone He's placed in your life?

3. *Be hospitable to one another without grumbling* (v. 9).

Hospitality is a tangible expression of love, which Peter commanded the believers to exhibit toward one another. When the banner of love is linked to hospitality, it raises the standard of behavior to a higher level.

- a. What should the believer keep in mind when extending this courtesy to others? Why would this be important?

- b. There are times when demonstrating hospitality can seem more of a duty than a joy. At such times what should you remember? See Matthew 25:40 and Mark 9:41

4. *Be a good steward of your gifts* (v.10).

Since every believer has received a spiritual gift from God to use in service to the body of Christ, the Christian is therefore capable of ministering to others. The word *gift* (charisma) literally means a *gift of grace*. God has blessed us with this grace, giving us the responsibility of sharing our gift(s) with others. What has been given to each individual is to benefit the body as a whole. Through our sharing, we are administering the “manifold (many faceted) grace of God” in its various forms.

Verse 11 divides the gifts of grace into two broad categories: *speaking* and *serving*. The *speaking* gifts include: preaching, teaching, evangelism, prophecy, speaking in tongues, encouragement, and leadership. The *serving* gifts include: assistance or encouragement that benefits or contributes towards the needs of those within the body of Christ, healing, miracles, and showing mercy.

- a. Personal: Do you know what *your* spiritual gift(s) are? If so, how are you using them to serve the body of Christ?

Up close ~

If you don't know what gift is yours, make it a matter of prayer and searching the Scripture to find out! For further study, what do you learn from the following:

- Romans 12:6–8

- 1 Corinthians 12:1–11

- Ephesians 4:4–16.

Suffering for God's Glory

Read 1 Peter 4:12–19 for review.

The Bible instructs Christians in this passage not to be surprised by persecution or suffering, for both are part of God's plan to bring His children to maturity. Jesus Himself warned His followers: *"If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you"* (John 15:20). So what should a believer do? Trust God to help you through it. The fire of the trial will test your endurance and refine your faith.

1. When you do suffer, in what can you rejoice? v. 13
2. What example of suffering does Peter mention in verse 14?

Suffering has meaning because as we are tried, we come into deeper fellowship with Jesus Christ. We can rejoice in the midst of great difficulty, knowing that God is in control of every area of our lives—even the painful ones.

- a. If you are reproached for your faith, what does Peter say about you? Why? v. 14
- b. What should your response be? What should it *not* be? v. 16
- c. In contrast to verse 16, for what actions should a believer never suffer? v.15
(Notice the variables in this list.)

The believer's choices in life should give forth a testimony that identifies them as true followers of Jesus Christ. The reverse of this can also be true—the lack of persecution in a person's life can suggest that their lifestyle choices do not reveal their true identification with Christ.

The reference to judgment in verses 17–18 is two-fold: (1) It refers to the trials and sufferings of the believer that have a purifying and refining effect; and (2) It also refers to God judging all individuals according to their deeds. Peter quotes from Proverbs 11:31 to illustrate that unlike followers of God, non-believers are not a part of His refining judgment. The judgment they face is judicial and takes the form of punishment. When Christ returns they will face the fire of His judgment.

3. What word of encouragement does Peter extend to the believers in v. 19? Briefly note a personal testimony of God's faithfulness.

Notes

Hope in Action

1 Peter 5: Serving in Hope

Lesson 5

1 Peter 5:1–14

In a nutshell ~

It has been said that the church rises and falls on the spiritual quality of its leaders. Immature leaders motivated by personal gain seem to replicate their kind among the flock. Before saying goodbye in his final chapter, Peter strongly challenges the leaders to serve by example, with motives and methods worthy of their high calling. He then exhorts all believers to humbly submit to God and to one another and to stand strong in the face of the enemy's resistance.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 1 Peter 5:1–14.

Peter addresses this portion of his letter to the elders who serve the church congregation. The word *elder* refers to those officials who serve as pastoral leaders, occupying a position that is crucial to believers experiencing suffering and persecution. Peter includes himself as a *fellow elder*—one of them.

1. Notice the two significant statements Peter makes regarding himself. v. 1
 - a. He was a witness of what?

Proclaiming himself a witness of Christ's sufferings would cause Peter to recall the most painful time of his own life. Think back to the kind of witness Peter was at the time of Christ's death. (See Matthew 26:31–35; Luke 22:31; Luke 22:54–62.)

