LEADER GUIDE

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: ADULTS

Romans

Spring 2020

CSB

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The gospel is the power of God to change lives.

The word gospel means “good news.” It is the good news of what God has done for us through His Son, Jesus.

The good news of the gospel is rightly understood in light of the bad news of sin. Romans 3:23 tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” and “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Our sin separates us from God.

Nothing we can do will bridge the chasm between us and God. No amount of good deeds can earn our salvation. “No one will be justified in his sight by the works of the law” (Rom. 3:20).

“But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). That is good news! Because Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead, we can have “peace with God” (Rom. 5:1) and “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). He is waiting for you now.

• Admit to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.

• By faith receive Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept Jesus’ gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.

• 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 Jesus’ name 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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MEET THE WRITERS

Jere Phillips wrote the Bible commentary for sessions 1–3. Dr. Phillips is Professor of Practical Theology at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. He earned degrees from Union University (B.A.) and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.; Ph.D.).

Charles Ray wrote the Bible commentary for sessions 4–14. Dr. Ray serves as Distinguished Professor of New Testament and Greek at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He earned degrees from Mississippi College (B.A.; M.Ed.), New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.; Ph.D), and the University of New Orleans (M.A.E.T.)

Jimmy Hester wrote the group Bible study plans for this study. Dr. Hester is Bible Study Director and teacher of an adult class at First Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee. After 27 years of service at LifeWay Christian Resources, he retired in 2011 as Senior Director of Student Ministry Publishing. Dr. Hester earned degrees at North Greenville University (A.A.) Furman University (B.A.), and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.; D.Min.).
Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

**Abba** [AH buh]—Abba is an Aramaic term of endearment for “father,” similar to our word for “daddy.” Jesus used the term to speak of His own intimate relationship with God (Mark 14:36); believers enter into a relationship with God as Father through faith (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

**Election**—A term used in the New Testament to refer to the gracious purpose of God in bringing salvation to people (Rom. 9:11; 11:28; 2 Pet. 1:10).

**Flesh**—used by Paul to designate the sinful nature that is incapable of conforming to God’s holy expectation; used also in contrast to anything godly or spiritual

**Gentiles**—The term refers to all people who are not Jews.

**Gospel**—The word gospel means “good news.” The good news is what God has done for us through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

**Illyricum** [ih LIHR ih kuhm]—Illyricum was a province in the Roman Empire, north of Macedonia, that represented the northeastern limits of Paul’s missionary work when he wrote Romans. It was about 1,000 miles from Jerusalem.

**Justified/justification**—To be justified carries the same meaning as being declared righteous. (See below.) Justified is a legal term that describes one who has been declared not guilty of a crime. Justification brings a sinner into a right relationship with God. It is a work of God based on what Christ accomplished on the cross.

**Redemption**—This word refers to the act of freeing or releasing by paying a ransom price; Jesus gave Himself as a ransom to free sinners from slavery to sin.

**Righteousness/declared righteous**—The term righteous refers to the holy and just nature of God; God is righteous. It also is used in reference to the gracious action of God in declaring believers righteous. We are declared righteous by God, that is, acquitted of all guilt and given a right standing with Him, on the basis of our faith in what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

**Saints**—A saint is a believer in Christ; the word is related to “holy” or “set apart.” All believers are saints because they belong to God and are set apart to live according to His purpose.

**Sanctified**—Sanctification is the experience that begins at conversion by which a believer is set apart by God for His purposes and enabled to grow into the likeness of Jesus by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in his or her life.

**Wrath**—God’s wrath is His hostility toward sin. God is holy and is opposed to sin because it is against His very nature.
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USING THIS GUIDE TO LEAD

BEFORE THE GROUP TIME

1. **Study the core passage.**
   Start preparing early. Read the passage, listing people, places, key words, key phrases, and actions taken. Use the commentary included in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary*, and *Biblical Illustrator* to discover information about the items you listed. Write a summary of the truths you discovered using the statement printed under the session title of each session as a starting place.

2. **Create a group time plan.**
   Identify the main idea of the session. Craft a group plan that helps the group discover and respond to the main idea. Consult the Group Plans in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (includes ideas for using the *Personal Study Guide*). Identify ways to focus the group’s attention, explore the text, summarize the lesson, and challenge the group.
   For additional ideas or questions, consult *QuickSource* and *Explore the Bible Extra* (identifies a current event to introduce and conclude the lesson, found at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible/adults/LeaderExtras). Review the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack* items, determining how to best use them in your group’s setting.

3. **Gather and review.**
   Use the list in the Gather the Following Items list on the first page of each session as a starting place. Make sure you have additional copies of the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* for anticipated 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 everyone as participants arrive and focus their attention on the Bible study.

5. **Lead the group in a time of Bible study.**
   Use the plan you created, recording notes along the way to help you remember how the group responded. Remember, every group experience takes a few unexpected twists and turns; be flexible.

AFTER THE GROUP TIME

6. **Evaluate and Record.**
   Review Practice for ideas to encourage the group to put into practice the truths discovered. Record prayer requests and other insights you gained about the group and specific participants. Use these notes to help you be a better teacher in the future.

7. **Start preparing to lead the next group time.**

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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 back.

**Personal Study Guide**
Resource for the group members to help them prepare for and study during the group time.

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

Additional Leader Helps

**Adult 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 a tool for an individual called on to step in to lead the group on short notice.

**Adult 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).

**Biblical Illustrator**
Resource providing biblical backgrounds related to the session using articles, photos, and illustrations.

*Find out more or order at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible*
INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

Many Bible teachers consider Paul’s letter to the church in Rome to be his greatest work. This letter has been influential in the lives of believers throughout the centuries. Where it has been studied and its teachings applied, it has lead to renewal of the church.

PAUL’S SITUATION

The Book of Acts gives us the background of Paul’s travels related to his Letter to the Romans. Paul spent about three years in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. After a successful ministry there, he determined to visit Macedonia and Greece before returning to Jerusalem, after which he planned on going to Rome (Acts 19:20-21). Upon arriving in Greece, Paul spent three months, probably in Corinth (Acts 20:1-3). Paul wrote his letter to the believers in Rome during this visit, probably in the winter of AD 56-57. Toward the end of the letter, Paul wrote a short reference for Phoebe, a faithful member of the church in Cenchreae, located about seven miles southeast of Corinth (Rom. 16:1-2). Apparently Phoebe had arranged a trip to Rome and wanted to make contact with the church there. Paul vouched for her faithful service to the church in Cenchreae, and in turn Phoebe probably delivered Paul’s letter to the church in Rome.

In his letter, Paul expressed interest in three geographical locations: Jerusalem, Rome, and Spain. In Jerusalem, Paul intended to deliver the financial aid he had collected for the poor during his travels in Macedonia and Achaia (Rom. 15:26). Paul mentioned this offering in both of his letters to Corinth, which also were written on the third missionary journey (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8–9). The offering was important to Paul, not just because of the financial relief it would provide for poor believers in Jerusalem but also because of potential the offering might have for strengthening the relationship between the believers there and the churches Paul had established during his missionary journeys. Paul expressed concern to the Roman believers that the offering might not be received in the spirit in which it had been given, and that unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem might seek to cause trouble among the Jewish Christians and with Paul (Rom. 15:31). From the Book of Acts we learn that Paul’s concerns were well placed.

Paul’s second location was Rome. He had made several attempts to come to Rome but had been hindered each time (Rom. 1:10-13; 15:23). Paul wanted to be encouraged by the Romans believers as he strengthened them by sharing spiritual gifts (1:11-12). In addition, as the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul desired the opportunity to preach the gospel in Rome and have a fruitful ministry there, just as he had among other Gentiles (1:13,15). With Paul’s ministry focus shifting, he wanted to partner with the church in Rome, as he had done with the church in Antioch (15:24).

Paul’s final location was Spain. Paul’s church planting plan had been to start churches in strategic locations from which the gospel could spread. Paul’s aim had been to preach the gospel in unreached areas, places where Christ had not been named (15:20). For that reason, Paul felt that his ministry focus must now shift to Spain. In an unexpected turn of events, Paul left Jerusalem as a Roman prisoner and spent at least two years in prison in Rome (Acts 28:16). There is no indication in the New Testament that Paul ever made it to Spain, though some early Christian writers thought that he may have had a ministry there before he died.
THE CHURCH IN ROME

There is no description in the New Testament of the founding of the church in Rome. At least one early church historian suggested that Peter founded the church during the reign of the emperor Claudius (AD 41-54). Most Bible teachers today believe the church was founded before Peter went to Rome. Luke mentioned that visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, were among those who were in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9-10). It seems likely that some of the Roman visitors were among the converts that day and that these new converts carried their faith back to their synagogues in Rome.

The Roman historian Suetonius described a conflict among Jews in Rome around AD 49 over a person named “Chrestus.” Suetonius probably got the name wrong, and the dispute probably was over “Christus,” the Latin spelling of Christ. The dispute was between Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah and those who didn’t. Claudius expelled from Rome many of these Jews, both Christians and those who were not. Luke mentioned that Aquila and Priscilla were among those who were ordered to leave Rome; they ended up in Corinth, working with Paul (Acts 18:2-3). Usually, exile from the city was not a permanent punishment. Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned at the end of Paul’s letter to Rome, probably indicating that they were back in Rome when Paul wrote his letter (Rom. 16:3).

Based on this scenario, the leadership in the church in Rome was primarily Jewish before AD 49. After the expulsion of the Jewish Christians, we can assume that Gentile Christians took over many of the leadership positions. Tensions may have run high when Jewish Christians returned to Rome. The tensions Paul addressed in his letter between the strong and weak (14:1; 15:1) may have grown out of this situation. Twice Paul commanded each side to accept the other (14:1; 15:7).

MAIN THEME

Paul stated his reason for wanting to preach the gospel in Rome: he was not ashamed of the gospel because it was the power of God resulting in salvation to those who believe. This gospel has revealed the righteousness of God (1:16-17). We can see this concern for the gospel in the opening and closing of the letter as well. Paul had been set apart for the gospel of God (1:1), the same gospel that would strengthen his readers (16:25). This gospel had been promised in Scripture by God’s prophets (1:2) and now had been fully revealed in Christ (16:26), so that obedience of faith might be brought to the Gentiles (1:5; 16:26). Paul had preached this gospel since his conversion, and now he desired to preach it in Rome and in Spain.
Session 1

ROMANS 1:1-7,13-17
MEMORY VERSE: ROMANS 1:16

READ Romans 1:1-17, First Thoughts (p. 12), and Understand the Context (pp. 12–13). As you read Romans 1:1-17, reflect on how Paul described Christ in these verses. How does Paul’s description compare to how you tend to think of Jesus? (PSG, p. 9)

STUDY Romans 1:1-7,13-17, using Explore the Text (pp. 13–17). As you study, notice Paul’s boldness and confidence in his introduction to the Romans. Use Explore the Bible Adult Commentary, found in print or digital format at LifeWay.com, to aid your understanding of the passage.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 18–19), More Ideas (p. 20), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Consider creative ways to use the Suggested Music Idea (p. 20).

GAIN insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploretheBible) or on iTunes®.

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides. For More Ideas (p. 20): □ Personal photos; □ Paper and pens; □ Writing board and marker. Prepare to display: □ PACK ITEM 1 (Map: Paul’s Voyage to Rome); and □ PACK ITEM 2 (Outline of Romans). Make copies of: □ PACK ITEM 7 (Handout: Romans Time Line); □ PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark); and □ PACK ITEM 10 (Handout: Doctrinal Emphases in Paul’s Letters).

COMPELLED
The transforming power of the gospel compels believers to share it with others.
FIRST THOUGHTS

Think about the milestones in our lives. We have parties on our birthdays. We send invitations to our weddings. We announce the births of our children. It’s natural to share life-changing moments. Celebrations are better when others join in. Our salvation changed our lives in ways no other milestone could. But let’s be honest; it’s tempting to keep it to ourselves. Paul didn’t want that for the Romans. He wanted them to embrace the gospel and share it with others.

(PSG, p. 8) What was the last major milestone you celebrated? How did you mark that event?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 1:1-17

Zeal characterized Paul’s life. During his formative years, influential teachers like Gamaliel fashioned Paul’s intense devotion to the Mosaic law and to the traditions of Jewish elders. His passionate pursuit of God led Paul to persecute the followers of Jesus. Years later, Paul identified his treatment of the church as an example of his zeal (Phil. 3:6).

After his transformational encounter with Jesus, Paul had to retreat to a distant land and restudy everything he had been taught about the Scriptures. The reality of a risen Christ could not be denied, but it went contrary to all he knew. Afterward, his firm conviction about Jesus and his inescapable response to God’s grace compelled Paul to share this good news with all people, whether Jew or Gentile, Greek or barbarian.

Having journeyed throughout the regions of Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, Paul longed to reach new lands and people untouched by the gospel. He wanted everyone to experience the glorious transformation that Christ had worked in his life. While Paul had ministered in several major cities, the ultimate challenge was the capital of the empire—Rome!

