



EXPLORE **THE BIBLE.**
Adults

Romans

Leader Guide (CSB)

Fall 2026



ONE ROAD

“All roads lead to Rome.” It’s a familiar phrase. We understand it to mean that no matter what problem we’re facing, there’s probably more than one way to achieve a solution. Of course, thousands of years ago, it meant something much different.

During the days of the Roman Empire, the capital city was the hub of economic and cultural power. That included transportation. Justifiably, the Romans were proud of their roads. What’s more, many of those roads originated from a single spot, the Milliarium Aureum, the “Golden Milestone.” This large column was set up in the Roman Forum and served as the starting point for a vast network of highways that branched across the known world. As a result, all roads quite literally led to Rome.

Midway through the first century, the apostle Paul was hoping to take one of those roads and visit the church in Rome. In preparation, he wrote them a letter, an extensive explanation of humanity’s sin and God’s salvation. In it, Paul shared the meaning of the gospel and how Christ followers should apply it to their lives each day.

While many roads led to Rome, Paul was adamant that Jesus was the only road to God. He said that Jews and Gentiles alike were helpless to save themselves. Everyone needs Jesus as Savior. Things haven’t changed. We all still need Jesus if we’re hoping for a new relationship with God. If that’s where you find yourself today, here’s what you need to do . . .

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God’s Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross. Jesus also rose from the dead, making a new, eternal life possible for us.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen.”

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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*Evangelistic Emphasis

MEET THE WRITERS



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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline, please visit Lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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FROM **THE TEAM LEADER**



Photos. Wedding invitations. Save the dates. Birth announcements. Our refrigerator doors often showcase important people in our lives and significant events. I put announcements on my refrigerator so I won't forget them and sometimes photos of past events are purposely left up because they bring me so much joy. Exciting milestones and photos of everyday moments are captured in one spot like a special collection to be reminded of and enjoyed over and over.

Good news and big announcements are hard to keep to ourselves. In the book of Romans, Paul wrote to believers meeting in Roman house churches telling them of the best news ever shared—the gospel. Paul expounded on who needs the gospel (we all do) and where we can find salvation (only in Christ!). Jesus, through His life, death, and resurrection, made salvation possible for us. We are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). The gospel truly is the *best* good news.

I hope this quarter of study brings a deeper appreciation of God's gift of grace and the new life we are offered in Christ. May this lead you to tell others this good news!

In Him,

Amber Vaden

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Explore

Discover



Teaching to Share the Gospel

G. Dwayne McCrary

God gifted each of us differently. Paul pointed out that God gifts “some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11). Some take this to mean we need to stay in our lane, let the evangelist do his work while we do our work as a shepherd or teacher. However, this same Paul directed his protégé, Timothy, to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5). Paul’s direction to Timothy would be consistent with the Great Commission in Matthew 28, where Jesus directed all His disciples to make disciples, which includes evangelizing. Those gifted as teachers may do evangelism differently than those gifted with service or hospitality, but we are all tasked with evangelism in some way.

Here are five things we can do to be more intentional about sharing the gospel when we lead a Bible study group.

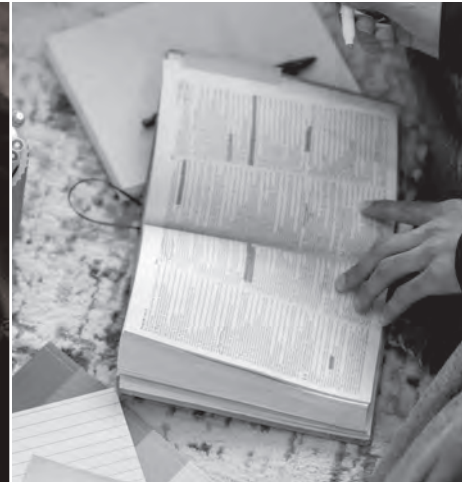
1. Be prepared to share. We all need to be able to share how we became followers of Jesus and how others can do the same. If we need help, we can always refer to the information on the inside front cover of the Lifeway resources that explains

how to respond to the gospel (admit, believe, and confess). We may have a favorite verse (John 3:16; 14:6; Rom. 6:23) or set of verses (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; 5:8; 10:9-10; Eph. 2:1-13) we can point to when sharing the gospel. The key isn’t so much which verse or verses we use, but that we’re prepared to share when the opportunity arises.

2. Invite people to share their stories. The people in our groups have stories to tell if we give them an opportunity. Some won’t share their story unless we invite them to share how they came to Jesus. This also helps those in our groups improve as witnesses for Christ and get more comfortable with sharing the gospel as they listen to others and share their own stories with the group.

3. Look for opportunities. In Lifeway resources, at least one lesson each quarter is marked as evangelistic, but that doesn’t mean the others do not offer occasions to share the gospel. Most, if not every, Bible study session provides an opportunity to share the gospel. A lesson on the use of money can open a door by reminding the group that we use our money not to secure our salvation but in response to the salvation Jesus already secured for us. Subtle, yet still an opportunity to share the gospel. Many times, we pass over those openings without thinking about it.

4. Include a way to respond. Telling a person about Jesus and His offer of salvation is only half the work. We need to offer them a way to respond. Asking them in front of the group may not be the best approach. We are asking them to



make a big decision that requires careful thought. We can make ourselves available after group time or share our cell phone numbers in case anyone wants to talk more about what it means to follow Jesus. However we do it, we need to make sure no one is left wanting to know more or wanting to respond without an opportunity to do so.