- b. Even though he initially failed Jesus as a witness, in what way would Peter be included as a partaker?

At the time Peter wrote this letter, he was a church leader who had sinned, repented, and been restored by God's grace, allowing him to be included as one who would share in Christ's glory. He has become a pillar of the Jerusalem church but wrote as a fellow elder. He states that a pastor's primary role is to *shepherd the flock of God*.

2. In verses 2–3, Peter summarizes the pastor's role. Using your resources, look up the word *shepherd* and write a definition.

3. In verses 2–3, Peter highlights the right and wrong ways to shepherd the flock of God. Jot down the descriptive words he uses in the following for:

- a. Wrong motives (v. 2):
- b. Right motives (v. 2):
- c. Wrong methods (v. 3):
- d. Right methods (v. 3):

Up close ~

In order to better understand Peter's heart on this matter and the emphasis of his words, take some time to carefully read through the Old Testament passage of Ezekiel 34. In it is a graphic portrayal of the problems with irresponsible shepherds and the detrimental affects upon God's flock. Then answer the questions below . . .

- a. How does God feel about these shepherds? What will He do with them?
- b. Contrast their behavior with that of the True Shepherd.
- c. What do you learn in this passage about God's love and care for His flock?
- d. The perspective Peter put forth in chapter 5 was indelibly written on his heart. See John 21:15–17 to why this was so; record your thoughts on it.
- e. Think about it: What are some of the duties of the pastor-shepherds in your own church? Take a moment to pray for them and their huge responsibility.

4. Peter concludes this section of the passage by focusing on the highest motive for shepherding God's people; what is it? What reward will the shepherd receive? v. 4

The *Crown of glory* is not a literal crown that each person will wear, rather a common glory that all pastors/leaders will share—those who are faithful servants as well as those who have persevered through suffering.

Selah~

How does knowing you will share in this *Crown of glory* encourage *you* to continue serving in hope?

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) **1 Peter 5:6–7**

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week's end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to it into practice. Note your results.

Submit to God

Read 1 Peter 5:5–7.

The remainder of the chapter is directed to those in the church who are not pastors, but are most likely younger in terms of their Christian maturity and experience. The pastor's responsibility is to shepherd the flock, and the members of the flock have the responsibility to submit to those in leadership over them. Again, Peter issues a command rather than an option. The word *submit* used here means to *defer to the authority of another*. It indicates a cooperative spirit and a willingness to support the pastor.

1. What motive is there for believers to be submissive? v. 5

- a. How does Hebrews 13:17 support what Peter is stating in verse 5?

The combination of godly leaders supported by submissive followers will result in the mutual respect and humility between all members in the body of Christ. Peter's exhortation to be "clothed with humility" suggests that this virtue should be a part of the believer's spiritual wardrobe.

Touchpoint~

Briefly describe the occasion and example of humility displayed by Jesus in each of the following passages . . .

- a. John 13:1–17 (Consider the impact this scene would have on Peter’s mind and heart.)

- b. Philippians 2:1–11 (Paul the Apostle shared here about the unity that comes through humility, modeled by Jesus Christ that we are to follow.)

- c. Personal: Charles Spurgeon wrote that, “*Humility is to make a right estimate of one’s self.*” By doing so, we can be made aware of our own strengths and weaknesses. We can also commit these to God to help us improve where needed. How can this help *you* to follow Christ’s example in serving others?

Notice that the verbs Peter uses in verse 5 are in the present tense, meaning that God *continually opposes* the proud—those who think they do not need to listen to Him. But He *continually give grace* to those who listen and humbly follow Him, particularly in the midst of suffering and persecution.

2. What does Peter mean when he says: *"Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God"* (v. 6)? What happens to those who follow this command?

Up close ~

Is the believer who trusts God fully trusting in Him if he/she hangs on to their worries, problems, and struggles in life? The answer to fear and worry is found in verse 7: “*Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*” Below are three passages that contain the secret to knowing how to cast your care on Him and the results you will achieve. Write down what you discover here and begin applying these principles.

- Psalm 55:22

- Matthew 11:28

- Philippians 4:6–7

Resist the Devil

Read 1 Peter 5:8–11 for review.