The church at Rome had been established some time earlier. Paul heard of the believers’ faith, and he longed to minister among them. Although the church was firmly established, they seemed not to understand some basic doctrinal issues. Too, fellowship among Roman Christians appeared strained by the attitudes of the Jewish Christians toward their Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul’s zeal drew him toward Rome. He wanted not only to preach the gospel, but to help the believers understand and apply the fundamental truths of justification by grace through faith in Jesus. In this opening section of his letter, Paul established the basis for his apostleship and laid the foundation for doctrinal and practical instruction.
At the same time, Paul did not want to be perceived as arrogantly interfering. While he did not hesitate to claim the role of an apostle, he did so in the context of being the bondservant of Christ. The power and authority of Paul’s message lay not in himself, but in God who saved him and called him to preach the gospel.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE GOSPEL DESCRIBED (ROM. 1:1-7)

VERSES 1-4

Typical for his letters, Paul identified himself in the opening sentence. More than simply letting his readers know his name, Paul wanted them to understand who he was. Repeatedly in various writings, Paul used the dual identity of servant and apostle to demonstrate that his authority for writing rested not in himself, but in Christ who saved him and called him.

Paul thought of himself as a servant or “bondservant,” someone who belonged to another. The phrase of Christ Jesus made it clear that Paul considered himself to be owned by Christ. By placing the title Christ before Jesus’ name, Paul emphasized the rightful authority of the Messiah.

A servant does not have the right of self-determination. Paul was called by Christ Jesus to be an apostle. He claimed the role of apostle not out of pride but to indicate Jesus’ purpose for his life. He was called by Jesus to be sent out for His purpose.

Paul identified his mission as the gospel of God. While we normally think of the gospel as the good news of Jesus, Paul also understood the gospel as belonging to the Father. It was God’s good news of salvation through Christ. For that purpose, Paul had been set apart.

One reason for referring to the gospel of God involved its origin. God had promised beforehand that He would send the Messiah—His Anointed One. Before the incarnation of Jesus, God had given lost humanity the promise of a Savior. As God the Son, Jesus was co-eternal, co-existent, and co-equal with the Father. Yet in taking on flesh, Jesus fulfilled the Father’s promise to provide salvation for human beings. Jesus could only make atonement for human sin by becoming man (Phil. 2:6-8).


The good news specifically involved God’s promises concerning his Son. References to Jesus as the Son of God did not mean He was somehow lesser than the Father. The Jews understood that being the Son of God meant equality with God (John 5:18; 10:33). Having taken on human flesh,

Jesus was a descendant of David. This phrase further supported the fulfillment of God’s promise concerning the Messiah. Jesus’ genealogy emphasized His being a descendant of David (Matt. 1:1). The Pharisees knew the Messiah would come from the lineage of David. While affirming the prophecies, Jesus pointed out that David referred to the Messiah as “Lord,” meaning He was greater than David (Matt. 22:41-46). As such, Paul emphasized that Jesus Christ is our Lord.

The idea that Jesus was appointed to be the powerful Son of God can be confusing unless we understand the term appointed. This phrase does not mean that God appointed Jesus to be the Son in the way a greater appoints a lesser to a position. The word appointed also means “to declare.” Jesus did not become the Son of God; He was God the Son throughout eternity. As He fulfilled God’s promise regarding the Messiah, Jesus was declared to be God’s Son. In verses 3 and 4, Paul described Jesus as fully human and fully deity.

Two phrases refer directly to Jesus’ nature as the Son of God. He is powerful, referring to the omnipotence of deity. Some scholars argue the accompanying phrase according to the Spirit of holiness denotes Christ’s holiness rather than the Holy Spirit. Other writers claim this statement describes the role of the Holy Spirit in declaring Jesus’ divine nature, as well as Jesus’ role in sending the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:16; John 15:26). In both cases, Jesus’ righteous nature was vitally connected to His power as the Son of God.

The final witness to Jesus’ divine nature was the resurrection of the dead. The word by in verse 4 is an instrument of means. The semantics of this phrase suggests two applications. The first, and most obvious, involves Jesus’ resurrection. God declared Jesus to be His Son by raising Christ on the third day following His crucifixion (1 Cor. 15:3-8). The second aspect involves Jesus’ role in the resurrection of the dead. He is the resurrection. Ultimately, He will raise from the dead every person who believes in Him (John 11:25). His power in the resurrection of the dead testifies to His being the Son of God.

VERSES 5-6

Paul received both grace and apostleship through Jesus. Paul knew he did not merit God’s forgiveness. Only by the grace of Christ can anyone be reconciled to God. God’s grace not only was vital to Paul’s salvation but also to his apostleship. Paul never claimed to be an apostle based on anything he had accomplished. He accepted this role as a grace gift from God.

God’s purpose in saving and calling Paul was to reach many people with the gospel, especially the Gentiles. The term Gentile includes all people groups who were not Jewish. Early in Paul’s ministry, he preached primarily to the Jews. Rejected by them, he moved on to his ultimate mission field—the Gentiles. This expanded ministry was for the sake of God’s name among all the Gentiles. God’s grace is for all people.

Paul used an interesting phrase to describe salvation: the obedience of faith. Salvation does not come from the obedience of works, but rather obedience proceeds from faith. Obedience belongs to faith and cannot be truly experienced aside from faith.
Paul wrote to both Jewish and Gentile Christians who comprised the church at Rome. He emphasized that those Gentiles in the church were also called by Jesus Christ. Salvation was not the exclusive claim of Jewish Christians. The Gentile believers in Rome were called by Jesus Christ.

VERSE 7
Having offered the basis of his authority, Paul addressed the recipients of his letter. While aspects of his opening remarks focused on the Gentile believers, this epistle was intended for all who are in Rome. Not meaning the entire population of the city, Paul was writing to the church. This phrase is modified by two qualifiers.

First, the members of the Roman church were loved by God. The Christians in Rome had experienced serious opposition. The persecution had not yet forced the Jews to leave Rome and governmental assaults had not peaked. Still, conditions were not good. The believers needed to be encouraged in the knowledge of God’s love for them.

Second, they were called as saints. The word saints comes from the same root as “holy.” Believers were to be known by their likeness to their Savior. His righteousness and holiness should be reflected in their lives.

In an introduction familiar to most of Paul’s letters, he acknowledged his desire that the people experience grace and peace. Both come from the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. By God’s grace through Christ, we are made to be at peace with Him. We also receive inner peace through Christ.

The Roman believers were exposed to many different philosophies and the claims of various religions. Paul declared that genuine truth is found in the gospel. As we respond to God’s calling, we come to know truth not merely in the abstract, but through the practical application of faith and obedience.

How does your experience with the gospel of grace impact your sense of purpose for life? In what ways does your life express God’s calling?

THE THEME OF ROMANS
The gospel is the power of God for salvation and radically changes the lives of all who put their faith in Christ Jesus (1:16). Paul’s passion for the gospel is seen from the opening verse to the closing of the letter. He had been set apart to proclaim the gospel to unbelievers (1:1); the same gospel would strengthen believers in Rome (16:25).
THE GOSPEL DEBT (ROM. 1:13-15)

VERSE 13
Paul addressed the Roman believers as his brothers and sisters. Although he had yet to meet them, he wanted to convey affection and respect. Too, Paul did not want them to think he had overlooked them in his missionary journeys. Lest they be unaware of his intentions, Paul wrote about how he had often planned to come to Rome. Although he did not tell how the Holy Spirit had prevented him from going, Paul affirmed his desire to visit the Roman church.

Paul did not merely want to enjoy the fellowship of the Roman Christians, but he also desired to have a fruitful ministry among them. In other cities where he predominantly served among Gentiles, Paul had seen God work in extraordinary ways. Although he suffered in many of these places (notably Iconium, Lystra, and Philippi), the gospel thrived and churches were born (Acts 14–16).

VERSES 14-15
Because of his personal experience of God’s grace, Paul felt obligated to share the gospel with all people. This compelling motivation was not limited to a sense of debt but expressed a strong desire to fulfill his apostleship. Paul wanted to be faithful to the Lord who saved him and called him into this gospel ministry.

Paul sensed a responsibility to both Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

VERSE 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.

VERSE 14-15
I am obligated both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

VERSE 15
So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.
In what ways do you repay the gospel debt? What kinds of opportunities has the Lord given you to share His good news this week?

THE GOSPEL DECLARED (ROM. 1:16-17)

VERSES 16-17
Paul was so grateful for God’s grace in his life that he could never be ashamed of the gospel. While others might be timid concerning the faith, Paul boldly declared the good news of Jesus Christ. The power of God was not merely in the preaching of the gospel, but in the gospel itself.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Notice the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of this statement. The word everyone opens the way to salvation to all people regardless of their backgrounds. The phrase everyone who believes limits salvation to persons who place their faith in Jesus Christ.

Salvation is open first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. The term Greek should be understood in the same way as the word Gentile, meaning anyone who was not a Jew. Paul was not being prideful when he said salvation is offered to the Jew first. According to God’s plan, the Jewish people received God’s word through Moses and the prophets. God intended for Israel to be a missionary nation, carrying His name to all people.

The gospel reveals the righteousness of God. God’s justice required judgment of sin. His mercy could not provide forgiveness without His justice being upheld. The gospel declares how Jesus Christ took our sin on Himself and paid sin’s penalty in our place. In this way, God’s righteousness is revealed from faith to faith, for it is by faith that we receive Christ as Savior. The phrase contains a verb form and a noun form of the root word for faith. One might read it “from believing to belief.”

Through Christ’s atonement, God can forgive believers and maintain His righteous character. At the same time, He imputes His righteousness to believers who receive Jesus by faith. Supporting the importance of faith, Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4: The righteous will live by faith. Both salvation and sanctification emerge from faith.

Knowing the truth of the gospel, believers gain boldness that comes from conviction. Like Paul, we can stand before anyone and confidently share the good news of Jesus.

What gives you confidence to boldly declare the gospel to people you know?
**LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY**

**FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)**

**INTRODUCE:** After the group has arrived, ask: *What was the last major milestone you celebrated? How did you mark that event?* (PSG, p. 8) Encourage the group to consider events beyond an annual event like a birthday. Challenge the group to identify a rare or once-in-a-lifetime experience and share the significance of the event in their lives. After several have shared, ask: *When given the opportunity, who have you told about your experience?*

**TRANSITION:** The apostle Paul had a life-changing experience with Jesus on the Damascus Road. The experience of salvation changed his life completely, and he wanted others to embrace the gospel and share it just as he had done. Review **Pack Item 2** *(Outline of Romans)* and use information from Understand the Context (pp. 12–13) to introduce the session as it relates to the Book of Romans. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 7** *(Handout: Romans Time Line)* and call attention to the time and occasion when Paul’s Letter to the Romans occurred.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Explain that Paul likely wrote his Letter to the Romans while in Corinth. Locate Corinth and Rome on **Pack Item 1** *(Map: Paul’s Voyage to Rome)*. Then lead the group to review the differences and similarities between Paul’s letters using **Pack Item 10** *(Handout: Doctrinal Emphases in Paul’s Letters)*.

**EXPLORE THE TEXT**

**READ:** Direct a volunteer to read Romans 1:1-7, and invite the group to listen for phrases that present Paul’s credentials to those receiving his letter.

**GUIDE:** Lead the group to identify the three phrases in verse 1 that present Paul’s credentials. As each phrase is identified, explain its significance to Paul in establishing himself as the author of this letter.

**EXPLAIN:** Paul was quick to say that the gospel was not a new idea but was in God’s mind from the beginning of time. The prophets in previous generations were messengers of God’s promises pointing to the coming Messiah. In verse 2, Paul pointed to the prophets who faithfully spread the word about the coming Messiah as an example and encouragement for believers to share the gospel with others.

**DISCUSS:** How would you characterize Paul’s description of Jesus in verses 3 and 4? Why might it have been important for Paul to describe Jesus this way?

**DIRECT:** Point the group to verse 5 and highlight the two things (grace and apostleship) believers experience as their lives are transformed through the resurrected Jesus. Note how Paul moved in verse 6 to include the believers in Rome.

**ASK:** How did Paul understand his purpose in life? How did that purpose relate to the way Paul described Jesus to the Roman believers? (PSG, p. 12)

**EXPLAIN:** Following the identification of Paul as the author of Romans and his explanation of his motivation and purpose for writing, Paul identified and blessed his audience in verse 7. While the first characteristic of his readership does not apply to us, the other two characteristics do. We are not in Rome, but we are “loved by God, called as saints” (v. 7). May we hear a word from God in Paul’s Letter to the Romans just as they did when they were initially exposed to Paul’s teachings.
READ: Call on a volunteer to read aloud Romans 1:13-15. Instruct the group to listen for the dilemma Paul faced in traveling to Rome.

DISCUSS: Explain that while we aren’t told what the reason was for Paul’s delay, we recognize that it had an impact on him. Ask: How would you describe Paul’s passion for sharing the gospel? By comparison, how would you describe your passion for sharing the gospel? (PSG, p. 14)

DEFINE: Call on several volunteers to share a one- or two-word definition of the word obligated. Then ask: What obligated Paul to share the gospel? How would you describe Paul’s passion for sharing the gospel?

READ: To illustrate the power of Romans 1:16-17, instruct the group to imagine they are the first Romans to hear Paul’s letter. The house church that gathered included Jews and Gentiles, believers, and a few seekers. As you read aloud Romans 1:16-17, do so with the boldness and confidence Paul may have used if he were present. After the reading, invite volunteers to identify the words of the text that encourage them the most.

DISCUSS: How does the change that comes about through faith in Jesus produce boldness and confidence in sharing the gospel with others? (PSG, p. 15) When have you seen this boldness for Christ in another person?

HIGHLIGHT: Emphasize the bold statement from the PSG (p. 15): The gospel does more than just provide salvation from sin; it transforms every area of life. Invite volunteers to respond to the statement. Allow those to share examples of how they know this statement to be true.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Reflect on the session’s main points by reviewing the bulleted summary statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 16). As you read each one, invite volunteers to share their observations on each statement.