5. Encourage the group to pray for, invite, and bring along people who are far from God. One reason we may not always feel an urgency to share the gospel as we teach is that we are leading the same group of people week in and week out. In effect, our groups become functionally closed.

By encouraging participants to pray for opportunities to share the gospel, invite people not currently involved in a Bible study group, and bring the people they invite

with them, we might find ourselves more intentional about sharing the gospel when we teach.

Notice that “invite” and “bring” are listed separately. We need to remind our groups that we can invite people to attend, but if we invite them and offer to pick them up or meet them in the parking lot, they will be more likely to say yes to the invitation.

Review the lessons for this quarter and note those specifically identified as evangelistic. Encourage your group to make special efforts to bring guests with them on the weeks these lessons are taught.

G. Dwayne McCrary is the manager of Adult Ongoing Bible studies at Lifeway.



Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Faith—trusting Jesus alone for salvation; personal reliance on His death and resurrection (Rom. 3:22; 4:5)

Firstfruits—the first and best part of a harvest offered to God, showing gratitude and trust in His provision; it also refers to the first evidence of God’s saving work (Rom. 8:22-23; 11:16)

Flesh—the sinful human nature—our internal pull toward sin that resists God’s desires (Rom. 7:18)

Glorified/Glorification—the future transformation of believers when they are fully made like Christ and share in His glory (Rom. 8:17)

Gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ—His death, resurrection, and the salvation He offers to all who believe (Rom. 1:15)

Grace—God’s unearned kindness and favor, freely given to sinners through Christ (Rom. 5:20)

Illyricum [ih LIHR ih kuhm]—Roman province located northwest of Macedonia; the northeastern limits of Paul’s missionary work (Rom. 15:19)

Justified/Justification—God’s declaration of a believer’s right standing with Him, resulting in peace with Him (Rom. 3:24; 5:1)

Reconciled/Reconciliation—to be brought back into a right relationship with God as the result of His justifying sinners—accomplished through Christ’s blood, not through human effort (Rom. 5:10-11)

Redemption—God’s act of setting people free from sin’s penalty and restoring what was broken (Rom. 3:24; 8:23)

Righteous/Righteousness—God’s perfect moral character expressed in His always doing what is right and just; to be “made righteous” refers to God’s saving act in which He justifies the sinner, giving them a right standing with Him based on their faith (Rom. 3:22)

Sanctified—to be set apart by God and for God; something God does—by the Holy Spirit who changes the believers’ hearts—and something believers pursue, growing in godliness (Rom. 6:22; 15:16; 1 Cor. 6:11)

Sin—anything that stands in opposition to God’s holy character and commands; sin separates people from God and places humanity under His judgment; it is both a condition and the acts that flow from it (Rom. 3:23; 6:23)

Wrath—God’s righteous opposition to sin (Rom. 1:18; 5:9)

BIBLE READING PLAN



SEPTEMBER

- ☐ 1. Romans 1:1-7
- ☐ 2. Romans 1:8-12
- ☐ 3. Romans 1:13-15
- ☐ 4. Romans 1:16-17
- ☐ 5. Romans 1:18-23
- ☐ 6. Romans 1:24-25
- ☐ 7. Romans 1:26-32
- ☐ 8. Romans 2:1-4
- ☐ 9. Romans 2:5-11
- ☐ 10. Romans 2:12-16
- ☐ 11. Romans 2:17-24
- ☐ 12. Romans 2:25-29
- ☐ 13. Romans 3:1-8
- ☐ 14. Romans 3:9-18
- ☐ 15. Romans 3:19-20
- ☐ 16. Romans 3:21-26
- ☐ 17. Romans 3:27-31
- ☐ 18. Romans 4:1-5
- ☐ 19. Romans 4:6-8
- ☐ 20. Romans 4:9-12
- ☐ 21. Romans 4:13-17
- ☐ 22. Romans 4:18-25
- ☐ 23. Romans 5:1-5
- ☐ 24. Romans 5:6-11
- ☐ 25. Romans 5:12-14
- ☐ 26. Romans 5:15-17
- ☐ 27. Romans 5:18-21
- ☐ 28. Romans 6:1-4
- ☐ 29. Romans 6:5-10
- ☐ 30. Romans 6:11-14

OCTOBER

- ☐ 1. Romans 6:15-18
- ☐ 2. Romans 6:19-23
- ☐ 3. Romans 7:1-3
- ☐ 4. Romans 7:4-6
- ☐ 5. Romans 7:7-12
- ☐ 6. Romans 7:13-20
- ☐ 7. Romans 7:21-25
- ☐ 8. Romans 8:1-4
- ☐ 9. Romans 8:5-11
- ☐ 10. Romans 8:12-17
- ☐ 11. Romans 8:18-25
- ☐ 12. Romans 8:26-30
- ☐ 13. Romans 8:31-39
- ☐ 14. Romans 9:1-5
- ☐ 15. Romans 9:6-9
- ☐ 16. Romans 9:10-15
- ☐ 17. Romans 9:16-21
- ☐ 18. Romans 9:22-29
- ☐ 19. Romans 9:30-33
- ☐ 20. Romans 10:1-4
- ☐ 21. Romans 10:5-13
- ☐ 22. Romans 10:14-15
- ☐ 23. Romans 10:16-21
- ☐ 24. Romans 11:1-6
- ☐ 25. Romans 11:7-10
- ☐ 26. Romans 11:11-16
- ☐ 27. Romans 11:17-24
- ☐ 28. Romans 11:25-32
- ☐ 29. Romans 11:33-36
- ☐ 30. Romans 12:1-2
- ☐ 31. Romans 12:3-8