If you cast yourself and your cares on God, you are safe. If you do not, Satan will gain the advantage. C.S. Lewis once said, “*The two mistakes Christians make in talking about Satan are that we either joke about him or we ignore him.*” Neither of these can be an option for the believer. The words *be sober* and *be vigilant* could better be translated as *be self-controlled* and *alert*. The true intent here means *pay attention—wake up!* It is a strong warning for every Christian to realize that we are in a life-and-death spiritual battle and the stakes are very high!

All of the persecution believers will ever face comes down to one source: “*your enemy the devil.*” He is known by various names in Scripture: *Lucifer, Accuser, Beelzebub, Destroyer, and Satan*. Regardless of what you call him, he is God’s archenemy. As such, he is also the enemy of God’s people and the source of all evil in the world. Although he has no power over God, he does what he can to divide and destroy those who belong to God. We must learn to be aware of his tactics and always be on guard.

1. How much do you know about this “roaring lion” that is seeking to devour you? It is vital that you have a correct understanding of the person and work of Satan and his demonic forces in the world. Here’s your opportunity to examine some of his activities, limitations, and ultimate destiny. Look up the references that will enable you to say that *you are not ignorant of his devices* (2 Corinthians 2:11)!

a. *Satan’s activities include:*

- Job 1:7 –

- Matthew 13:19 –

- 2 Corinthians 4:4 –
- 2 Corinthians 11:14 –
- Ephesians 6:16 –
- 1 Thessalonians 2:18 –

b. *Satan's limitations:*

- Job 1:12 –
- James 4:7 –
- 1 John 2:13b
- 1 John 5:18
- Revelation 12:10–11

c. *Satan's destiny:*

- Matthew 25:41
- John 16:11
- Romans 16:20
- 1 John 3:8
- Revelation 20:2–3
- Revelation 20:10

d. What, from the exercise you just completed, stands out to you? Why?

2. What instruction does Peter give in verse 9 about how you must deal with Satan?
 - a. The word *resist* is a reference to maintaining a position of defense rather than one of attack. What do *you* think is the best way to resist him and remain steadfast in the faith?
 - b. What statement does Peter make about universal suffering in verse 9?
 - c. How does this reality underscore the importance of believers praying for one another? Do you take this to heart?
3. In terms of the bigger picture, what does Peter say God will do? v. 10
Which of these saving grace actions are you most in need of right now? Why?

In verses 12–14, Peter writes his final thoughts using the first-century custom of offering greetings at the conclusion of his letter. He mentions Silas, who served as Peter's secretary, taking down the dictation of this letter as Peter spoke it into existence.

4. For what reason does Peter say he wrote this letter? v. 12

The “kiss of love” (v. 14) was a form of greeting popular with the early church. It represented unity and expressed love among the believers. Today a handshake or hug is the equivalent. But no matter what greeting is used, the point is that we are to let our love for others show through our actions.

Peter ends his letter as he began it, by wishing the believers the peace that comes to all those who are in Christ Jesus. Do *you* have His peace right now? If not, would you like to? Just bow in His presence and invite Him into your heart by repeating these words:
“Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner in need of Your forgiveness. I ask You right now to be my Savior and Lord. I thank You for dying for me and rising again from the dead and for granting me Your peace that passes all understanding.”

If you prayed this prayer of forgiveness, please tell your group leader or pastor (or someone you trust) today as an open profession of your new-found faith. God bless you and welcome to the family of God!

Notes

Hope in Action

2 Peter 1: Growing in Hope

Lesson 6

2 Peter 1:1–21

In a nutshell ~

Have you ever taken your Christian faith for granted? Those of us who are not pressing on toward our heavenly goal may find that we are becoming stagnant in our spiritual growth. The miracle of transformation happens in an instant—the twinkling of an eye—but the process of sanctification takes a lifetime! As we learn and grow, we realize that we are the ones responsible to make sure we are adding certain virtues to our lives as we await Christ's return.

Peter wrote this second letter most likely from prison in Rome, around A.D. 66–67. While his purpose in writing the first letter was to comfort those in suffering, his second letter contains a strong warning for believers to recognize false teachers and refute their teaching. As Peter was preparing to die at the hands of his Roman executioners, he encouraged the flock of God to become serious about growing up in Christ.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 2 Peter 1:1–21.

There is a difference between the way Peter identified himself at the beginning of his first letter and here as he begins the second one. This difference reflects the transformation that has taken place in his life.

1. Compare 1 Peter 1:1 with 2 Peter 1:1. What word does Peter add to describe who he is?

a. Look up each of the words below and share what each title represents in terms of service for Christ.