CHALLENGE: Encourage the group to consider their response to the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 16) and how they might act following the group time: Discuss ways your Bible study group can more effectively share the gospel. How can your group give greater support to the activities in your church designed to share the gospel?

PRAY: Lead a time of silent prayer using the third question set under In My Context to guide the group’s reflection and response: How has the gospel transformed your life? With whom can you share about this change? (PSG, p. 16)
PRACTICE

• Communicate with those typically in Bible study who were not present to let them know about the new unit. Make sure they receive a copy of the Personal Study Guide (PSG) before the next session.

• Pray for each person, praying specifically for those who might be struggling with tough decisions, adversity, health issues, or grief.

• Consider those in your circle of relationships who are unchurched or unaffiliated with a church. With whom can you share the gospel this coming week?

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To model for the group what they are being asked to share in Focus Attention, bring photos of an event in your life that marked an important milestone from your past. Explain the occasion and comment on the significance of the event and how it affected your life. Tell about opportunities since the event where you have shared your experience with others.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• As a prelude to Romans 1:1-7, provide the group with paper and pen and instruct them to compose an introduction to a letter they are writing to a group that needs to hear the gospel. Once completed, ask volunteers to share what they wrote.

• To expand Romans 1:13-15, write the two sets of parallel groups on a writing board (Greeks/wise; barbarians/foolish). Invite the group to list characteristics that would further define each set. Observe the contrast between the two lists and explain that Paul felt obligated to preach to everyone.

• To supplement Romans 1:16-17, call for volunteers to share what they discovered about the term gospel as the result of completing the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 14) this week.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Distribute Pack Item 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark) and point out this session’s memory verse (Rom. 1:16). Recommend to the group that they place the bookmark in a prominent location where they will see it each day. Invite them to memorize the verse as an encouragement to share the gospel with others.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To enhance the theme of the session, lead the group to sing or recite the chorus of “Share His Love,” by William J. Reynolds.
Guilty
Ignoring God leads to destruction.

ROMANS 1:18-28,32
MEMORY VERSE: ROMANS 2:11

READ Romans 1:18–2:16, First Thoughts (p. 22), and Understand the Context (p. 22). As you read Romans 1:18-28,32, note God’s response to humanity’s rejection of Him.

STUDY Romans 1:18-28,32, using Explore the Text (pp. 23–27). Review the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary to place Paul’s teaching in the context of “Wrath, Wrath of God.” Use Explore the Bible Adult Commentary found in print and digital format at LifeWay.com to aid your understanding of the passage.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 28–29), More Ideas (p. 30), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Plan how to use the Suggested Music Idea (p. 30). Consult QuickSource for additional questions you can use in leading the discussion and an Object Lesson idea for the study.

GROW with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; □ Paper and pens for Focus Attention (p. 28). For More Ideas (p. 30): □ Pictures of ancient idols. Prepare to display: □ PACK ITEM 1 (Map: Paul’s Voyage to Rome); and □ PACK ITEM 2 (Outline of Romans). Make copies of □ PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

Pick any destination in your town. How many ways can you get from your home to that spot? You can probably come up with dozens of possible routes—but some would be better than others. One might even be the best. Life is a lot like that. It’s a journey to find meaning. The world gives us plenty of options claiming to offer true peace and purpose. But when the time came for God to unveil His plan for the human race, He only provided one option. He only made one way—and His name is Jesus.

(From PSG, p. 17) **What might a person turn to in his or her search for meaning? How would you rank the items you listed from most tried to least?**

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**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**ROMANS 1:18–2:16**

Writing to a multiethnic congregation, Paul addressed issues related to the church as a whole as well as to the two primary groups—Jews and Gentiles. Anyone who was not a Jew was considered a Gentile. Paul desired to preach the gospel to all people. That gospel begins with all people understanding they are guilty of sin. Only then can they appreciate the gift of Christ.

This context passage focuses on how all people are guilty of sin, whether or not they had been exposed to the Mosaic Law. It emphasizes the universal need of all people to be saved, regardless of religious background or the lack thereof. Paul pointed out that God provided enough information through creation and the human conscience for people to understand they were sinners. Instead of repenting, people denied God and pursued their depraved desires. Consequently, God gave them over to their deviant ways. From idolatry to sexual perversion, the range of sin seemed boundless for people who denied their Creator.

God shows no favoritism. He declares all persons to be sinners in need of salvation that is available only in Christ. Whether having the knowledge of the Law or not, everyone is guilty before the only One worthy to judge. No one can escape liability before God’s judgment seat. All have sinned and have fallen under the wrath of God—the natural result of rejecting the Lord. Nevertheless, God wants sinners to confess their sin, repent, and receive salvation through His Son. The gospel is truly good news for all people.
VERSES 18-20

Although some people have stifled their reactions to God’s convicting Spirit, most have a sense of good and bad. Even persons who have never been exposed to Scripture have an innate understanding of wrongdoing. While we often try to excuse, rationalize, or explain away our sin, it tugs irrepressibly at our conscience. Even when we compare our conduct with other people considered much worse, we cannot escape our sin. Part of the reason lies in the consistent nature of God that is evident all around us.

Because sin expresses itself in contrast to God’s righteous character, no one who is unsaved can avoid encountering God’s wrath. Many people feel uncomfortable thinking about the wrath of God. We’d rather focus on His love and compassion, but God’s wrath articulates His love. If He let us continue in the destructive path of sin, He would not be demonstrating love. Unlike the selfish anger of human wrath that seeks vengeance on its object, God’s wrath involves His righteous judgment of all godlessness and unrighteousness. His action seeks to turn us away from sin, which leads to death.

Godlessness involves irreverence toward God. Unrighteousness includes actions of injustice and wrongdoing. The inclusion of the adjective all emphasizes that no sin escapes God’s judgment. Every sin, however slight we think it to be, offends the righteous nature of God.

Just as nature demonstrates God’s existence and character, God’s wrath is revealed from heaven. His judgment of sin has a divine origin. On a human level, people might claim innocence or protest their punishment. God’s justice has a far higher standard—God Himself. People may try to suppress the truth through their unrighteousness, but in doing so they are convicted before God’s tribunal.

The phrase what can be known does not intend to define every aspect of God. Though general revelation does not contain enough information to produce salvation, the creative order makes known much about God, such as His existence and power. God’s invisible attributes of eternal power and divine nature can be seen in the created order. Consequently, every person has enough knowledge of God to understand what is wrong because sinful activity contrasts so starkly with the rightness of God.

Beginning when He spoke the world into being, God demonstrated His eternal power through His creation. Even as early humans gazed up into the stars or marveled at the majesty of the earth, they could not help but acknowledge the might of the Creator. The order of creation also declared God’s divine nature. Complexity does not occur accidentally, regardless of the amount of time involved. Only the existence of a Grand Designer who is superior to creation can explain the vast intricacy of existence. Reasonable people are forced to admit God’s qualities are clearly seen and understood through what He has made. Whether through the macrocosm of the universe or the microcosm of a drop of water, objective observers recognize order and purpose that cannot merely occur by chance.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read “Morality in First-Century Rome,” an archived Biblical Illustrator article provided via digital download in the Spring 2020 Explore the Bible Leader Pack.
Consequently, **people are without excuse** when held accountable for sin. No one can claim ignorance of God. No one can rationalize sin. No one can legitimately deny that God has demonstrated His virtuous nature and His righteous expectations. As God reveals Himself in His creation, we have only one option—to acknowledge our accountability before Him and seek His forgiveness.

*What aspects of creation reveal the most about God to you? How could you use that revelation to help others know God?*

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**VERSES 21-23**

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 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.

23 Consequently, the thinking of sinful humans **became worthless**. The term *worthless* involves foolishness and vanity. Self-centered minds reject truth in favor of whatever validates their personal desires. While the word *thinking* deals with the effect of sin on the mind, the phrase *senseless hearts* describes emptiness and futility at the seat of the soul. When sinners remain unrepentant, their hearts are darkened. They lose the ability to perceive or discern what is true.

Ironically, when people lose the power to reason logically, they actually think themselves *to be wise*, considering themselves to be intellectually superior to people who believe in God. In reality, they have simply confirmed the judgment that they indeed are *fools*.

Scripture declares that only a fool says that there is no God (Ps. 14:1). Such people are corrupt, committing despicable deeds because they no longer can discern between good and evil (Ps. 53:1). Their moral compass is reversed. Instead of true wisdom that begins with the fear of the Lord (Ps. 111:10), they base their lives on the foolishness that denies God.
Idolatry offers one example of the foolishness found in denying the Lord. Since sinful humans cannot repudiate the majesty of creation, they must find a replacement for God that allows them to continue in sin. As a result, they have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images of created things. If they were to acknowledge the glory and reality of immortal God, they would have to bow in submission. Refusing to do so, they instead come up with a cheap substitute made with their own hands. Instead of man created in God’s image, they bow to gods created by man’s imagination.

Creation, rather than the Creator, became the object of worship. They cast images of mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles to focus their veneration. These idols were given god-like status by foolish people who preferred to satisfy their innate desire to worship with things that could not condemn their sin.

 Rejecting God’s truth leads to darkness and foolishness. We need to learn from past mistakes and seek the light of God rather than remain in the darkness of worldliness. True wisdom begins by acknowledging and serving the Lord.

Why do some people serve man-made “gods” rather than honor the Lord? How would you help such people reject foolishness and return to God?

DELIVERED OVER (ROM. 1:24-28)

VERSES 24-25
Bad decisions have severe consequences. When sinful people refused to acknowledge God, He delivered them over to what they sought. One of the desires of their hearts involved sexual impurity. Not all sin involves sexuality, but immorality often characterizes people who seek to satisfy their own cravings rather than honor God. The concept of their bodies being degraded among themselves refers to the way they dishonored God by shamelessly engaging in sexual sin.

When the truth of God condemned their desire, sinful humanity exchanged it for a lie. Just as our first ancestors disbelieved God in Eden, even so we tend to follow whatever allows us to continue in sin. Human nature yearns to worship something beyond ourselves. When people rejected God, they worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator.

Paul interjected a personal note of devotion to the Lord. God is the One who should be praised forever. He alone is worthy of worship and adoration. He alone should direct our affections and actions. With an exultant Amen, Paul declared it to be so.

VERSES 24-25
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.
VERSES 26-27

26 For this reason God delivered them over to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural sexual relations with unnatural ones. 

27 The men in the same way also left natural relations with women and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error.

VERSE 28

28 And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right.

VERSES 26-27

Continuing the example of how depravity expresses itself in immoral behavior, Paul described the reason and the ways God delivered them over. The phrase for this reason harkens back to the issue of false worship mentioned in the previous verse. The improper attitude of people toward God results in corrupt relationships with one another. They came under the control of disgraceful passions. The word disgraceful describes not only the degrading lusts but also the dishonor brought upon the sinner.

Just as they exchanged God’s truth in order to pursue a lie, even so their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In an obvious reference to female homosexuality, same-sex intimacy is declared to be unnatural. The term translates two words meaning “against nature.”

Natural relations involve a sexually exclusive relationship between a man and a woman in a married state.

In the same way, sin afflicted the men. To say they left means they deliberately chose to reject natural relations with women. In creation, God made human beings male and female (Gen. 1:27). Both were created in God’s image. The woman was made to provide companionship as well as to enable the procreation of the human race (Gen. 2:20-24; 1:28). Jesus also reiterated that God’s purpose for creating male and female involved a lifetime relationship within marriage (Matt. 19:1-6). Natural relations involve a sexually exclusive relationship between a man and a woman in a married state.

Moral depravity naturally results from rejecting God as Lord. Instead of accepting His pattern of creation, men were inflamed in their lusts for one another. They should have felt shame; instead, they committed shameless acts with men. While the Greek and Roman cultures not only approved but endorsed homosexuality, Scripture calls this behavior “detestable” (Lev. 18:22).

One cannot disregard God without consequences. One result of this immoral lifestyle was to receive in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error. Sin of any kind results in death (Rom. 6:23), but this sexual sin carried the additional effect in their bodies. An obvious interpretation of this penalty could refer to sexually transmitted diseases.

VERSE 28

Again, Paul emphasized that God delivered them over. Repeatedly, this passage portrays how God gave them up to that which they desired. Sinful people continually refused to acknowledge God. They did not think it worthwhile. They did not consider God to be worthy of their consideration. Accordingly, God gave them over to a corrupt mind. Their way of thinking was already degenerate. As a result, they did what is not right. Denying the wisdom of God, they were left with a reprobate mind that sees good as bad and bad as good.

Rejecting God leads to the devaluing of life. Degenerate people have no regard for their own lives, much less the people they use in their
debauchery. Instead of showing genuine love for others, they selfishly seek only to satisfy their lusts. Because of their obstinate rebellion, God delivers them to the consequences of their sinful choices.