NOVEMBER

- ☐ 1. Romans 12:9-13
- ☐ 2. Romans 12:14-21
- ☐ 3. Romans 13:1-3
- ☐ 4. Romans 13:4-7
- ☐ 5. Romans 13:8-10
- ☐ 6. Romans 13:11-14
- ☐ 7. Romans 14:1-4
- ☐ 8. Romans 14:5-9
- ☐ 9. Romans 14:10-12
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- ☐ 24. Romans 15:30-33
- ☐ 25. Romans 16:1-2
- ☐ 26. Romans 16:3-16
- ☐ 27. Romans 16:17-19
- ☐ 28. Romans 16:20
- ☐ 29. Romans 16:21-24
- ☐ 30. Romans 16:25-27

USING THIS GUIDE TO LEAD



BEFORE THE GROUP TIME

1. STUDY THE CORE PASSAGE.

Prepare early. Read the passage, listing key people, places, words, phrases, and actions. Use the commentary included in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* and the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* to dig deeper into the items you listed. If a QR code is available in a lesson, scan it to gain additional information on what's found in the passage. Write a summary of the session's main idea. Use the statement printed under each session title as a starting place.

2. READ THE GROUP TIME PLAN.

Study the Group Plans in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, which include ideas for integrating the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide*. Page numbers for related PSG content are provided in the Group Plans. These page numbers correspond to the regular print version of the PSG and may differ from large print versions. Adjust the plan to fit the needs of your group. Identify ways to engage adults, explore the text, summarize the lesson, and challenge the group.

For additional ideas or questions, consult *Explore the Bible QuickSource* and *Explore the Bible Extra* (which identifies a current event to introduce and conclude the lesson and is found at goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras).

Review the items available in the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*. Look at the Lifeway Sunday School blog and Groups Ministry blog for additional helps on leading an ongoing Bible study group.

3. GATHER AND REVIEW.

Review the group plan and options again and collect any supplies you will need. Make sure you have additional copies of the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* for guests.

DURING THE GROUP TIME

4. ARRIVE EARLY.

Make sure you are the first person to arrive. Pray as you set up the area. Greet adults as they arrive and focus their attention on the Bible study.

5. LEAD THE GROUP IN A TIME OF BIBLE STUDY.

Use the plan, recording notes of how the group responded. Remember, every group experience takes a few unexpected twists and turns, so be flexible.

AFTER THE GROUP TIME

6. EVALUATE AND RECORD.

Review and implement the After the Session idea to encourage the group to put the truths they discovered into practice. Record prayer requests and other insights you gained about the group and specific participants. Use these notes to help you grow as a leader.

7. START PREPARING TO LEAD THE NEXT GROUP TIME.

MEETING THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE FAMILY OF ADULT RESOURCES

CORE RESOURCES

Use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* or *Personal Study Guide* and *Leader Guide* as the core resource for your group.

Daily Discipleship Guide

Resource for both the group members and the group leader. An alternative to the *Personal Study Guide/Leader Guide* model. Includes key words, commentary and questions for the group, daily Bible readings for personal study after the group time, and ideas for smaller groups to discuss the study. Leader helps with targeted teaching plans included in the back.

Personal Study Guide

Resource for the group members to help them prepare for and study during the group time.

Leader Guide

Resource for leaders of groups using the *Personal Study Guide*. Includes commentary and group teaching plans.

ADDITIONAL LEADER HELPS

Commentary

Provides additional insight into the passages studied.

QuickSource

Resource for leaders, providing additional discussion questions, an object lesson, and dig deeper feature. Also provides ease of use for an individual called on to step in and lead the group on short notice.

Leader Pack

Resource filled with posters, masters for informative handouts, and access to a digital leader pack (includes DOC files of the *Leader Guide* commentary, group plans, the pack items in PDF format, and other helps for the leader).



Find out more or order at goExploreTheBible.com

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

The apostle Paul identified himself as the writer of Romans (Rom. 1:1), and this is largely unquestioned today since the style fits that of other letters attributed to Paul, such as Galatians and the two epistles to the Corinthians. Paul did indicate that he had the help of a secretary, or amanuensis, who penned the contents of the letter as Paul dictated it (16:22). His name was Tertius, and he supplied his own greeting at the end of the letter.

The recipients of Paul's letter were the Christians in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. Though Paul had not founded or even visited the church there, he knew several of its prominent members. His beloved coworkers, Prisca and Aquila, were in Rome at the time of writing (16:3). Throughout the last chapter, he listed many more people that he already knew who were part of this diverse congregation.

The date of Paul's letter to the Romans is an educated guess based upon the situation described in it. The apostle had finished his work in the eastern regions of the empire. He noted that his ministry over the years had taken him from Jerusalem to Illyricum, which is identified as the area of modern-day Albania and other nations along the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea (15:19). Having covered much of that region, he planned to go west and visit Spain after he visited Rome (15:24).

Before he could continue his missionary endeavors, however, Paul first had to deliver contributions for a famine relief offering. The apostle had received gifts from Gentile believers in support of their Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem (15:25-26).

Taken together, all of these factors suggest a date near the end of Paul's third missionary journey. This would place the letter sometime in the AD 50s.