- *Apostle* –

- *Bondservant* –

b. What does the word *bondservant* tell you about the character God had molded into Peter's life as he continued to follow Christ?

The readers of Peter's second letter were under the attack of false teachers infiltrating the body of Christ. It is clear from his message that his audience needed reassurance that their faith was indeed real. He writes to "those who have obtained like precious faith with us" (v. 1). Literally, he means that these believers had a faith as precious as the apostle's.

Peter's initial greeting in verse 2 is identical to 1 Peter 1:2. When he mentions *grace*, he is speaking of God's unmerited favor. The *peace* he refers to is the peace that comes about as the result of being reconciled to God through Christ. Here in verse 2, he adds to this reassurance by expounding on the blessing.

2. By what measure are *grace* and *peace* given to the Christian? How? v. 2

Selah~

Peter is not talking about the intellectual accumulation of information but rather a knowledge that comes through personal application and experience. Which do *you* possess? Please explain.

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) **2 Peter 1:3–4**

"... His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week's end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to put it into practice. Note your results.

The same God who calls us and blesses us with an abundance of His grace and peace, also enables us to grow spiritually. His divine power is manifested in the life of every believer, coming directly from the Holy Spirit within us. Apart from God we do not possess the resources needed to live a holy life, but Jesus Christ has *given us everything we need* for life and godliness. The moment we become born again, God empowers us to live in a way that glorifies Him!

3. How have we received this blessing? v. 3

- a. Personal: What was it about the Lord's glory and goodness that initially attracted *you* to Him?

4. What else have you received? Why? v. 4

The promises of God are assured because they are founded upon the character of the One making them. They come through the character of Christ—His own glory and goodness. We can count on them because His character remains the same; He never changes! When Peter talks about participating in the divine nature and escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust (v. 4), he means we are continually moving closer to God and further away from *self* and the *sinful nature* we were born with.

5. Personal: Can you think of a way you are demonstrating less of your previous sinful nature and more of the character of Christ?

Verses 5–7 describe in detail what this divine nature looks like and your role in this transforming process.

6. God has asked you to add to your faith characteristics of godliness. Using the resources you have on hand, look up and define each of these qualities:

- a. *Virtue*
- b. *Knowledge*
- c. *Self-control*
- d. *Perseverance*
- e. *Godliness*
- f. *Brotherly kindness*
- g. *Love*
- h. Personal: Which of these qualities is the Holy Spirit helping to work into your life at the moment?

Peter goes on to say in verse 8, “*For if these things are yours and abound . . .*” Literally it means, *if you possess these qualities in increasing measure*, pointing to the fact that the process is never finished but is always ongoing. To remain effective throughout the process, you must stop periodically to take stock of how you are doing.

7. What does Peter say about the person who lacks these virtues? vv. 9–10

- a. What is the potential for this kind of individual? (v. 9) How far will he or she go? Do you know someone like this?

In verses 10–11, Peter issues a word of encouragement and a challenge. The virtues he has just described are what enable you as a believer to *make your calling and election sure*! If you currently have doubt about the validity of your faith, perhaps you have *not been diligent* in your God-given responsibility. If your life does not show positive change, you will probably begin to question whether your faith is genuine.

- b. If this hits home to your heart today, take a moment to prayerfully commit yourself to the Lord, asking Him to enable you to make some changes.
 - Personal: On a scale of 1–10, with ten being best, how much effort are you putting towards this process of change? What can you do to give more effort?

- c. If you respond positively to Peter’s challenge here, what two statements of truth can you claim from the following . . .
 - v. 10b
 - v. 11

The Prophetic Word

Read 2 Peter 1:12–21 for review.

Christians need to be reminded—even those firmly established in the faith. Three times in verses 12–15, Peter mentions the words *remind*, *reminding*, *reminder*. Some thirty years earlier, Jesus declared that Peter would die a martyr. As death came closer, Peter no doubt felt the weight of this truth and so, wrote with greater urgency. Those who do have the opportunity to know that death is near will desire to pass on to others that which is closest to their heart. They want others to understand that which is of the greatest importance and benefit once they are gone.

1. How did Jesus speak of Peter’s death in John 21:18–19?

Jesus prophesied that Peter would die a martyr as the result of following Him. The words “stretch out your hands” refer to death by crucifixion. Tradition holds that Peter requested that he be crucified upside down because he did not feel himself worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

2. What did Peter determine to do as long as he remained alive? 2 Peter 1:13

Selah~

In your opinion . . . (answer the following . . . this will be challenging—do your best!)