**How should the fear of being delivered over to sin motivate us to seek God? In what ways does the absence of the fear of the Lord result in a lack of wisdom?**

**DESERVING DEATH (ROM. 1:32)**

**VERSE 32**
This week’s study passage began with the evidence that every person has enough revelation to know the righteous nature of God. Each individual should be aware of what is right and what is wrong, as well as the consequences of sin. The problem with unrepentant sinners is not that they do not know God’s just sentence, but that they do not care. They do not think God is worthy of their consideration. They not only do sinful acts, they **even applaud others who practice them.**

**People who parade their wickedness illustrate the deceptive nature of sin.**

Today’s society thinks biblical ethics are overbearing and believe God’s justice is harsh. In reality, people who parade their wickedness illustrate the deceptive nature of sin. One only has to watch various media to see people who flaunt their sin. Because having other people join their wrongdoing seems to validate their behavior, they encourage other people to sin. They ignore the reality that refusing to honor God justifies a sentence of death. Instead of seeing God’s discipline as an expression of His love, their degenerate minds substitute sensuality for love. In the end, God’s righteous justice will prevail. Only those who repent and seek forgiveness in Christ will find God’s redeeming love.

**VERSE 32**

32 Although they know God’s just sentence — that those who practice such things deserve to die— they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INVITE: As the group arrives, hand each individual a piece of paper and pen. Direct them to list the optional routes from their home to where the group is meeting. When completed, ask: How many different routes did you list? How would you rank your list from the least desirable to the most desirable? Which route would you say is the best route? What determined your ranking?

TRANSITION: In life, we are faced with many options. People take various routes searching for meaning and all but one fall short of finding purpose. When the time came for God to provide His plan of salvation, God offered one option—Jesus. Following his declaration that “The righteous will live by faith” (Rom. 1:17), Paul launched into teachings about God’s response to humanity’s rejection of Him. In this session we will hear God’s verdict and sentence on those who reject Him.

DISCUSS: How would you describe the basic relationship between God and humanity? (PSG, p. 18)

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Point out the context of today’s passage using Pack Item 2 (Outline of Romans). Read Romans 1:18-20, and invite the group to listen for reasons there is no excuse for ignoring God.

EXPLAIN: When Paul wrote to the Romans, very little of the New Testament existed. While some letters had been written, the gospels were spread mostly through oral tradition. But the limits of written revelation did not mean God had not shown Himself to humanity. Paul emphasized that God’s existence and power were evident through the created world.

DISCUSS: Where do you see God’s presence and work through what He has created? What have you learned about Him by observing what He has made? (PSG, p. 19)

READ: Even those who recognized God’s presence failed to honor Him and turned to nonsense and foolishness. Call on a volunteer to read aloud Romans 1:21-23. Instruct the group to listen for what humanity created to replace God.

MINI-LECTURE: Using the commentary on verses 21-23 (pp. 24–25; PSG, pp. 20–21), outline Paul’s explanation of how humanity progressed from knowing about God to creating replacements for God through various images.

DISCUSS: With what false gods do people try to replace God today? How do our substitutes demonstrate our foolishness? (PSG, p. 21)

READ: Read aloud Romans 1:24-28, and instruct the group to listen for what occurs when sin overtakes a person’s life.

ILLUSTRATE: Lead the group to recall experiences from their childhood when their parents allowed them to face the consequences of unwise behavior. Invite parents in the group to share times when they allowed their children to experience consequences of bad decisions.
DISCUSS: Paul used the term “God delivered them over” throughout this passage. What does that mean? (Humanity reached the point where it no longer sought or accepted the truth of God, and God allowed people to suffer the consequences of their decisions.) Ask: What does this phrase teach us about God? About ourselves?

ASK: How does getting what we desire lead to greater problems? (PSG, p. 22) Invite volunteers to share an example from their own experiences.

IDENTIFY: Instruct the group to search verses 24-28 for what “God delivered them over” to [“desires of their hearts” or lusts (v. 24); “disgraceful passions” or acting out (v. 26); “corrupt mind so they do what is not right” or a secular mind and improper conduct (v. 28)]. Note how the progression of their sin quickly moved farther away from God and evil began to dominate their lives.

DISCUSS: Invite the group to agree or disagree with this statement: A person’s sin leads to devaluing other people. Explain.

READ: Instruct a volunteer to read Romans 1:32. Considering Paul’s teachings on humanity’s corruptness, ask: Why is God justified in judging all sin? (PSG, p. 23)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Read the session’s main points by reviewing the bulleted summary statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 24). After all points have been read, say: Paul painted a grim picture of humanity wandering aimlessly without Christ. To make matters worse, many who reject Christ either deny His judgment or think they will somehow escape His wrath. But Paul pointed out that God had pronounced a just sentence—death. His judgment is not based on a personal whim but in His righteousness.

CHALLENGE: Invite volunteers to share their responses to the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 24): In what ways have you been blinded to sin? How did you realize your need for God? How can you help others realize their need for God?

PRAY: Lead a time of shared prayer using the third question set under In My Context to guide the group in voicing their response: List some people you know living under God’s death sentence today. How can you and your Bible study reach those individuals with the gospel? (PSG, p. 24)
PRACTICE

• Communicate early in the week in person or by text, phone, or email with those in the group who were at the first session but not present in this session.
• Pray for each person, specifically for those struggling with tough life situations.
• Follow-up with anyone who may have attended the group for the first time. Answer questions they may have and encourage them to become part of the group.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
As an option to Invite in Focus Attention, display Pack Item 1 (Map: Paul’s Voyage to Rome). Remind the group of Paul’s challenges in traveling to Rome. While it’s uncertain what the reasons were when he wrote this letter, travel eventually became a challenge. Call attention to his route on the map. Ask the group to identify alternative routes he might have taken. Move to Transition in Focus Attention.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• To expand Romans 1:18-20, invite three volunteers to state excuses a nonbeliever might offer when confronted with a question concerning the existence of God. Instruct the remainder of the group to respond to the excuses using Paul’s explanation in verses 18-20.
• To supplement Romans 1:21-23, search the Internet, a Bible dictionary, or handbook for illustrations of ancient idols. Share these by way of an electronic monitor or in print to show examples of what Paul was referring to when he said, “mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles” (v. 23).
• To enhance the discussion of Romans 1:24-25, reemphasize this statement: A person’s sin leads to devaluing other people. Ask: How is the devaluing of another person involved in sexual sin? As part of the dialogue, highlight from the PSG (p. 22): When His correction is ignored, God allows humans to follow their path and experience the consequences of their choices. This does not mean that He will not take them back or that they have crossed into some kind of unforgivable sin. But it does mean that God lets them feel the full weight of their foolishness.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Distribute Pack Item 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark) to those who need one. Point out this session’s memory verse (Rom. 2:11). Set the context for the verse by reading Romans 2:1-10.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
Lead the group to read the lyrics to “Amazing Grace,” by John Newton, noting words and phrases that point to truths found in Romans 1.
INSUFFICIENT

Since no one can keep the law perfectly, everyone needs a Savior.

ROMANS 2:17-29

MEMORY VERSE: ROMANS 3:10

**READ** Romans 2:17–3:20, First Thoughts (p. 32), and Understand the Context (pp. 32–33). As you read Romans 2:17-29, note the way Paul developed his argument against keeping the law as a means of salvation.

**STUDY** Romans 2:17-29, using Explore the Text (pp. 33–37). While Paul did not specifically reference Jesus’ teaching on the Jews and the law, compare what he said with what Jesus said in Matthew 23:2-3. Use Explore the Bible Adult Commentary found in print and digital format at LifeWay.com to aid your understanding of the passage, especially the role of circumcision.

**PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 38–39) and More Ideas (p. 40). Plan how to conclude with the Suggested Music Idea (p. 40). Consult QuickSource for additional questions you can use in leading the discussion and an Object Lesson idea for the study.

**GAIN** insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploretheBible) or on iTunes.

**GATHER** the following items: ☐ Personal Study Guides. For More Ideas (p. 40): ☐ A poster with the word Perfect written in large letters; and ☐ An archery target and three arrows. Prepare to display: ☐ PACK ITEM 2 (Outline of Romans); and ☐ PACK ITEM 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans). Make copies of: ☐ PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark); and ☐ PACK ITEM 13 (Handout: Key Words in Romans).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

We never make a sale every time we talk to a potential client. Athletes never hit every pitch, make every shot attempt, or complete every pass. Why? Because nobody’s perfect. And what’s true in these areas is also true in our spiritual lives. God’s standard is perfection, and none of us can reach that standard. That’s a problem. And that’s what makes Jesus’ work on the cross so important.

*(In PSG, p. 25)* What are some things you’re really good at? How close are you to perfect in those areas? In what ways do you fall short?

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**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**ROMANS 2:17–3:20**

Writing to Jews and Gentiles in the church at Rome, Paul addressed their equal liability before God. The opening sections of this epistle maintained the Gentiles’ accountability even if they did not have the advantage of knowing the Scriptures. Nature itself declared the majestic righteousness of its Creator. Therefore, even pagans were answerable to the Lord.

At the same time, the Jews could not assert spiritual superiority. Yes, they had a covenant relationship with God as evidenced by the rite of circumcision. However, if they did not keep the conditions of the covenant they would fall under God’s judgment. The Jews could not claim to be teachers of the heathen if they behaved like pagans. They should not flaunt their knowledge of the Law if they did not keep the Law.

People are not judged merely by external adherence to religious rules, but by internal faithfulness to God. The physical sign of circumcision should reflect spiritual sincerity. If not, then circumcision is meaningless. True circumcision involves the heart. *(See Rom. 2:29; Deut. 10:16; 30:6.)*

While Paul held his fellow Jews to a high expectation, he also reminded them of God’s blessings. God had entrusted the Jews with His revelation. He wanted them to be His missionaries to the world. Through Moses and the prophets, God gave His Word to Israel so they might know Him and declare Him to the nations. He remained faithful even if they did not.

Having demonstrated mutual accountability of both Gentiles and Jews, Paul arrived at the logical conclusion: all were guilty before God. In a series of references to Old Testament sayings, Paul showed how every person has sinned and is subject to judgment. Paul’s purpose was not to condemn them but to establish their need for repentance and faith toward God.

As a standard of righteousness, the Law reveals where people come short of God’s requirements. The Law is unable to make one righteous, but it should motivate people to seek God’s pardon and desire His righteousness.
Between the testimony of creation and the declarations of the Law, both Gentile and Jew find themselves in need of forgiveness. No one can offer an excuse for sin. Each person stands exposed as a sinner before God. This section of Romans not only reveals human shortcomings but can lead all people groups to pursue the Lord humbly and sincerely.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

HYPOCRISY REVEALED (ROM. 2:17-24)

VERSES 17-18

Personal identity tends to define not only our actions, but also our attitudes toward ourselves and other people. Using the collective pronoun you to refer to the entire group, Paul pointed out the hypocrisy of calling oneself a Jew but not living according to God’s covenant. The word now transitions from the previous section about Gentile responsibility to that of the Jews. Using the term if, Paul began a series of conditional statements to demonstrate the Jews’ accountability before the Lord. This word can also be translated as “since.” His argument was that since they claimed certain spiritual distinctions, they should live accordingly.

The Jews were carved out of history by God to be His unique people. Unfortunately, they did not merely feel blessed to have this special relationship with the Lord, but many went further and boasted a sense of superiority. They would rely on the law to validate their unique position with God. Moses’ law had been given to define God’s standards for His people and draw people to realize their need for His mercy. Instead, they distorted it into a point of pride. They would boast in God, even while transgressing His law which they claimed as their own.

Ironically, God’s Word enabled them to know His will. Through the Scriptures, God revealed His nature. He expected His people to live in such a way that reflected His character. They should have understood God’s expectations for people who bore His name. Instead, they often mistook their desires for God’s will, replacing God’s nature with their own.

This section continues the conditional statement of the previous verse, suggesting that what Paul was about to say had been predicated on the Jew’s claims, not their reality. Knowing God’s will, they should live accordingly. The fact that they lived contrary to God’s Word indicated that they either did not truly understand His will or they did not care. Preferring their own interpretation of religious righteousness, they substituted rituals and tradition in the place of faith and obedience.

Because they had been instructed from the law, the Jews should be able to approve the things that are superior. The term translated approve means to examine a matter to determine its validity. In this case, the phrase emphasized the Jews’ claim be able to discern a matter’s value and significance. If they were able to use God’s Word to uphold a superior way of living, they should have demonstrated that lifestyle daily.

VERSUS 17-18

17 Now if you call yourself a Jew, and rely on the law, and boast in God, and know his will, and approve the things that are superior, being instructed from the law,

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

VERSES 19-20
Repeating his conditional introduction with the word if, Paul continued to list qualities that some Jews had claimed. If they were convinced that God had chosen them to be a guide for the blind, then they should be walking rightly before Him. The fact that they considered anyone who was not a Jew to be blind highlighted their self-righteousness. They believed Gentiles were unable to see the truth of God because they were not part of God’s chosen people. They thought Gentiles lived in darkness, a term sometimes used to describe either sin or spiritual ignorance.

Their hypocrisy prevented them from fulfilling God’s intention.

To a degree, they were right. The nations lacked a proper understanding of God. God intended for Israel to testify about Him to the rest of the world. Instead of remaining true to God’s purpose, the Jews saw their role in a self-serving way. Their hypocrisy prevented them from fulfilling God’s intention. Their light had become darkness, much as Jesus had warned (Matt. 6:23).

As Paul continued citing Jewish boasts, the outrageous nature of their pride became even more exaggerated. They viewed others as ignorant and immature, needing an instructor and teacher. The idea behind the word ignorant went much further than a lack of knowledge and suggested that other people were foolish. Similarly, the term immature described someone who is childish.

Both phrases revealed the Jews’ conceit. They believed they were the embodiment of knowledge and truth in the law. The qualifying phrase in the law limited the scope of their understanding related to Moses’ teaching. They arrogantly viewed themselves as prime examples of people who were masters of the law.