In addition, many scholars believe that Paul wrote the letter from the city of Corinth around this time. The greetings in Romans 16 also indicate a connection to Corinth. Phoebe, a "servant of the church at Cenchreae" (a port city just east of Corinth) is commended to the church in Rome, possibly because she carried the letter to them (16:1-2). The letter also contains a greeting from Gaius and from Erastus "the city treasurer" (v. 23). Though Gaius was a common name, Paul did baptize a man named Gaius in Corinth (1 Cor 1:14). Also, a paving stone dated to the AD mid-50s identifying an Erastus as a city official has been found in Corinth.

The combination of names and circumstances mentioned in Romans provides another strong indication that the letter was written from Corinth in the 50s.

PURPOSE

Since Paul had not personally traveled to Rome—even though he had felt a desire to do so on several occasions (Rom. 15:22)—he wrote one of the most comprehensive explanations of the gospel in the entire New Testament. His desire was to show both Jews and Gentiles in the Roman church that everyone stands on common ground before Jesus. All people are sinners, so all need a Savior. And those who are saved by the grace of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus are expected to pursue holiness through the power of the Spirit.

After presenting his thoughtful and logical doctrine of sin, salvation, and justification in chapters 1–11, Paul shifted his focus to practical issues in chapters 12–15. He shared how believers—both Jews and Gentiles—could apply their faith in the real world. As noted, chapter 16 primarily contains a series of greetings and personal connections between the apostle and his readers.



As he prepared to take the gospel to Spain, Paul eyed a visit to Rome on his way toward the unreached communities. He wrote the letter in preparation for his visit and to encourage the Romans to partner with his ministry efforts.

Of course, Paul did arrive in Rome eventually, though he did not know that his visit would not come of his own free will. After his arrest in Jerusalem, he appealed to Caesar (a right he enjoyed as a Roman citizen in the empire) to ensure a fair trial. Since Scripture is silent on the matter, we can only speculate as to whether or not Paul finally made his way to Spain.

MAJOR THEMES

1. The Righteousness of God. In Romans 1:16-17, Paul delivered the thesis of his letter. He said he was not ashamed of the gospel because it was the power of God for salvation to all who believed. God offered righteousness as a gift to those who believed in Christ and accepted His sacrifice on the cross as the payment for their sins.

2. The Universality of Sin. Both Jews and Gentiles are born under the dominion of sin. No one is exempt, so no one should rely on their own merits for salvation. Sin produces death, and sinners cannot save themselves from the consequences of their sin.

3. Justification by Faith. Believers are pardoned and declared righteous before God, not by works but by faith. A legal term, justification implies that an authority has canceled the debt of sin. For believers, God performed this work because of their faith in Jesus and made them right with Him (Rom. 3:28; 5:1).

4. Life in the Spirit. Though salvation is completely a work of God, believers are called to engage their flesh in the battle against the

temptation to sin (6:1-14). More precisely, Christians are called to consider themselves dead to the power of sin in their lives. This does not mean that sin ceases to be a powerful and destructive force, but it does mean that believers have the power to overcome sin through their restored relationship with God. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, who lives in all believers (8:1-17).

5. God's Sovereignty and the Nation of Israel. Even though many Israelites rejected God and His Messiah, He still desires they be saved. As a fellow Jew, Paul prayed for the salvation of Israel, just as he prayed for the salvation of the Gentiles (Rom. 9-11). He noted that God's work among the Gentiles was not a rejection of the Jews, but an opportunity for them to see their need and return to Him.

6. Practical Christian Living. Believers should offer themselves to God as living sacrifices and have their minds renewed so they can be transformed into the image of Christ. This is a daily process of sanctification, and it has practical results in the lives of those who are following Jesus (Rom. 12-15). For example, as men and women transformed by God, believers can identify and make use of spiritual gifts for the church and approach their relationship with governing authorities with a new perspective.

Romans presents readers with a monumental work. It combines profound theological insight with pastoral instruction and a passion for missions. Its wisdom has blessed the church for generations. And a careful study of its pages still holds the promise of blessing to readers today.



ROMANS

- **I. Introduction** (Rom. 1:1-15)
- **II. The Universal Need of Righteousness** (Rom. 1:16-3:20)
- **III. Justification: The Imputation of Righteousness** (Rom. 3:21-5:21)
 - A. The righteousness of God in justification (Rom. 3:21-26)
 - B. Justification by faith excludes boasting (Rom. 3:27-31)
 - C. Justification and the Old Testament (Rom. 4:1-25)
 - D. Justification involves reconciliation (Rom. 5:1-11)
 - E. The Christ-Adam analogy (Rom. 5:12-21)
- **IV. The New Life in Christ** (Rom. 6:1-8:39)
 - A. The old self/new self and sin's dominion (Rom. 6:1-23)
 - B. The old self/new self and the Mosaic law (Rom. 7:1-25)
 - C. The old self/new self and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1-39)
- **V. The Mystery of Israel** (Rom. 9:1-11:36)
 - A. Israel's unbelief and the gospel (Rom. 9:1-10:21)
 - B. Israel's rejection is not final (Rom. 11:1-36)
- **VI. Exhortations about the Christian Life** (Rom. 12:1-15:13)
 - A. Living sacrifices and spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:1-8)
 - B. Christians and non-Christians (Rom. 12:9-21)
 - C. The believer's obligation to the state (Rom. 13:1-7)
 - D. The Christian's motivations (Rom. 13:8-14)
 - E. The strong and the weak in the church (Rom. 14:1-15:13)
- **VII. Epilogue: Greetings and Travel Plans** (Rom. 15:14-16:27)

True Power

THE GOSPEL ALONE HAS THE POWER TO REMOVE
THE GUILT OF HUMANITY'S SIN.