- What would a *young* believer need to be reminded about?

- What kind of reminder would *you* give to a *mature* believer?

- What reminder would be appropriate for a *backslidden* believer?

3. What did Peter say that he would be careful to do according to verse 15? What do you think he meant by this?

Up close ~

Peter wrote of his impending departure with calmness and courage. He was prepared to leave his *tent*—his temporary body (v. 13) and move into God's eternal kingdom (v. 11).

- a. What does 1 Corinthians 15:42–44 say about the believer's new body?

- b. Suppose for a moment that you knew you had only a short time to remain on this earth. What would you diligently try to pass on to those closest to you? What would you want them to remember after you are gone?

Peter wanted his readers to know that the truth of God's saving power through Christ was not conceived in the mind of man, rather that it rests solely on the confirmation of Scripture. In verses 16–18, Peter revisits the moment of the *Transfiguration of Jesus*, which he had personally witnessed several decades earlier: “*We were eyewitnesses of His majesty*” (v.16). He had the unique experience of being present when God the Father bestowed honor and glory on the Son.

4. Take a moment to read the account in Matthew 17:1–8, and consider the following . . .

- a. Who did Jesus take with Him up on the mountain?
- b. Why do *you* think He chose these three to witness this incredible event?
- c. Who appeared to talk with Jesus? v. 3
- d. What did the voice in the clouds declare? Who was speaking? v. 5
- e. How did the disciples respond? What did Jesus do? vv. 6–7

The Transfiguration of Jesus revealed the true nature of who Jesus is—the glory and majesty of His character. It provided a preview of His Second Coming when He returns in the fullness of His glory. This was God the Father meeting with God the Son in the presence of eyewitnesses!

Peter's retelling of this story emphasizes his authority in teaching about the person and work of Christ. As glorious as this event was, Peter notes here in chapter 1 that we have another assurance regarding Christ—much more reliable and trustworthy than the eyewitness accounts—we have the Holy Scriptures! Peter was so confident about the authority and reliability of God's written Word that he counseled his readers to use the Scriptures as their guide until the day of Christ's return!

5. How does Peter describe Scripture in verse 19?

The “morning star” is a reference to Jesus Christ at the Second Coming (see Revelation 22:16). Peter's intent here is that until the return of Christ, we are to walk in the light of the truth of God's Word. He has described the believer's journey as a *pilgrimage* through a dark world and God has provided the Lamp of Truth to guide us. If we receive His Word and obey, we will be kept from the error of false teaching and discover a way of life that honors Him. How's *your* journey going?

Notes

Hope in Action

2 Peter 2: Standing in Hope

Lesson 7

2 Peter 2:1–22

In a nutshell ~

Are you mature enough in your Christian walk to discern truth from error, and would you be able to recognize a false teacher if you came across one? Are you skillful enough in handling the Scripture to refute false teaching when you hear it? During the growth of the early church, believers were being bombarded with false teaching, prompting Peter to devote a good portion of his second epistle to the subject. It is worth noting that false teaching is every bit in evidence today as it was in Peter's day. In fact, if you don't know the truth of God's Word, you will be easy prey for those who propagate false teaching.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 2 Peter 2:1–22.

The closing verses of chapter 1 comprise the bridge conveying the severe warning in chapter 2. Previously, Peter explained that God gave His truth to holy men who spoke to people as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. True prophets spoke and wrote down God's words, but there were also false prophets at work. The information communicated by these false teachers was very destructive, contradicting the true prophets who were sent by God to awaken the people to turn from their sins.

Peter explains that these false teachings—heresies—were secretly brought in, meaning they were smuggled in. False teachers knowingly and purposely sought to turn people from the truth to their lies, which would ultimately lead to destruction and judgment. It begs the question: would you knowingly place yourself under the influence of someone spreading destructive heresies? Of course not! But some of those spreading false teaching do so in very clever and subtle ways.

1. If you've ever listened to and recognized a false teacher in action, you most likely know what to look for. Think about the characteristics of this type of individual that makes them so appealing. In *your* opinion . . .

- a. What would they sound like?
- b. What would their demeanor look like?
- c. What would their message contain?