VERSES 21-22
Having described a number of what should have been positive qualities, Paul brought his point to bear. If they were such exemplary people that they could teach another, perhaps they really needed to teach themselves. At this juncture, Paul changed rhetorical techniques. In the previous section, he used a series of conditional phrases to establish the qualities the Jews had claimed. Beginning with this verse, Paul switched to several questions built on the previous statements.

For example, if the Jews were preaching you must not steal, did they steal? Like the questions that follow in succeeding verses, Paul was not necessarily accusing them of actually stealing. His point was to challenge whether they were being consistent between what they advocated and what they practiced.

Similarly, anyone who taught you must not commit adultery should not commit adultery. Again, Paul was not saying they were involved in immoral behavior but rather was demanding that people who expected marital fidelity in others ought to be faithful in their own marriages.
The issue of dealing with idols follows the same line of reasoning. Western culture does not lend itself to understanding the reference to robbing the temples. Some scholars suggest that since idols represented false gods, some Jews would not have considered it to be stealing if they robbed places of deceitful worship. Most likely, however, this question was rhetorical, much like those inquiries that preceded it. On the outside, they despised idolatry. In their hearts, however, they longed for the treasures found in pagan temples. Their walk did not back up their talk.

**Their walk did not back up their talk.**

**VERSES 23-24**

Paul’s final question could be understood as a summation. These Jews seemed to boast in the law. They were proud that they had been entrusted with God’s Word. They believed the Mosaic Law set them apart as God’s chosen people. Instead of treating the Law as God’s standard by which conduct was gauged, they had isolated it as a symbol of spiritual dominance.

Paul questioned whether, having elevated the place of the law, they were at the same time dishonoring God by **breaking the law**. If they loved God, they should be diligent to obey His commandments (John 14:15; 15:10).

Their identity as God’s people caused others to associate God’s character with the behavior of Israel. Consequently, their disobedience affected God’s reputation. They brought dishonor to the name of the Lord. To **dishonor God** was to bring shame on the Holy One.

Paul made his point by appealing to the very Scripture in which the Jews had boasted. Isaiah 52:5 and Ezekiel 36:20-23 refer to the way the name of God was **blasphemed among the Gentiles**. The word *blasphemed* comes from a word meaning “to revile.” In Old Testament days, Israel and Judah had engaged in flagrant sin. As a result, their actions gave the pagan nations reason to ridicule their God. The prophets condemned their behavior because it profaned God’s name.

If the Jews of Paul’s day were not living in a manner consistent with the Scripture in which they boasted, the Gentiles not only would mock them, they would also disparage Israel’s God. When Paul concluded this statement with the phrase **because of you**, his finger of accusation pointed clearly toward their hypocrisy.

The Jews were not the only ones living differently than their professed beliefs. Today, we need to recognize our inability to keep the law at every point. We cannot lay claim to righteousness if we cannot maintain the same standards we require of others. The answer is not to set aside God’s requirements but to approach relationships with God and with people in an attitude of deep humility and neediness.

**How would you evaluate your consistency in keeping God’s Word?**
OBEDIENCE REQUIRED (ROM. 2:25-27)

VERSES 25-27

The Jews were proud of their religious heritage. To them, circumcision was more than a ritual that identified them as part of God’s covenant people. It was a source of spiritual vanity. Paul’s rebuke in these verses was not intended to condemn the rite of circumcision but rather to put it within the proper context. Circumcision benefits someone if that person observes the law. God’s covenant was not limited to people who underwent the physical act of circumcision. Circumcision was to represent an inner allegiance to God.

If, on the other hand, a person were a lawbreaker, then it would not matter if that person had experienced circumcision or not. For these people, even that in which they found pride (circumcision) had become worthless, as if it were uncircumcision.

Paul’s primary emphasis in this section involved obedience to God. The Jews were bragging about their knowledge of the law. They considered the sign of circumcision as evidence of their devotion to God. However, they were not living consistently with the law.

On the other hand, if a person were uncircumcised, but kept the law’s requirements, then that obedience would be counted as circumcision. The issue is not whether or not people are circumcised but whether they are obedient to the Lord.

Paul impressed on his readers the importance of obedience. In verse 26, he argued that the uncircumcised person who kept the law was preferred to someone who was circumcised but did not obey. In verse 27, Paul further elevated the person who is physically uncircumcised but who keeps the law. Such an individual would be in a position to judge someone who was a lawbreaker, even if the latter had followed the letter of the law and experienced circumcision. The term judge suggests not merely the ability to distinguish but to condemn.

God wants us to obey Him with all our hearts rather than merely following the letter of the law (Rom. 7:6). Paul considered himself to be a minister of the new covenant, focusing not on the letter but on the spirit of God’s Word (2 Cor. 3:6).

How does true obedience reconcile the requirements of God’s Word and the spirit of His intention?

HEART RECOGNIZED (ROM. 2:28-29)

VERSE 28

Within the church at Rome, a growing schism had appeared between Jewish and Gentile believers. The Jews do not seem to have insisted that the Gentile Christians adopt Jewish rituals like the Judaizers of Galatia (Gal. 1:6-9).
Still, their air of spiritual superiority created friction in the fellowship. Paul took an unusual approach in correcting their error by clarifying what defined a Jew.

Jesus and His apostles were Jews. Most of Jesus’ followers were Jews. The early church began with Jewish origins. The problem was many Jews had forgotten the faith that their forefathers had demonstrated in following Yahweh. They neglected the weightier matters of justice and mercy (Matt. 23:23). These people continued the external rituals without understanding or applying the internal truths represented in their rites.

Paul argued that the true member of the covenant family was not someone who seemed to be a Jew outwardly. Neither appearance nor adherence to religious traditions marked the genuine Jew. Unfortunately, these people had wrapped themselves in styles of worship, dietary habits, and especially the symbol of circumcision. They missed the point.

True circumcision went beyond a physical operation. It was not visible in the flesh. Paul used the phrase true circumcision to indicate someone who was a legitimate member of God’s covenant people. People can affect an appearance that might cause observers to admire them as being religious models, but the Lord looks beyond the superficial surface and judges what lies within.

VERSE 29
On the contrary, or in contrast to external characterizations, a true Jew is not merely someone who was born into a particular ethnic heritage or who had followed certain religious customs. The person God considers to be part of His people demonstrates a circumcision of the heart. Even Moses had taught that the nature of true circumcision is of the heart. It proceeds from loving God with all of one’s heart and soul (Deut. 30:6).

This kind of spiritual condition results from the work of the Spirit rather than the effort of the flesh. It is achieved not by following just the letter of the law, but by allowing God to transform the heart. He removes a heart of stone and replaces it with one of flesh, pliant under the hands of the Father (Ezek. 36:26). Someone whose heart has been changed by God’s Spirit desires more than just meeting the minimum requirements of the Law. This true Jew desires to please God by keeping His Word with all his heart.

Consequently, praise that matters comes not from people but from God. Jesus warned about performing religious works in order to garner human praise. Instead, He taught His disciples to seek to serve God in a way that glorifies Him. He in turn rewards them (Matt. 6:1-18). No greater praise is possible than to hear the Father say, “Well done.”

God looks beyond outward appearance. He knows what results from mere lip-service and what comes from a heart dedicated to Him. We are not limited by our puny self-effort. Through His Holy Spirit, God dwells in us to give us the desire and the empowerment to please Him (Phil. 2:13).

How can other people recognize whether you serve the Lord from the heart?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INVITE: As the group arrives, ask, What are some things you're really good at? How close are you to perfect in those areas? In what ways do you fall short? (PSG, p. 25) After most have arrived, say: Perfection is a difficult thing to achieve no matter how many hours you practice or how much you study or how many aids you purchase. And if we are honest, we will admit that we can always do better.

TRANSITION: In our spiritual lives, God’s standard is perfection, and we all fail to achieve it no matter how hard we try. God knew that we were incapable of perfection, so He sent a Savior to cover our imperfection. Paul wanted the Jewish Christians in Rome to realize that their failure to obey the law indicated they were just as in need of a Savior as the Gentiles.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Point out the context of today's passage using Pack Item 2 (Outline of Romans). Instruct someone to read aloud Romans 2:17-24, and invite the group to listen for the Jews' attitude toward their relationship with God. Once read, encourage the group to share their thoughts.

CREATE: Lead the group to develop a résumé based on the characteristics that are given in Romans 2:17-24. Using verses 17-18, list basic characteristics Jews would say set them apart. As characteristics are identified, invite the group to explain each one's significance. Your list should include: God's chosen people, relies on the law, acknowledges God, knows and follows God's will. Add a second section to the resume using verses 19-20. List responsibilities identified by Paul. Your list should include guide for the blind, light to the world, instructor of the ignorant, and teacher of the immature. Briefly discuss why each responsibility would be considered important.

EVALUATE: Explain that Paul challenged the Jews to evaluate their resume in verses 21-24 as he pointed out their hypocrisy by showing that they did not practice what they preached. Lead the group to state the areas Paul identified. Conclude by reading Paul’s general evaluation in verse 23. Note that Paul supported his question by quoting Isaiah 52:5.

DEFINE: Call attention to Pack Item 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans) and distribute Pack Item 13 (Handout: Key Words in Romans). Explain that the group will use the key words search throughout the study to identify words used by Paul in his Letter to the Romans. Identify law on the poster and read the definition on the handout.

TRANSITION: Paul continued his argument by calling attention to another Jewish practice that preceded the law: circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14). Abraham was instructed by God to have every male in his family circumcised, along with his male servants, as a physical reminder of a Jews' relationship and responsibilities toward God. But circumcision's original intent became a symbol of pride instead of a statement of a person's relationship with God.

READ: Invite someone to read aloud Romans 2:25-27, and instruct the group to observe how Paul developed his argument against Jewish pride.
DISCUSS: Paul contrasted the behavior of those who were circumcised and relied on the law with a person who was uncircumcised and obedient to God. What was Paul’s point in making this argument? (A genuine relationship with God does not require physical symbols or ceremonies.) Conclude the discussion by reading Paul’s words to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 7:19.

STRESS: Physical symbols and ceremonies serve as a reminder of a relationship with God and a way to demonstrate a person’s commitment to God for others to see.

ASK: What religious practices might a person point to today in an effort to prove righteousness? (PSG, p. 31)

EMPHASIZE: The key to connecting with God is through the heart.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Romans 2:28-29, leading the group to note words that indicate signs of a relationship with God.

DISCUSS: How would you describe the Spirit’s work of circumcising a person’s heart? How might this be described today? (PSG, p. 32)

HIGHLIGHT: Point out this statement from page 28 of the PSG: God’s people became self-centered and self-righteous, snubbing their noses at the very people they were commanded to help.

DISCUSS: How do you see self-righteousness expressed in the world today? How does today’s self-righteousness compare to what Paul was addressing? (PSG, p. 28) How can we protect from becoming engulfed in self-righteousness?

REFLECT: Invite the group to share their experiences with the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 32): Read Philippians 3:5-11, identifying the things Paul notes about his life prior to becoming a Christ follower. How did Paul’s life confirm what he wrote in Romans 2? How is what Paul wrote to the Romans another way of Paul sharing his life experience?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Call for a volunteer to read aloud the three summary statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 33). Invite volunteers to share which statement seems most applicable in their lives today and briefly explain why.

CHALLENGE: Encourage the group to share their response to the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 33) and how they might respond. Challenge the group to be specific in determining actions that could be taken. How can you and the members of your Bible study encourage one another to have hearts for God? List actions the group needs to take. (PSG, p. 33)

PRAY: Lead in prayer, committing to obey God and living with integrity as a child of God so others may see Christ and experience His love and grace. Conclude with the Suggested Music Idea (p. 40) by singing “His Name Is Wonderful.”
PRACTICE

• Think about your personal level of obedience to God. Consider areas where you are strong and areas you need to strengthen. Plan and take steps to reduce your weaknesses.
• For your personal prayer time, divide the group into six sets and pray each day for everyone in one of the sets.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
As an option for Focus Attention, display a poster prepared with the word *perfect* written in large letters. Lead the group to share specific examples that would define the word *perfect*.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• To expand Romans 2:17-24, use an archery target to illustrate what it means to miss the mark. Demonstrate that you have three arrows to shoot at the target: one arrow hits the outer rim of the target, a second arrow falls to the ground in front of the target, the third arrow hits the inner ring just outside the bull’s eye. Ask: *How successful was I? Unless I hit the bull’s eye, have I accomplished my goal?* Read James 2:8-12, and note the similarities in James’ message with that of Paul’s message in Romans 2:17-24.
• To personalize Romans 2:17-18, ask: *In what areas do you try to compare yourself positively to other people? What actions do you need to take to safeguard against comparing yourself with others?* (PSG, p. 33)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Distribute the bookmark for today’s memory verse from Pack Item 8 (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*) to those who need one. Point out that this session’s memory verse (Rom. 3:10) is in a series of verses from the Book of Psalms that Paul quoted to reinforce his argument and justify his message to the Romans. Challenge the group to go beyond the mechanics of memorizing words to meditating on the truth of the words and embedding them in their hearts.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
Close the session by singing “His Name Is Wonderful,” by Audrey Mieir. Emphasize that the real children of God are not those who depend on physical signs or ceremonies, but those who have put their faith in the Savior God sent, Jesus Christ.
**Romans 3:21–4:3**

**Memory Verse:** Romans 3:23-24

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**Overview:**

- **Read** Romans 3:21–4:25, First Thoughts (p. 42), and Understand the Context (p. 42). As you read Romans 3:21–4:3, note the way Paul acknowledged that while all have sinned and are separated from God, God provides a path to redemption and restoration through Jesus.