Scripture Passage: Romans 1:13-25 Memory Verse: Romans 1:16

On one of our first dates, my wife and I ate at a great Tex-Mex place before a concert. She had bought a new blouse and new white pants for the occasion. As he put our food on the table, our waiter accidentally flipped a bowl of guacamole sauce into her lap. He apologized profusely and offered to pay for the dry cleaning. We reminded him that accidents happen—though the stain never completely came out of those pants.

Guacamole stains are nothing compared to the stain caused by sin. It not only has covered us, but its removal is impossible without the gospel. Unlike my wife's unfortunate encounter, we were not innocent in acquiring the stain of sin. When Adam and Eve ate of the tree, they—and all humanity—fell.

Thankfully, Jesus became the spotless sacrifice for sin, the substitute for the punishment we deserved. The message about Jesus's death and resurrection constitutes the gospel, and the gospel alone has the power to remove the guilt of humanity's sin. As you begin this study of Romans, thank God for the forgiveness He provides and consider ways you can share the gospel clearly with adults in your group over the next several weeks.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

Scan here to gain insights about this week's study on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.



All of us have experienced the power of good news. Perhaps it was when you got the report that you passed an exam. Or when you were told that you got the job. Maybe you received the blood test results and learned that nothing's wrong. Good news has a powerful impact on us. It turns an ordinary day into an extraordinary event that we will always remember. (PSG, p. 10)

**What's a memorable good news moment you've had?
How did it affect you?**



Understand the Context (Romans 1:1-32)

In Romans, Paul wrote to a church that he had never visited. In Romans 1:13, he said that he had often planned to spend time with them, but the opportunity had never presented itself. Though he never had visited the Roman church, he did know people there, including Prisca and Aquila (Rom. 16:3-16). One day, he would get the opportunity to meet more believers in Rome as he lived under house arrest and awaited trial (Acts 28:16).

When Paul wrote this letter to the Romans, he was longing to take the gospel to Spain, where few had heard of Jesus (Rom. 15:20,28). However, he first needed to deliver an offering from churches in Macedonia and Corinth to the suffering saints in Jerusalem (15:25-26). He asked for the Romans to pray that he would have safety from the unbelievers in Judea so he could visit them on his way to Spain (15:30-31).

If Paul did not plant the church in Rome, who did? Because of the city's prominence, missionaries may have brought word about the crucified and risen Savior to Rome early. Luke also mentioned that visitors from Rome were present on Pentecost (Acts 2:9-11). It's possible that some of the three thousand people who trusted Christ that day returned to Rome and brought the gospel with them (Acts 2:41).

But why would Paul write a letter to a church that he did not plant? Primarily, Paul wanted to strengthen the work of the gospel in Rome and encourage believers as they learned to walk with

Christ (Rom. 1:11-12). He affirmed this prayer in the letter's conclusion (16:25-26).

As the capital of the empire, Rome certainly had great diversity of cultures, which made false teaching and division constant threats to the church there (16:17-18). For that reason, Paul wrote to lay a foundation for the true gospel prior to his anticipated visit. The common ground shared by the Christians in Rome did not originate with geography, politics, or cultural similarities. Rather, the glorious gospel of Jesus united the diverse believers in Rome.

In Romans 1:1-32, Paul laid a foundation that would help the Romans understand the gospel better. After introducing himself and expressing his desire to visit them, the apostle presented his thesis in Romans 1:16-17. The gospel is the power of God to salvation for all who believe it, both Jews and Greeks. Salvation comes through faith alone, not through religious works.

Faith was necessary to overcome the power of sin and guilt that had dominated their old ways of life (Rom. 1:18-32). The pull of sin is so strong and human nature is so depraved that only God can save people as they trust in the sacrifice of His death and in the power of His resurrection.

Read Romans 1:1-25 and underline the words and phrases that call attention to Jesus and the gospel. (PSG, p. 10)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: The First-Century Roman Empire*) and **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Romans*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Romans Time Line*). Bring an envelope to use in the introduction.

ASK:

**What's a memorable good news moment you've had?
How did it affect you?** (PSG, p. 10)

READ:

Direct a volunteer to read aloud the opening paragraph on page 10 of the PSG. Lead a brief discussion on ways people receive good news.

ILLUSTRATE:

Hold up an empty envelope. Allow a few volunteers to share about times they received an envelope containing good news. Explain that the apostle Paul once sent a letter to the Christians in Rome that explained the greatest news imaginable—what we know as the “gospel.”

SHARE:

Summarize this content from page 11 of the PSG:

“In Paul’s letter to the believers in Rome, he introduced himself by way of the gospel. When anyone used the word “gospel” in those days, they meant that they had good news. For Paul, the gospel meant the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. . . . He wanted to encourage believers there, and he also wanted them to partner with him in proclaiming the gospel to others who had not heard it. He testified that telling others the good news of Jesus did not embarrass him. On the contrary, he shared the message with eagerness. He had an obligation to proclaim it everywhere.”

TRANSITION:

In today’s study of Romans 1, Paul began building a powerful theological argument for salvation in Christ. And He began by emphasizing the importance of the gospel.