2. From where does Peter say the false teachers would come? v. 1

Think about it: for someone inside the church to be teaching false doctrine, they would have to be hearing the truth and then deliberately distorting it. Peter immediately focuses on the content that was heretical in this teaching: they were *denying the sovereign Lord who bought them* (v. 1). The word *bought* comes from *agorazo*, meaning to *redeem*.

The Old Testament passages of Exodus 6:6–7a and 2 Samuel 7:23 tell us that God redeemed Israel to make them His people, to show His awesome deeds, and to make His name known.

Up close ~

The New Testament usage of the word *redeem* means to buy a person out of slavery. Take a look at 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 1 Peter 1:18-19. What do you find there about the price paid to redeem you? To whom do you now belong?

3. To what extent does Peter say these false teachers will go? What will they bring upon themselves as a result? v. 1

- a. What will they cause many to do? What effect will this have on the reputation of Christ and the Gospel? v. 2

- b. What is their method? v. 3

False teachers have every intention of exploiting others with stories they have manufactured for their own purpose or financial gain. They fleece the flock by distorting the truth, telling people what they want to hear. Peter says that though these teachers seem to be getting away with their sin for the time being, all the while *condemnation is hanging over them* and *destruction* will eventually be their end.

4. Personal: Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you have “stretched the truth” in order to achieve some sort of personal gain; whether it be monetary or for the purpose of looking good in someone else’s eyes? As the saying goes: “A person is as good as his or her word.” How good should a Christian’s word be? How good is *your* word?

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) **2 Peter 2: 9**

“...The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week's end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to put it into practice. Note your results.

The Doom of False Teachers

In case there were some who still did not believe in a future judgment, Peter gives three examples of God's past judgment (vv. 4–8). Beginning with the broader look at the angelic realm of the cosmos and His judgment of the angels, Peter then moves to the judgment of all mankind in the worldwide flood, and then more locally to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. These three judgments prove that absolutely no one is exempt from judgment—not even the angels. God is a God of justice and fairness who is not willing to compromise with unconfessed sin. But He is also a God of grace and mercy and willing to forgive any and all who come to Him with a truly repentant heart.

Noah believed God and was protected from the flood that covered the earth (Genesis 7:11-23). Abraham's nephew, Lot, was also rescued from destruction (Genesis 19:1–24), proving that *“the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment”* (v. 9). The word “temptations” here could best be translated *trials*, which literally refers to *the test*. The New Testament consistently refers to the Second Coming of Christ as the final test. The Lord will act to rescue those that are His, but the ungodly will face judgment. The word “reserve” (v. 9) also means to *hold*, *keep*, or *guard*. It suggests that God is in control of judgment—He will have the final say with each person.

1. Verse 10 is a reference to the false teachers being included in God's judgment. Describe the character of false teachers mentioned in this verse.

- a. In contrast to the audacity of false teachers, what does v. 11 say about angels?

Up close ~

The false teacher's claim to fame is usually the self-professed attainment of a higher level of knowledge and spirituality. Peter charges that they actually *blaspheme in matters they do not understand* (v.12). Meaning, that all of their apparent knowledge is worthless. They are *brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed*. Here in verses 12–17, Peter graphically illustrates the character that is linked to this kind of person, underscoring the fact that our actions speak much louder than our words!

Fill in the chart below. Align the behavior next to the characteristic in each verse. The first one is done for you as an example. Once you complete the list, take a long look at it.

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Behavior</u>
a. v. 12 <i>Brute beasts—creatures of instinct</i>	<i>Blaspheme—speak evil of things they do not understand</i>
b. v. 13	
c. v. 14	
d. v. 15a	
e. v. 17	
f. In a sentence, summarize the outcome of these individuals.	

The empty, boastful words of the false teachers were enticing to some believers in Peter's day, as they still are today. In the remaining verses of this chapter, Peter mentions who these false teachers target and the substance of their appeal.

2. From what you've learned, think about what Peter meant by the words he uses in verse 18. Record your own thoughts.

- a. *words of emptiness* –
- b. *lewdness* –
- c. *those who live in error* –

By appealing to lustful, sensual desires, these false teachers were very effective in drawing believers away from the truth of the gospel. They didn't go after strong, mature believers; rather their prime target was the newer or weaker Christians—those who were *unsteady* in the faith.