- **Study** Romans 3:21–4:3, using Explore the Text (pp. 43–47). The *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* or *QuickSource* will broaden your understanding of the key words Paul uses in this text.

- **Plan** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 48–49), More Ideas (p. 50), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible.

- **Grow** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

- **Gather** the following items: 
  - Personal Study Guides;
  - A debit/credit card and a dollar bill;
  - Bible dictionaries (in print or digital formats) for the group to use;
  - A board and marker; and
  - Paper and pens for group members. Prepare to display: 
    - **Pack Item 3** (Poster: The Romans Road); and
    - **Pack Item 5** (Poster: Key Words in Romans). Make copies of: 
      - **Pack Item 9** (Handout: Justification by Faith);
      - **Pack Item 10** (Handout: Doctrinal Emphases in Paul’s Letters);
      - **Pack Item 11** (Handout: The Romans Road);
      - **Pack Item 12** (Handout: Paul’s Use of Abraham in Romans); and
      - **Pack Item 13** (Handout: Key Words in Romans).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

Most of us want to avoid the embarrassment that comes with having our debit card denied or realizing we are a dollar short and unable to pay for the meal we just ordered. When those things happen, it feels like the eyes of everyone are suddenly on us. Paul reminded the Roman believers they all fell short when it came to God’s righteousness. He also explained that through faith in Jesus, we find God’s grace and His willingness to cover our shortcomings.

*(In PSG, p. 34)* Which would be a greater embarrassment: having your card denied at a restaurant or realizing you are a dollar short at a cash-only restaurant? Explain.

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**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**ROMANS 3:21–4:25**

The first few verses of this section are packed with words that give us insight into how we attain a right relationship with God. Just as there is no distinction in our sinful state (3:23), so there is no distinction in our access to God’s righteousness; it is available to all who believe (3:22). That righteousness is achieved by God’s grace, through God’s redemption of us in Christ Jesus (3:24). God initiated that redemption by offering Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (3:25), which demonstrated that God was righteous in the way He has dealt with sin (3:25-26).

Using a series of questions and answers, Paul established that God was the God of the Jews and the Gentiles, and as such, He would justify them both through faith. Since there is no distinction between the two groups, either in sin or in access to God’s righteousness, no one has a ground for boasting; we are all sinners justified by faith. Paul next raised the question as to whether faith nullified the law. His answer was a definitive no. Earlier, Paul had affirmed that there was an advantage both to being a Jew and to circumcision (3:1-2), just not as a means to justification.

Paul concluded this section by using Abraham as an example of justification by faith. Because Abraham was not justified by works, he had no grounds to boast. A person considers wages as something earned and, therefore, something that the person deserves. However, Abraham believed, and God graciously counted his faith as righteousness (4:1-8). Both circumcision and the law came after the promise and after Abraham’s faith. While Abraham waited for an heir, he continued to believe that God would grant him a great nation. Paul ended this section with a reminder that faith is also counted as righteousness for those of us who believe (4:24).

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**KEY DOCTRINE**

**Man**

By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race (1 John 1:8-10).

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**BIBLE SKILL**

*Use a Bible dictionary.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THROUGH FAITH (ROM. 3:21-24)

VERSES 21-23

The phrase but now contrasts Paul’s previous discussion about the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18–3:20) with his present discussion about the righteousness of God. At the beginning of his letter, Paul identified the gospel as “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,” because it is in the gospel that “the righteousness of God is revealed” (1:16-17). Paul made it clear that no one, whether Jew or Gentile, could expect to be made right with God through works of the law (3:20). Through the law we know only the presence of sin, for the righteousness of God has been made known apart from the law. The covenant based on the law had been superseded (Heb. 8:7-13), so that everyone who believes, whether Jew or Gentile, has access to God’s righteousness apart from adhering to the regulations of the Law given to Moses. There is a discontinuity between the old covenant and God’s revelation of His righteousness in Christ, but there is continuity as well. The phrase the Law and the Prophets refers to the Old Testament, specifically as it bears witness to God’s righteousness. Right standing before God cannot be achieved through human effort under the old system of the Law, but the Old Testament attests to God’s activity in providing righteousness. Paul’s words echo Jeremiah’s prophecy, quoted by the writer of Hebrews, of a new covenant written on people’s hearts (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-12).

Paul repeated the phrase the righteousness of God, adding to it another element he had introduced in Romans 1:16-17—the element of faith. The Greek phrase translated through faith in Jesus Christ can be understood in two ways. The traditional view is to understand Jesus as the object of the believer’s faith. In this view, righteousness is revealed through the believer’s faith in Jesus. The Greek word translated faith can also mean “faithfulness.” In this case, Paul’s point would have been that the righteousness of God has been revealed through the faithfulness of Jesus to the Father. Both ideas are obviously true: if Jesus had not been faithful to the Father, then our faith in Him would mean nothing. Paul’s point seems to have been the role of faith in the revelation of God’s righteousness. Paul reiterated the point with the following phrase: to all who believe. Righteousness is only available through faith in Christ Jesus, but it is available to everyone who has that faith.

Paul’s conclusion here is grounded in his argument in 1:18–3:20. No distinction exists between Jews and everyone else. Paul later used the same Greek word translated distinction to emphasize the accessibility of the blessings of God in salvation to all who believe (10:12-13). The reason there is no distinction is because of the sinful state of all people. Paul used two phrases to describe that sinful relationship. First, all have sinned, and as a result, all people stand equally under the judgment of God. Second, as a result of that sin, all fall short of the glory of God. Paul likely was referring to the glory that had resulted from humans being created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), an image that was marred, but not destroyed, as a consequence of Adam and Eve’s disobedience.

VERSES 21-23
21 But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets. 22 The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, since there is no distinction. 23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

VERSE 24

24 They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

VERSE 24

Just as there is no distinction in regard to our sin before God, there is also no distinction in our access to God’s justification. Paul’s point is not that everyone who sinned will be justified (universalism), but that everyone has access to that justification. Based on our sinful standing before God, we deserve only God’s judgment. However, in Christ, God has rendered a verdict of not guilty. In this verse, Paul described the mode or manner and the means of that verdict. First, we have been justified freely by his grace. God’s unmerited love for us led Him to offer to us something that we could not attain through our own effort. We have nothing to offer and depend totally on God’s grace. Therefore, our only hope is to receive by faith what has been freely given.

The means of our justification is through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The Greek word translated redemption was often used to indicate the liberation of slaves or prisoners of war through the payment of a price. Paul used the word twice in connection with forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14) and twice more in connection with the role of the Holy Spirit in securing believers for a future day in which our redemption will be complete (Eph. 1:14; 4:30). In Paul’s only other use of the word, he connected our redemption to our adoption as children of God (Rom. 8:23). Given Paul’s connection between redemption and forgiveness, it is best to understand our redemption as liberation from the sin that placed us under God’s judgment.

(In PSG, p. 37) What word or phrase in verse 24 stands out the most? How does that word or phrase counter the reality of verse 23?

VERSES 25-26

25 God presented him as an atoning sacrifice in his blood, received through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed.

26 God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be righteous and declare righteous the one who has faith in Jesus.

VERSES 25-26

Paul’s main point is expressed in the initial words of verse 25: God presented him [Jesus] as an atoning sacrifice. It is important to notice that God is the one who initiated the entire process of redemption. Human beings have nothing to offer that would serve as a sacrifice to atone for sins.

The greatest point of discussion in this verse is the meaning of the Greek word translated atoning sacrifice. The word appears only one other time in the New Testament, where it describes the covering on the ark of the covenant on which the high priest sprinkled the blood of a goat on the Day of Atonement (Heb. 9:5). This covering was the mercy seat where God accomplished the atonement for the sins of the people. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the same word was used frequently to describe this covering over the ark. The Greek word translated presented can be used to describe what is publicly displayed. The sprinkling of the goat’s blood was hidden behind the curtain in the holy of holies, but God publicly presented Jesus as our atoning sacrifice on the cross.
Paul explained how Jesus functioned as our atoning sacrifice. The phrase *in his blood* designates Jesus’ death on the cross as the means by which the sacrifice was attained. The benefits of this sacrifice are received through faith.

Paul maintained that God’s purpose in presenting Jesus as an atoning sacrifice was to make clear God’s own *righteousness*. In its only two occurrences in the New Testament outside of Romans, the Greek word translated *demonstrate* means “to prove” (2 Cor. 8:24; Phil. 1:28). The word can also mean “to show.” The point in either case is that in the cross we can see God’s righteousness at work. The phrase *sins previously committed* refers to sins committed before Jesus’ sacrificial death initiated a new age of forgiveness and salvation. God, in His restraint, allowed those sins to go unpunished until the cross, when God’s righteous character was demonstrated to the world. God’s restraint was designed to allow people to experience the kindness of God that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

Just as God’s righteousness was seen in His restraint in allowing past sins to go unpunished, so Christ’s atoning sacrifice demonstrates God’s righteousness in the present age. In the cross, the holy God atoned for sin through the sacrifice of His Son. For that reason, God declares righteous the one who has faith in Jesus. As believers, we can rest assured that our righteousness is secure in Christ.

**How would you explain Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for our sins to a person who is not a believer? What illustrations or analogies could you use to explain unfamiliar words like sacrifice?**

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**FOR ALL PEOPLE** *(ROM. 3:27-31)*

**VERSES 27-28**

Paul again used a series of rhetorical questions and answers on the topic of boasting to drive home his defense of justification by faith. The initial question challenged the possibility of *boasting*, a topic Paul dealt with earlier (2:17,23). Not all boasting is bad. Paul boasted “in the hope of the glory of God” (5:2), about a fellow worker (2 Cor. 7:14), and even about his own weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). However, boasting of one’s right standing with God was excluded.

The meaning of the word *law* in verse 27 is unclear. Normally, Paul used the word to indicate the Law of Moses, although the word can be used to mean “principle.” Paul, then, would be comparing the principle of works and the principle of faith. In either case, works and faith stand in opposition to each other. A law of faith precludes all boasting.

Paul rounded off this series of questions with a summary of his earlier teaching, giving more insight into what he meant by *the law of faith*. Paul had already affirmed that no person could be justified through *works of...*
the law (Rom. 3:20). The law or principle of faith meant that the only way anyone could be right before God was by faith. Since justification can only come through faith in Christ, no grounds exist for boasting.

VERSES 29-31

29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. 30 Do we then nullify the law through faith? Absolutely not! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

31 Paul’s conclusion drawn from the two questions in verse 29 was that the one God would justify both the Jews and the Gentiles by faith. Paul used slightly different wording for each group: the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Some Bible teachers have tried to draw a distinction between by and through. However, most of the suggestions for what that distinction would be have been highly nuanced and are not very convincing. It makes more sense that Paul simply varied the two prepositions for stylistic reasons. Paul’s point is clear: God would justify both Jews and Gentiles through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Faith prohibits boasting.

One might surmise, based on Paul’s emphasis on faith, that the law had no value any longer. Paul’s answer to whether the law was now invalid was a resounding Absolutely not! While he insisted on a continuing role for the law, Paul did not explain here what his claim to uphold the law might mean. Paul probably had in mind here what he spelled out later: God did what the law, weakened by sin, could not do, so that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in those who walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh (Rom. 8:3-4).

In what ways should Paul’s teaching that God is the God of the Jews and the Gentiles affect the way that we relate to people groups around the world? How should it affect our prayer lives and our giving?

INCLUDING ABRAHAM (ROM. 4:1-3)

VERSE 1

Paul next turned to Abraham as a test case for his doctrine of justification by faith apart from works of the law. Paul devoted all of chapter 4 to discussing the various ways Abraham demonstrated that justification came through faith. Abraham was venerated for his relationship with God. Surely if anyone had a right to boast, it would have been Abraham.
Veres 2-3

Paul asked his readers to suppose for the sake of argument that Abraham had been able to be justified by works. In that case, Paul argued, Abraham would have had a right to boast; however, Paul quickly interjected that Abraham’s boasting would not be before God. Some Bible teachers have suggested Paul’s point was that Abraham would have grounds for boasting before other people but not before God. While the text could be interpreted that way, the context shows that Paul’s point of comparison was not between Abraham and others but between justification by faith and justification by works. The God who justified Abraham by faith was the God who justified the Gentiles and the Jews by faith. Therefore, there was no ground for boasting at all.

To solidify his argument, Paul appealed to Scripture, specifically Genesis 15:6. This is the first time the word believe occurs in the Bible, and it is connected with the word righteousness. The context was Abraham’s concern that the promise God made earlier (Gen. 12) had not yet been fulfilled. Rather than a sea of descendants, Abraham had no children and his slave was his only heir (15:4). In response to God’s renewed promise, Abraham trusted God, who “credited it to him as righteousness” (15:6). Throughout Romans 4, Paul reminded his readers that Abraham’s faith came before the sign of circumcision was given to him (Gen. 17) and before Abraham’s signature obedience to God’s command to offer Isaac as a sacrifice (Gen. 22).

Abraham’s debt was paid in full by his faith in God—just as ours is paid through our faith in Christ.

The spiritual transaction that took place in Abraham’s heart is described with business terminology: credited. Abraham deposited his trust in God’s words, as demonstrated by his willingness to obey. God recorded that faith as a credit to his account. Abraham’s debt was paid in full by his faith in God—just as ours is paid through our faith in Christ.