Group Activity Option

Music

Distribute the lyrics to “By Faith” by Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty, and Stuart Townend. Lead the group to read the lyrics in unison or read along as the song is played. Direct the group to scan the lyrics and identify words or phrases associated with good news. Highlight the chorus. Explain that this study of Romans 1 focuses on the good news of Jesus—the gospel. Encourage adults to reflect on what makes Jesus’s death and resurrection such good news as they study these verses.

Gospel Power (Rom. 1:13-17)

13 Now I don't want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I often planned to come to you (but was prevented until now) in order that I might have a fruitful ministry among you, just as I have had among the rest of the Gentiles. **14** I am obligated both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish. **15** So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. **16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. **17** For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.

(v. 13) Paul didn't want the Romans to be **unaware** that he had planned to visit them, but the doors had closed. The Greek word for **planned** described setting a task. In the Bible its subject could be God or humans. At times, human plans clash with the will of God.

The passive **prevented** does not include a subject in Greek. So, who **prevented** Paul from preaching to the Romans? In another letter, Paul told the Thessalonians that Satan had hindered him from coming to them (1 Thess. 2:18). That took the form of fierce human opposition. In this case, Paul also had a divine obligation to finish the collection for Jewish believers and to deliver it to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:22-29). Interestingly, both human circumstances and divine guidance meshed to prevent Paul from going to Rome.

Paul wanted a **fruitful ministry** in Rome as he had in other spots. This would have included both evangelism and discipleship. Eventually he would make it to Rome (Acts 25:10-28:16), even though he was a prisoner at the time (28:16).

(v. 14) Paul believed he was **obligated** to preach the gospel. This Greek word sometimes referred to a financial responsibility (Matt. 18:28; Luke 16:5), a consequence of sin (Matt. 6:12), or a debt of love (Rom. 13:8). Here, the sense was rooted in a divine call.

Paul's obligation reached beyond Jews to **Greeks and barbarians**. The **Greeks** would have included educated, intellectual citizens of the empire. **Barbarians** were uneducated or members of the lower class. Paul never abandoned the obligation of grace. He had received forgiveness through the gospel, and that indebted him to share the gospel with everyone else.

(v. 15) Paul's obligation did not leave him joyless. Rather, he was **eager** to share. The call to preach gave Paul the passion to take Jesus's mes-

sage across the empire. The Greek wording can describe an expectation prior to an explosion of activity.

The Greek phrase for **preach the •gospel** can be transliterated to *evangelize*. However, that does not mean Paul only preached to the lost. He would minister both to those who needed Christ and to those who needed discipleship. All people need the gospel's power in their lives.

(vv. 16-17) Paul was not **ashamed** of the gospel. Admittedly, the idea of a crucified Messiah created a stumbling block for Jews and seemed foolish to many Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23). But Paul understood that the gospel was necessary **for salvation**. This was true of both the **Jew** and the **Greek**. Paul had spoken to Jews first (Acts 13:45-46), but he knew God's power was not limited by ethnicity.

Paul affirmed that **•righteousness** was God's gift, not a human work. He believed that God **revealed** ("brought to light") His righteousness **from faith to faith**. This could refer to the whole process of God revealing Himself to individuals through faith.

Paul quoted from the Old Testament more in Romans than all his other letters combined (sixty-one times). Here, he quoted Habakkuk 2:4, **The righteous will live by •faith**, to emphasize that God did not justify people by works. Salvation is a gift of God through faith in Jesus.

Key Doctrine

Evangelism and Missions

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. (See Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8.)

EXPLORE Romans 1:13-17



OVERVIEW:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers seek opportunities to share the gospel's power with those who need it.

Direct attention to **Pack Item 1** (Map: *The First-Century Roman Empire*) and **Pack Item 8** (Handout: *Romans Time Line*) to set the historical context of Rome and Paul's letter to the Romans. Note that Paul wrote this letter toward the end of his third missionary journey.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Romans 1:13-17 as the group listens for why Paul wanted to come to Rome.

EXPLAIN:

Point out "Introduction" on **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outline of Romans*). Note that Paul did not plant and had not visited the church in Rome, so he needed to provide some form of introduction. Share that he used this introduction to launch into a discussion about how every person needs the gospel.

IDENTIFY:

Guide the group to work in pairs to examine the verses and make a list of key words or phrases that reveal why Paul wanted to go to Rome. After a few minutes, allow the pairs to share their findings. Highlight the desire for a fruitful ministry.

REVIEW:

Encourage volunteers to suggest why "gospel" is such a significant idea in these opening lines of the letter. Share:

Paul's testimony reminds us that we should never be ashamed of the gospel. The good news about Jesus is the power of God that changes lives and brings salvation to everyone who believes. Paul's mention of both Jews and Greeks reminds us that the gospel has no boundaries—it is good news for all people everywhere. Receiving the gift of salvation through Christ changes everything. (PSG, p. 13)

GUIDE:

Direct the group's attention to Romans 1:16. Encourage the group to memorize this verse, so they can recall it easily when provided an opportunity to share their faith.

ASK:

How does remembering that the gospel is "the power of God for salvation" change your confidence in sharing it? (PSG, p. 13)

SAY:

Paul had dual desires. On one hand, he wanted everyone to hear the good news of Jesus, the gospel. On the other hand, he wanted believers to grow stronger in Christ. Preaching the gospel could accomplish both.