3. Contrast what these teachers offered versus the state of their condition. v. 19
 - a. What does Peter say in this verse about being a slave?
 - b. Look back at what Jesus had to say about the bondage of sin and how to become free. See John 8:31–36.
4. What does Peter say about the false teachers who know the truth but then turn away from it? In what way would they have been better off? vv. 21–22 (Think about this carefully.)

Peter's final point is a very strong, graphic one: "*A dog returns to his own vomit; a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire*" (v. 22). In other words, those who return to their evil life after becoming enlightened and cleansed by the Truth are no better than a dog that vomits and returns to it, or a pig that is washed clean but immediately returns to rolling in the mud. Animals do things naturally, but human beings who make an outward profession of faith without inwardly being transformed by the Holy Spirit will also soon return to their old way of life because it is so natural to them; they are comfortable with it.

Selah~

Take some time to thoughtfully navigate your way through this next exercise, keeping in mind that younger, weaker believers in the faith are more susceptible to false teachers.

- a. Hebrews 5:12–14 give a clear reason to "grow up" in your faith. According to these verses, what is wrong with settling for just the *milk* of the Word? What is the advantage of moving on to solid food?
- b. Look again at Ephesians 4:13–15. If a believer remains in a stage of *spiritual infancy*, what are you vulnerable to? What does God want you to do instead?
- c. Hebrews 3:12–13 present the one thing that will hinder you from growing up—what is it? Will you receive the exhortation from the Holy Spirit to hear His voice and return to Him? Close your study today with some time in prayer.

Notes

Hope in Action

2 Peter 3: Watching in Hope

Lesson 8

2 Peter 3:1–18

In a nutshell ~

Peter just shared his insights on the dangers and doom of the false teachers and now returns to the heart of his message. He writes to all faithful believers, exhorting them to remember God's words as they look forward with anticipation to the Lord's return.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 2 Peter 3:1–18.

Waiting is one aspect of the Christian life that seems very difficult for most people. It is helpful and beneficial for believers to be engaged in something while we wait. Peter proceeds to tell his readers in chapter 3 that we are not to wait passively, but *actively*, by giving diligence to the way we live. With that thought in mind, he offers the perfect activity—wholesome thinking.

Turning away from the subject of the false teachers, Peter refers to his audience as beloved or dear friends. Returning once again to what is closest to his heart, his purpose is to stimulate believers to think about what awaits them in the future.

1. Keeping in mind the goal of false teachers to make believers think unwholesome thoughts, Peter makes reference (v. 2) to two potential areas of contaminated thinking targeted by false teachers. What are they?

By way of reminder, Peter points to the Old Testament passages in Scripture spoken by the prophets. He tells his readers not to take this lightly, simply because the future has not yet happened. The second area that needs protection from wrong thinking has to do with the "command given by the Lord through the apostles," referring to the law of Christ.

- a. Repeatedly found in Scripture, what is this command? See John 13:34–35, and 15:12; Romans 13:9–10; James 2:8; 1 Peter 1:22 and 4:8; and 1 John 3:11.

Peter emphasized that “knowing this first” (v. 3)—knowing above all else—we must understand that in the last days scoffers will come.

2. Look up the word *scoffer* and write a definition.

- a. Describe what these individuals are like. v. 3 (See also 2 Peter 2:10). What is their argument? v. 4

Verses 5–7 point out the fact that though the false teachers knew the Old Testament, they deliberately chose to ignore and forget what Scripture says. They denied God’s intervention in past history.

3. What example does Peter use to support his claim of their denial? vv. 5–6

The Bible teaches that the God who created the heavens and the earth is the same God who will one day judge His creation. The One who has the power to create all things also has the power to end them!

- a. Instead of being destroyed by water as in Noah’s day, what kind of judgment awaits those upon the earth at the Second Coming? v. 7
- b. Read about the coming judgment in Revelation 19:20 and 20:10–15. What new insight do you gain?

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) **2 Peter 3: 9**

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week’s end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to put it into practice. Note your results.

In light of God's impending judgment, Peter offers reasons for the Lord delaying His return. Knowing that the time left to us is limited, it behooves us to spend it loving those who resist and even oppose the gospel message, in the hope that we can bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

4. What does this perspective reveal to you about the heart of God? vv. 8–9
 - a. Does His delay in returning mean that He has forgotten His promise? What does it say about His priority?
 - b. There are only two things in this world that are eternal: God's Word and people. How does this reality help you with your priorities as you await the Lord's coming?
5. What statement does Peter give us about the coming day of the Lord? v. 10

Up close ~

The warning Peter uses here was issued by Jesus Himself. What was His emphasis in Matthew 24:36–44?