(In PSG, p. 41) How does the faith of Abraham compare to the faith required of believers today?

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LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INVITE: Stand before the group displaying a debit or credit card in one hand and a dollar bill in the other hand. Ask: Which would be a greater embarrassment: having your card denied at a restaurant or realizing you are a dollar short at a cash-only restaurant? Explain. (PSG, p. 34)

TRANSITION: Point out the context of today’s passage in relation to Paul’s other letters, using Pack Item 10 (Handout: Doctrinal Emphases in Paul’s Letters). Say: The major portion of the beginning of Paul’s letter focused on the fact that everyone falls short when it comes to God’s righteousness. In Romans 3, Paul shifted to the solution to this problem by explaining that only through faith in Jesus can a person find God’s grace to cover shortcomings. Note that this session focuses on the transforming power of the gospel.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

OUTLINE: Write the following on a poster or white board: Through Faith, In Jesus, and For All People. Suggest that this outline can be used with this passage to explain the righteousness of God through faith.

READ: Highlight Through Faith on the board and read Romans 3:21-24. Invite the group to listen for what is to be obtained (righteous of God) and what is required to achieve the goal (faith in Jesus).

STUDY: Direct attention to Pack Item 3 (Poster: The Romans Road) and distribute Pack Item 11 (Handout: The Romans Road). Say: The Romans Road is a simple but powerful method of explaining the good news of salvation using verses from the Book of Romans. We will track the verses on the Romans Road throughout our study. Today’s passage includes Romans 3:23, the first milestone answering the question, Who needs salvation? This is also part of the memory verse for this session. Invite a volunteer to read aloud the verse.

CONNECT: Transition to the next point by reading verse 24. Identify grace on Pack Item 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans) and Pack Item 13 (Handout: Key Words in Romans).

ASK: What word or phrase in verse 24 stands out the most? How does that word or phrase counter the reality of verse 23? (PSG, p. 37)

DISCUSS: Call attention to In Jesus on the board. Read Romans 3:25-26, and invite the group to consider this question: How might we explain and illustrate how Jesus’ sacrifice redeems those who believe in Him as Savior?

EXPLAIN: Romans 3:25 speaks of Jesus as God’s “atonning sacrifice.” Other translations use the phrase “propitiation by his blood” (ESV). Supply a Bible dictionary (or several copies) to the group and lead them to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 38). Use this time to broaden the group’s understanding of Jesus’ sacrifice for sins. Incorporate the Suggested Music Idea (p. 50) with this activity.
**DISCUSS:** How would you explain Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for our sins to a person who is not a believer? What illustrations or analogies could you use to explain unfamiliar words like sacrifice? (PSG, p. 38)

**IDENTIFY:** Direct attention to *For All People* on the board. **Invite a volunteer to read Romans 3:27-28,** and call for the group to identify the questions in verse 27 that Paul used to show there is no place for boasting about personal accomplishments when the gift of salvation is freely given. Call attention to the conclusion Paul stated in verse 28 that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Identify faith, works, and law on the key words poster and handout.

**DISCUSS:** **Ask a volunteer to read Romans 3:29-31,** and invite the group to identify the questions Paul used to show salvation is open to anyone by faith. **Discuss: How does salvation being offered to all impact how believers should relate to other people? How might it impact how believers pray?** (PSG, p. 40)

**TRANSITION:** **Distribute Pack Item 12 (Handout: Paul’s Use of Abraham in Romans).** Say: Paul’s next question took Israelites back to the very origin of their national identity. Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation, but God also promised that people from every corner of the world would be blessed by Abraham’s life. (Read aloud Gen. 12:1-3.) Review the handout before reading Romans 4:1-3.

**READ:** **Read Romans 4:1-3,** and invite the group to identify what justified Abraham in the eyes of God.

**ASK:** How does the faith of Abraham compare to the faith required of believers today? (PSG, p. 41)

**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)**

**REFLECT:** Lead the group to define salvation. After several have responded, invite the group to share in one sentence how to receive salvation. As an example, read together the outline on the board that you’ve created: Through Faith, In Jesus, For All People.

**CHALLENGE:** Distribute paper and pens. Call attention to the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 42) and instruct the group to respond in writing: Write about how you accepted God’s offer of salvation through faith. Take time to thank Him for providing you salvation. If you haven’t made that choice, what’s holding you back? Who can you talk to about it? (PSG, p. 42) After several minutes of personal reflection, affirm those who have accepted God’s gift of salvation through Jesus. Offer to visit after the group time with people wanting to know more about salvation through faith in Jesus.

**PRAY:** Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for God’s gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Commit to living a life that reflects God’s gracious gift and be faithful to share it with others through words and deeds.
PRACTICE

- Contact group members who were absent this session and especially check on those who have missed multiple sessions.
- Investigate community ministry opportunities and present them to the group as ways they could serve and share Christ with others.
- Prayerfully consider those you know who need to hear of God’s gift of Jesus and determine a time and place to share the gospel with them.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
As an option for Focus Attention: Invite a volunteer to read the following quote from Billy Graham that you’ve written prominently in the room: “Faith isn’t pretending our problems don’t exist, nor is it simply blind optimism. Faith points us beyond our problems to the hope we have in Christ.” Lead the group to explain their response to the quote.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- As an overview of the passage, read out loud Romans 3:21–4:3 and instruct the group: Circle in your Bible each time Paul used the word faith. Once read, ask and discuss from page 35 of the PSG: How would you describe the importance of faith based on this passage?
- To contribute to the discussion of Romans 3:23, read the Key Doctrine: Man (PSG, p. 36). Ask: How does this passage support this statement?
- To expand on Romans 3:28, distribute Pack Item 9 (Handout: Justification by Faith). Review the material with the group to provide deeper meaning to what Paul is saying in this passage.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Expand Summarize and Challenge by beginning with a discussion of the following questions from In My Context (p. 42): What sins do you tend to categorize as requiring God’s immediate judgment? Based on this passage, what adjustments do you need to make in your attitude toward people who commit the sins you identified?

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Personal struggles often provide heightened sensitivity to the heart of God. William Cowper’s life was filled with tragedy and anxiety. During a period of recovery at age 33, he found the Lord when reading Romans 3:25, and from his experience, he wrote “There Is a Fountain.” Share the lyrics with the group.

At Peace
All who accept the gospel find peace with God.

ROMANS 5:1-11
MEMORY VERSE: ROMANS 5:8

READ Romans 5:1-21, First Thoughts (p. 52), and Understand the Context (pp. 52–53). As you read Romans 5:1-11, note what Paul identified as benefits a believer gains through faith in Jesus.

STUDY Romans 5:1-11, using Explore the Text (pp. 53–57). Gain a deeper understanding of peace using the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary. Use Explore the Bible Adult Commentary found in print and digital format at LifeWay.com to aid your understanding of the passage.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 58–59) and More Ideas (p. 60). Plan ways to make guests feel welcome during this session.

GAIN insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploretheBible) or on iTunes.

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; □ Index cards for the group containing cause and effect statements; and □ A board and markers. Prepare to display: □ PACK ITEM 2 (Outline of Romans); □ PACK ITEM 3 (Poster: The Romans Road); and □ PACK ITEM 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans). Make copies of: □ PACK ITEM 11 (Handout: The Romans Road); and □ PACK ITEM 13 (Handout: Key Words in Romans).
FIRST THOUGHTS
We live with a basic understanding of “cause and effect.” With everything we see or experience we tend to look for some type of cause. Paul followed a similar line of logic as he walked his Roman readers through the reality of salvation and the Christian life. Sin has an effect and so does faith in Jesus.

(In PSG, p. 43) Why is it important to find the primary cause behind some type of event? How might a person go about identifying the specific cause that created a specific event?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 5:1-21
After using Abraham as an example of one who was made righteous by faith (chap. 4), Paul turned his attention to the results of justification. The first half of chapter 5 can be divided into three parts. In verses 1-5, Paul listed the benefits of justification: peace with God, access to grace, and the hope of glory. We can even rejoice in our problems because we know God will use them to produce a proven character within us. God’s love poured into us assures us this hope will not disappoint us.

In verses 6-8, Paul recorded how God demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to die for us. Paul pointed out the magnitude of God’s love by reminding believers how difficult it would be to find someone willing to offer his life even for a person of moral character. How unlikely it would be to find someone who would give his life to die for rebellious sinners, and yet this is what Jesus did.

In verses 9-11, Paul introduced the concept of reconciliation. Jesus’ death not only put believers in right standing with God, but it changed our hostile relationship with God into a relationship marked by peace that will one day result in our eternal salvation.

In the second half of the chapter (vv. 12-21), Paul again picked up the refrain of no distinction (3:22-23). Rather than the categories of Jew and Gentile, Paul gathered all of humanity into one group. We have all been affected by sin, and we all have the gift of grace available to us. Paul traced the entry of sin and death into the world by the transgression of one man, and then death spread to all people because all people sinned (5:12). However, just as death reigned because of the sin of one man, so God’s gracious gift through Jesus Christ overflows for many (v. 15).

Just as Adam’s disobedience led to his sinful act that brought condemnation to the many, so also Jesus’ obedience led to His righteous act that will bring justification and life to the many (vv. 18-19). Although
sin reigned in death, “grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (5:21).

**EXPLORE THE TEXT**

**JUSTIFIED WITH BENEFITS** *(ROM. 5:1-5)*

**VERSES 1-2**

The phrase *since we have been declared righteous by faith* summarizes not only the preceding verse (4:25) but also the entire letter up to this point. Our right standing before God is the result of our faith in Jesus’ atoning sacrifice.

The result of our justification is that we have *peace with God*. Just as God initiated the atoning sacrifice of Jesus that led to our justification (3:25), so our peace with God is not dependent on us but is *through our Lord Jesus Christ*. For Paul, peace was more than a subjective state of mind; it described the believer’s relationship with God that came as a result of our justification. Jesus told His disciples that the peace He left them was categorically different from what they would experience in the world (John 14:27). This peace is not just the absence of conflict. In the midst of suffering in the world, the disciples would have peace because Jesus had conquered the world (16:33). Paul reminded the Philippian believers that the “peace of God” would protect them because the “God of peace” would be with them (Phil. 4:7,9).

**Believers have firm footing when they stand in God’s grace.**

In verse 2, Paul began to enumerate the benefits that come from peace with God. The Greek word translated *access* appears only two other times in the New Testament (Eph. 2:18; 3:12). In both cases, the believer’s access is to God. Here the access is *into this grace in which we stand*. By emphasizing grace, Paul reminded the Roman believers that all the benefits described in this passage are the result of God’s gracious gift. We live in the sphere of that grace. At the end of this chapter Paul made clear that though sin reigned through death, “grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:21). Believers have firm footing when they stand in God’s grace.

Paul’s access to God led him to reflect on the hope that was his in Christ. The Greek word translated *rejoice* is the same word that was translated “boast” in the last two chapters. Although pride in one’s own attempts to keep the law is foolish, pride in what God has accomplished in Christ is appropriate. Paul’s reflection on the *hope of the glory of God* led him to brag on God. The glory in question probably refers to the future restoration of the glory present in the garden of Eden, a glory that Paul said would be incomparable (Rom. 8:17-19).
VERSES 3-4

Paul moved immediately from bragging about the glory that was to be revealed to bragging about his **afflictions**. The Greek word translated **afflictions** was used to describe that which produced pressure on the individual, either physical or emotional. It was used to describe the pain of childbirth (John 16:21), the suffering produced by a famine (Acts 7:11), and persecution caused by Stephen’s death (Acts 11:19).

It is easy for us to view suffering as the opposite of hope and peace. Paul’s point was that God often uses our afflictions to shape our character in His image. Rather than being crushed by the pressure, God can redeem suffering for His glory. When writing to the Corinthians, Paul used the churches in Macedonia as examples: in the midst of extreme suffering, “their abundant joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part” (2 Cor. 8:2).

Paul explained how believers could respond to suffering in this way by pointing out the virtues suffering can produce. The first virtue is **endurance**, which describes the ability to bear up under the pressure produced by suffering. As an athlete must demonstrate endurance if he or she is to finish the race, the believer must bear up under the difficulties of the Christian life (Heb. 12:1,12-13).

As we endure hardship, God produces within us **proven character**. The Greek word used here is found only in Paul’s writings, primarily in Second Corinthians, and can describe the process of testing or the outcome of that testing. The extreme suffering experienced by the Macedonian believers, mentioned above, was described as a severe test of suffering. That they passed the test was seen in their proven character, evidenced by their amazing generosity (2 Cor. 8:2). Paul reminded the Philippian believers of Timothy’s proven character, demonstrated by his service to Paul in the gospel ministry (Phil. 2:22). The proven character God produces in us through our patient endurance shines through when we experience suffering. That character produces hope. Paul will deal more fully with hope in chapter 8.

**Hope is a confident expectation that God will act to bring to completion what He began in Christ.**

VERSE 5

This hope is not wishful thinking based only on a desire for a specific outcome. Hope is a confident expectation that God will act to bring to completion what He began in Christ. The Greek word translated **disappoint** is related to the word Paul used at the beginning of the letter to show his confidence in the gospel: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel” (Rom. 1:16). The hope of the glory of God will not let us down.

Paul had this confidence **because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts**. Our ability to love others is the result of God’s love that overflows in us through the Holy Spirit. Because of our right standing before God based on Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for our sins, we have peace and hope that will weather all of life’s storms.
Can you think of times in your life when God has used difficulties to produce endurance, character, and hope? Were you able to see the difficulties as opportunities for growth, or did you see them only as obstacles to your own happiness?