ROMANS TIME LINE		
AD 64-67	AD 68-70	AD 71-72
AD 64: The Roman general Flavius Vespasianus is crowned emperor in Rome.	AD 68: The Roman general Vespasian is crowned emperor in Rome.	AD 71: The Roman general Vespasian is crowned emperor in Rome.
AD 65: Paul's first missionary journey begins in Antioch, Syria.	AD 66: Paul's second missionary journey begins in Antioch, Syria.	AD 67: Paul's third missionary journey begins in Antioch, Syria.
AD 68: Paul's fourth missionary journey begins in Antioch, Syria.	AD 69: Paul's fifth missionary journey begins in Antioch, Syria.	AD 70: Paul's sixth missionary journey begins in Antioch, Syria.
AD 71: Paul's seventh missionary journey begins in Antioch, Syria.	AD 72: Paul's eighth missionary journey begins in Antioch, Syria.	AD 73: Paul's ninth missionary journey begins in Antioch, Syria.



Divine Revelation (Rom. 1:18-20)

18 For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, **19** since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. **20** For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse.

(v. 18) For Paul, faith encompassed believing all that God promised. Not only would He save people from the power of sin, but He also would rescue them from the penalty of sin (God's wrath). Paul presented a logical case, but his arguments were not based on his ability to present a cogent case. He received his message through divine revelation, and that is what gave it authority and validity.

Just as God **revealed** that righteousness came through faith (Rom. 1:17), He also **revealed** that every person is born under **God's wrath**. The same Greek word occurs in both verses. **God's wrath** is not some wild, emotional outburst. Indeed, God's nature is compassionate, which causes Him to be slow in pouring out His anger (Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 103:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah. 1:3; 2 Pet. 3:9). But He does not deal with sin lightly, and His wrath represents a natural response that demonstrates His divine displeasure against sin. This included both the lack of reverence for Himself (**godlessness**) and immoral actions (**unrighteousness**).

By both beliefs and actions, those outside the faith **suppress the truth**. The Greek word for **suppress** can also be translated "hold back, restrain, check, or confine." Those who refuse to respond to God's revelation remain in their sin and will face the wrath of God to the fullest extent. The message of the gospel comes to them **from heaven**, but they reject that message and keep it at arm's length.

(v. 19) What about those who had never heard of Jesus? Did they also suppress the truth? Paul wrote that **what can be known about God is evident**. The Greek word for **evident** indicates something that was revealed or displayed in the open. How could those who had never heard of Jesus be held accountable to the wrath of God? Paul explained that God held them accountable because He has revealed Himself to all through

natural revelation through the creation of the world. God's revelation provides sufficient evidence of Himself to hold every human being accountable, including those who make the choice to reject that revelation.

As Creator, God has disclosed Himself to humanity through His creation (Ps. 19:1). People should view the care of God's creation and the intricate detail of its design as testimonies of His delight in His highest creation. However, some have chosen to suppress the truth that they see with their own eyes every waking day of their lives.

(v. 20) God is **invisible**, but Paul noted that He has made His **attributes** apparent to those who will seek Him. The apostle told the believers in Rome that God revealed His **eternal power** and His **divine nature** through what can be observed from the **creation of the world**. This does not diminish the role of Jesus in revealing God's character. His finished work is necessary because individuals cannot be saved by believing in natural revelation alone. However, God's revelation through creation is sufficient evidence to hold people accountable for their suppression of the truth.

Disbelief requires an act of rebellion against what God makes apparent and/or a bias against God. To deny the Creator despite the evidence of creation incurs the wrath of God.

People who ignore God's power and nature in creation are **without excuse**. But God has made it possible for people to see Him in creation, which can lead them toward the Savior. Those who ignore the evidence are stripped of any defense for their unbelief.

Every morning people arise to a world created by God and marred by the fall. They can see the evil caused by our rejection of God, but they also can see the goodness and faithfulness of God.



APPLICATION POINT: We can point others toward God through what he has revealed in His creation.

WRITE:

On a whiteboard write, *No excuses*.

READ:

Direct the group to read silently Romans 1:18-20, considering how God reveals himself through His creation.

DISCUSS:

What does creation teach us about God's attributes?
(PSG, p. 15)

GUIDE:

Highlight the meaning and purpose of God's wrath:

God's wrath does not suggest that God lost His temper because Gentiles did something that made Him mad. Rather, God's wrath is His appropriate response to sin. Paul explained that God's wrath was directed toward those who suppress the truth. Paul was talking about people who closed their eyes and covered their ears so they could not see the obvious signs of God's actual presence in their world. By muffling the truth about Him, they could deceive themselves into believing that He did not exist at all.
(PSG, p. 14)

WRITE:

Under *No excuses* write the words *General* and *Special*.

EXPLAIN:

Theologians use the words "general revelation" for seeing God through His creation. "Special revelation" comes through Jesus, who we primarily come to know through the Scriptures. Paul emphasized that those who had not received special revelation were still accountable to God because of His general revelation.

ASK:

How are God's invisible attributes displayed through creation? How should that influence the way we live each day?

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Paul emphasized that God reveals Himself through nature ("natural" or "general" revelation) as well as through His Word and through Jesus ("special" revelation). Read a Bible dictionary article on "Revelation" to learn more about these two forms of divine revelation. Record your thoughts about their similarities or differences.

Worthless Thinking (Rom. 1:21-25)

21 For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. **22** Claiming to be wise, they became fools **23** and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. **24** Therefore God delivered them over in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. **25** They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.

(v. 21) Paul stated that people **knew God**. This was not a saving relationship through Jesus, but a general knowledge that He existed. They knew *about* God because He had revealed Himself, but their response lacked two important elements.