- a. What additional insights do you gain from Revelation 3:3 and 16:15a?
- b. According to 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11, how should you as a believer think and act?

The book of 2 Peter is the only one in the New Testament that depicts the world being destroyed by fire (v.10). When we read of the fire of God's judgment in Scripture, it refers to not only its purifying effect, but also its destruction of all that is evil, in preparation of Christ's eternal reign. Peter points to the fact that judgment will come and all those who do not believe will perish.

Jesus Christ's *unexpected*—though predicted—return will bring about the destruction of creation as we know it.

6. What does verse 10 say about the destruction of the following . . .

a. The heavens –

b. The elements –

c. The earth –

The revelation of verse 10 is intended to emphasize that God's final judgment will be absolute and complete—nothing will escape His attention!

Selah~

In case you have missed the point Peter underscores about the patience of God, take a moment to think about the following questions, recording your thoughts.

- What if the Lord had returned last year—last month—or last week? Would you have been ready to meet Him? How about 5 or 10 years ago? Think of the many that would have missed their opportunity if He was not so long suffering.
- Has God ever failed to keep a promise to *you*? Has He ever been late?
- Have you been expecting Him to fulfill His Word according to *your* time table?
- What have you learned about God's grace and love for *you* through this study?

Maintaining an Eternal Perspective

Read 2 Peter 3:11–18 for review.

Since we know that everything here on earth will be burned up, we should put our attention and efforts into that which will last forever: God's Word and the saving of souls! This understanding should motivate us to periodically take stock of our lives and ensure that we are in pursuit of the things that will bring about lasting results for God's kingdom.

Peter's question, "*What kind of people ought you to be?*" (v. 11), is a rhetorical one. He has previously emphasized that Christians are to live holy lives. Those who are obedient will be in direct contrast to the ungodliness found in the world. Their lives will continue on after the coming destruction. Christians do not need to fear the *day of the Lord*, rather we can look forward to it!

In the closing verses of chapter 3, we again see active cooperation while awaiting the Lord's return. We are to be actively cooperating with God in the salvation of the lost, remaining steadfast in the faith, and growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord. Scripture does not explain *why* God chooses to use human beings as His instruments of grace, but apparently our willing response has an impact on *the day of the Lord*.

1. According to verse 13, what is every believer looking forward to? Why? Who promised it?
 - a. To understand what Peter means when he speaks about a place where "righteousness dwells," read the account in Revelation 21:1–4 and 22–27. In your own words, write a description of your future home.
 - b. As a believer, you need to be reminded that you are heading toward your eternal home. Your righteous actions now are the fruit of your choice to live a godly life. Soon you'll realize the fullness of your long-awaited reward. What are *you* looking forward to the most? Will you take a moment to thank Him for the home He is preparing for *you*?

Peter ends his letter by encouraging his readers to apply themselves to practicing righteousness now, in preparation for the coming kingdom. He once again reiterates that believers are not to be passive, but to be diligent as we await His soon coming.

2. What, specifically, does Peter say we are to be diligent in doing? v. 14
 - a. Look back to 1 Peter 1:19, where these same words are used to describe Jesus Christ. Is Peter suggesting that *you* will live a perfect life? What does he mean?
 - b. As you await Christ's return, what are *you* doing to be found without spot and blameless?

In order to be *like Christ*, the catalyst that motivates you to live a godly life is your anticipation of seeing Him. Peter makes his point in these verses by borrowing from the authority of the apostle Paul. He reminds us that Paul has made the same points in his letters and, though some of his writings may be difficult to understand, they are backed by the authority of God.

3. What have the false teachers done with these scriptural teachings? v. 16
 - a. Knowing their tactics beforehand, what is the warning here for us? v. 17
4. Verse 18 contains the key to remaining steadfast, free from error—what is it? How meaningful is this to you at this point in your life? Please explain.

The Christian life was never meant to be lived standing still. It is a continual process of growth that finds its meaning and focus in the ever increasing awareness of the person and character of Jesus Christ and His imminent return.

5. Personal: If you were to estimate your growth rate so far, what would you say? On a scale of 1–10, with 10 indicating *all* your effort, how do *you* measure up? Compare your learning of Scripture with your personal application of it.

Notes