First, **they did not glorify him as God**. *Glorify* means ascribing God proper weight, worth, and value. God revealed Himself as a powerful Creator who cared about humans, but humans minimized Him by worshiping His creation. Second, they did not **show gratitude** to Him. This refusal to glorify God and to thank Him for His providential care led to idolatry.

The refusal to acknowledge God affected sinners' minds and hearts. Paul said their **thinking became worthless**. The word *worthless* also can be rendered as idle, empty, fruitless, useless, powerless, or lacking truth. Their mind chased empty pursuits. Also, their **senseless hearts were darkened**. Their knowledge of God was clouded with the effects of their evil.

(vv. 22-23) Pagans were **claiming to be wise**, but this was simply self-deification. God is greater than humans, but we are greater than idols (Ps. 8:3-8). So, these "wise" people worshiped what was lesser than themselves (idols) rather than the Creator who is greater. As a result, **they became fools**.

With depraved minds and hearts, unbelievers **exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man**. This was an unfortunate exchange, trading the majesty of God for impotent idols. Visitors to the ruins of the Roman forum today can see the prevalence of idols fashioned after defective humankind.

Paul expertly highlighted human foolishness in his list of what people worshiped. Along with idols, people revered **birds** and **four-footed animals**, similar to the golden calf (Ex. 32). **Reptiles** included snakes and other creeping things that

crawl on the ground. Scholars highlight a descent seen in the idols, moving from standing upright to four feet to their bellies. They also followed the order of God's threefold classification in Genesis 1:20-25. A worthless mind led to the worship of that which was not worthy.

(v. 24) Worshiping creation rather than the Creator was not God's plan for people. Three times in the next five verses, Paul expressed the idea that God **delivered them over** (Rom. 1:24,26,28). Luke also expressed this idea in Acts 7:42. This was the same wording used to describe Judas's betrayal of Jesus (Matt. 26:25), but here it referred to God's act of judgment on sinners.

In addition, idolatry led to **sexual impurity**. Paul likely wrote this letter from Corinth, home of a temple to Aphrodite and hundreds of cultic prostitutes. Immorality went hand in hand with Roman worship, and God allowed them to follow these lesser pursuits. The Greek word for **degraded** meant to dishonor, disgrace, or shame.

(v. 25) God revealed **truth** about Himself, but unbelievers chose to embrace a **lie** that something lesser could offer hope and salvation. Sin distracts individuals from what will ultimately satisfy them to what ultimately will destroy them. **Worshiped and served** implied both reverent attitudes and submissive hearts. Worthless thinking leads people to revere and serve lesser gods that have no power to save. God, however, **is praised forever** (see Rom. 9:5; 2 Cor. 11:31).



Paul's Letters

Scan here to learn more about Paul's letters in the New Testament and why he wrote them.



APPLICATION POINT: Rejecting God ultimately leads to devastating consequences.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Romans 1:21-25 as the group listens for the consequences of rejecting God.

GUIDE:

Reflect on the way people deceive themselves when they disconnect from God's reality:

When people refuse to see God in His creation, they begin to spiral downward spiritually. They find themselves wandering around in a spiritual wasteland. There they begin to foster notions about themselves and their world that turn out to be worthless. Such notions leave no room for God and His presence. In turn, they ignore the truth about Him at every turn. (PSG, p. 15)

DISCUSS:

Group adults into teams of three or four. Direct them to read the passage again and to focus on the "images" people worshiped. Encourage them to discuss why it might be appealing to worship an element of the creation rather than the Creator.

ASK:

How do people exchange truth for lies today—and how might you be tempted to do the same? (PSG, p. 17)

EXPLAIN:

Since idolatry was rampant in Rome, Paul emphasized that people are accountable for their choices. If they rejected the Creator, He would let them follow their own passions and suffer the consequences. But Paul also knew the power of the gospel, which is why he was so passionate about shining the light of truth in a dark world.

CHALLENGE:

Urge adults to spend time this week examining their own lives and identifying areas where they are prone to honor the creation rather than the Creator who gave us His gospel.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Elements of Creation

Gather several items or images that represent God's creation. (*Examples: pine cone, flowers, pictures of a sunrise or sunset, a vacation picture from a national park, and so forth*) Display the items and affirm that it can be easy for us to take God's creation for granted. Ask: **How often do you take a long look at God's creation around you? Where is your favorite place in His creation to meet with Him?** Note that while creation points unbelievers to God, it also reminds Christ followers of God's love, grace, power, and faithfulness.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 18 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *Believers seek opportunities to share the gospel's power with those who need it.*
- *We can point others to God through what he has revealed in His creation.*
- *Rejecting God ultimately leads to devastating consequences.*

HIGHLIGHT:

Refer back to *No excuses* on the board. Remind adults that every person can see what God has created and can make a choice to worship Him. Emphasize that there are no excuses for idolatry today, just like in Paul's day.

DISCUSS:

Encourage adults to work in their small groups to read and respond to the first set of questions on page 18 of the PSG. Allow a few minutes for discussion and prayer for those who need to hear the gospel and for adults to find opportunities to share that message with those individuals.

PRAY:

Call on a pre-enlisted volunteer to close the group time in prayer, asking God to open the door for opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

AFTER THE SESSION

Reinforce the session, sending the group a text or email reminding them to look for opportunities to share the gospel. Encourage them to read and reflect on the second set of questions from page 18 of the PSG. Emphasize that they have valid reasons for being confident in the power of the gospel. Assure them that you will continue praying that God will provide opportunities for them to share the gospel with someone who needs it.

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