**JUSTIFIED THROUGH HIS DEATH (ROM. 5:6-8)**

**VERSE 6**
Paul used three phrases to define humanity’s position relative to God: *helpless, ungodly,* and sinners (5:8). The first word is often used to describe a person who is physically or emotionally ill or weak. In this case it describes us as powerless to accomplish anything on our own. The second and third words describe humanity as those in open rebellion to God’s law. When writing to the believers in Ephesus, Paul described his former life as one that was focused on pleasing himself rather than obeying God (Eph. 2:3).

Paul also said that Jesus’ death happened **at the right time.** Some Bible teachers see this phrase as describing the right time in relation to salvation history, comparing the phrase here with Paul’s wording in Galatians: “When the time came to completion” (Gal. 4:4). Others have suggested that *the right time* was that time when God was ready to pour out His wrath on sin and sinners. In either case, Paul’s point is that there was nothing arbitrary about the timing of Jesus’ death. It came at the time designated by the Father, and as such it was *the right time.* Under those circumstances, **Christ died for the ungodly.**

**VERSES 7-8**
Paul demonstrated the truly remarkable nature of Jesus’ death with two parallel sentences that have a slight difference in meaning. In the first sentence, Paul spoke of the difficulty in finding someone who would be willing to die for a **just person.** A difficulty arises over the relationship between a **just** person and a **good person.** Several suggestions have been offered to explain the difference, but the most logical seems to be to understand a **good** person as someone who stands in a positive relationship with the person who will die for him. It is difficult for us to imagine dying for a total stranger, even a morally-upright stranger. However, it is much easier to imagine someone being willing to die for a family member or a life-long friend. Neither of these situations explains what Jesus did; He died for people who ignored Him, and who turned against Him, and who finally killed Him.

The Greek word translated **proves** can also be translated “demonstrates” or “shows.” God’s love was on display in the cross for the world to see. Paul ended this section as he began, looking again at the object and timing of God’s love: the ungodly who were still sinners when Christ died for them.
In verse 6 Paul said that Christ died for the ungodly; here Christ died for us. Rather than dying for those who were righteous or good, Christ died for sinners like us.

**Can you think of a situation in which you would willingly give your life for the life of another person? What characteristics of that person might influence you to die for him or her? What was there about us that led Jesus to offer His life for ours?**

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**JUSTIFIED EQUALS RECONCILIATION** (Rom. 5:9-11)

**VERSE 9**

9 How much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath.

**VERSE 10**

10 For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.

In the previous section he described us as “helpless” (5:6) and “sinners” (5:8). Paul introduced the word reconciled in place of “declared righteous” (v. 9). Reconciliation occurs when a hostile relationship is exchanged for a peaceful one. The hostile relationship may be between two humans, such as men who are fighting (Acts 7:26) or a failed marriage (1 Cor. 7:11). In writing to the Corinthian believers, Paul made it clear that reconciliation happened at God’s initiative and that God was actively pursing reconciliation with the world through Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Specifically, that reconciliation is made possible through the death of his Son, which parallels the phrase “by his blood” in verse 9. Justification describes God’s work in declaring righteous those who have faith in Jesus; reconciliation emphasizes the changed relationship we have with God because He has declared us righteous. Our status has changed from enemy of God to child of God.
In verse 9, Paul indicated what we will be saved from (“wrath”). In verse 10, Paul said we will be saved by his life. The meaning of this phrase is not immediately clear. Some Bible teachers have suggested Paul was referring to the life of Christ in the believer. (See Phil. 1:21.) However, given the parallel between “wrath” in verse 9 and “life” in verse 10, others have suggested Paul was emphasizing the present life available to believers—a life that allows them to overcome the power of sin in their daily lives. We share the new life made available to us through the work of Christ.

**We should be bragging on God daily for what He has done for us in Christ.**

**VERSE 11**

In the phrase, **not only that**, Paul probably intended to point back to verse 10 as a whole. Not only have we been reconciled to God, which will lead to our ultimate salvation, **but we also rejoice in God**. Paul ended this section as he had begun. Just as we rejoice in the hope of glory (v. 2) and even in our afflictions (v. 3), we rejoice in our new relationship with God. In verse 10, Paul emphasized that our reconciliation was “through the death of his Son.” Here our rejoicing is **through our Lord Jesus Christ**. God has taken the initiative in reconciling the world to Himself. He accomplished our reconciliation through Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross. This reconciliation is a present possession. Though we wait patiently for the consummation of our salvation, **we have now received this reconciliation**. We should be bragging on God daily for what He has done for us in Christ.

Reconciliation changes relationships. Can you think of concrete ways that your changed relationship with God has affected your relationships with people you interact with each day?

**VERSE 11**

11 And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation.
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

DIRECT: Before the group arrives, prepare index cards with each containing one of the following incomplete cause and effect statements. Note that possible answers are included in parentheses. Duplicate cards if needed so everyone has a card.

- We received seven inches of rain in four hours, therefore ________ (areas became flooded).
- I never brush my teeth, therefore ________ (I have cavities).
- When water is heated, the molecules move quickly, therefore ________ (the water boils).
- The streets were snow-packed and icy, therefore ________ (cars needed more time to stop).
- He broke his arm, therefore ________ (the doctor put it in a cast).
- He was driving 55 in a 35-MPH zone, therefore ________ (he got a speeding ticket).
- I flipped the light switch on, therefore ________ (the light came on).
- She didn’t make dinner, therefore, ________ (she made reservations).

As the group arrives, distribute cards and instruct them to complete the statement by adding an effect to the cause on their card.

SHARE: After the group has completed the assignment, allow everyone to share their thoughts.

LEAD: These examples of cause and effect show how one thing can affect another. Ask: Why is it important to find the primary cause behind some type of event? How might a person go about identifying the specific cause that created a specific event? (PSG, p. 43)

TRANSITION: Point out the context of today’s passage using Pack Item 2 (Outline of Romans). Say: As we saw in the examples of cause and effect, “therefore” is a transitional word that indicates how one thing leads to another. In the first chapters of Romans, Paul outlined the path to justification by faith. In Romans 5, he transitioned from cause to effect by presenting practical matters of living faith each day.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Beginning in Romans 5, Paul shifts from terms like “you” and “they” to the first-person pronoun “we.” Where Paul had previously addressed those outside the faith, he was now focusing on people of faith who need to understand how their lives have been changed.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read aloud Romans 5:1-5, inviting the group to listen for benefits of becoming a true believer.

GUIDE: On a poster or white board, write the words Righteous by Faith. Below the title, write Benefits. Invite the group to identify benefits Paul listed in Romans 5:1-5. Note that the list should include: (1) Peace with God; (2) Access to God; (3) Rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God and in afflictions (afflictions produce endurance; endurance produces proven character; proven character produces hope); (4) God’s love experienced; and (5) The Holy Spirit.
As the list is developed, explain the significance of each element using the commentary (pp. 53–54).

**DEFINE:** Call attention to Pack Item 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans) and Pack Item 13 (Handout: Key Words in Romans). Identify peace and righteousness from this passage in the key word search and discuss their meanings.

**DISCUSS:** What is the relationship between peace and hope? How do they complement each other? (PSG, p. 46) How does knowing one is at peace with God help a person endure difficulties?

**READ:** Read Romans 5:6-8. Call attention to Paul’s insertion of “at the right time” in verse 6. Direct someone to read aloud Galatians 4:4-5 to provide a deeper understanding of this phrase.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to Pack Item 3 (Poster: The Romans Road) and Pack Item 11 (Handout: The Romans Road). Remind the group that we are tracking the verses on the Romans Road throughout the study. Say: Today’s passage includes Romans 5:8, the third milestone answering the question, How does God provide salvation? This is also the memory verse for this session. Invite a volunteer to read the verse aloud, and invite the group to reflect on the significance of each word and phrase.

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Romans 5:9-11. Based on this passage, ask and discuss: What does this passage teach us about God and about ourselves? (PSG, p. 49)

**EXPLAIN:** Use the information on PSG page 49 to explain what being reconciled means for believers. Then invite the group to share examples of everyday occasions when the term reconciled might be used. Ask: What does reconcile mean in those contexts? What does Paul mean in his use of reconciled and reconciliation in this passage? Identify reconciliation in the key word search.

**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)**

**REVIEW:** How has your response to the question at the bottom of page 49 of the PSG changed as a result of today’s discussion?

**REFLECT:** Invite the group to personally reflect on the first question under In My Context (PSG, p. 50): List adversities you are currently facing. How can you reflect the hope you have in Christ through these adversities? Use the Suggested Music Idea on page 60 to supplement this discussion.

**CHALLENGE:** Identify groups in your community that may wonder about God loving them. Ask: What can you and the members of your Bible study do to intentionally share God’s love with the people you identified? What insights from this passage can be shared with them? (PSG, p. 50)

**SUMMARIZE:** Invite the group to read silently Romans 5:1-11 and underline words and phrases that call for thanksgiving, celebration, and a commitment to demonstrate daily joy in Christ. Direct the group to close in silent prayer reflecting on the truths of today’s Scripture. Request they exit quietly.
PRACTICE

• Send an email or text to the group reminding them of today’s study. Encourage them to prepare and be present for the next session as we look at freedom from guilt.

• Continue to develop community ministry opportunities where the group could serve and share Christ with others.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As an option for Focus Attention, recall the following United States hurricane disasters in 2017—Maria (Florida, Puerto Rico), Irma (Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, Puerto Rico), Harvey (Texas, Louisiana, Alabama). Totaling more than $200 billion in losses and a death toll in the thousands, the cause and effect of these three disasters changed the lives of countless numbers of people forever. While some cause and effect relationships, like natural disasters, leave us feeling broken, the effect of faithfully trusting in Jesus is incalculable. Transition by saying: In the first chapters of Romans, Paul outlined the path to justification by faith that has changed the lives of countless numbers of people forever. In Romans 5, Paul transitioned from cause to effect by presenting practical matters of living faith each day.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• Use the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 47) to expand the group’s understanding of Romans 5:1-5. Compare Galatians 2:15-17 with Romans 5:1-5. Identify common words, phrases, and themes in these passages. What insights do you gain about justification as a result of this comparison? Write a summary statement based on the comparison.

• To supplement Romans 5:6, lead the group to identify words or phrases that explain the benefits of being declared just by God and no longer fearing God’s wrath.

• In conjunction with Romans 5:8, ask: How does the death of Jesus on the cross assure us of God’s love for us? Then highlight this statement from the PSG (p. 48): If we ever wonder about God’s love for us, the cross should be all the proof we need.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Lead the group to review the bulleted summary statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 50). Invite the group to pick the statement that best describes their greatest insight gained during the session.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Lead the group to sing “I’ve Got Peace Like a River,” an African-American spiritual whose time and origin are unknown. This spiritual compares the peace of God to a flowing river, the joy of Christ to a bubbling fountain, and the love of God to a deep, wide ocean.
Session 6

免费

All who accept the gospel find freedom from the guilt of sin.

ROMANS 6:1-14
MEMORY VERSE: ROMANS 6:23

READ Romans 6:1–14, First Thoughts (p. 62), and Understand the Context (pp. 62–63). As you read Romans 6:1-14, look for motivations for living a God-honoring life.

STUDY Romans 6:1-14, using Explore the Text (pp. 63–67). The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary will broaden your understanding of justification and sanctification. Research baptism in a Bible concordance to set the context for Paul’s use of the image to explain salvation. Use Explore the Bible Adult Commentary found in print and digital format at LifeWay.com to aid your understanding of the passage.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 68–69) and More Ideas (p. 70), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Plan to use the Suggested Music Idea (p. 70).

GROW with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

GATHER the following items: ❑ Personal Study Guides. For More Ideas (p. 70): ❑ Enlist a volunteer to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 54) on baptism. Prepare to display: ❑ PACK ITEM 2 (Outline of Romans); ❑ PACK ITEM 3 (Poster: The Romans Road); and ❑ PACK ITEM 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans). Make copies of: ❑ PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark); ❑ PACK ITEM 11 (Handout: The Romans Road); and ❑ PACK ITEM 13 (Handout: Key Words in Romans).
FIRST THOUGHTS

We usually think of freedom in terms of being free to do things. We like the idea of doing whatever we want, whenever we want. We appreciate being free to speak, free to work, free to worship, and free to disagree. But freedom has another side—the freedom not to act. Paul wanted the Romans to understand this side of freedom. Our freedom in Christ means we don’t have to live in guilt, and we don’t have to live in bondage to sin.

(In PSG, p. 51) What are some things you can do because you’re a Christian? What are some things that you have the power to avoid because you’re a Christian?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 6:1–7:25

Paul ended the previous chapter with the observation that although the coming of the law increased the trespass, “where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more” (Rom. 5:20). Did such a teaching encourage immorality? Paul answered this question with a series of rhetorical questions, each answered with a resounding “Absolutely not!”

The first question dealt with the misinformed conclusion that greater grace could be obtained by continuing to sin (6:1). Paul demonstrated the absurdity of a believer who had died to sin actually living in sin. Using baptism as an illustration, Paul reminded believers that when they were saved, they had died to sin and had been buried with Christ. Paul ended this section by urging believers not to obey the desires of sin.

A second question also related to sin in the lives of those who are under grace (6:15). Paul reminded believers that in the past they were slaves to sin, but in Christ they were now slaves to righteousness. As slaves to sin they had once offered themselves to impurity and lawlessness, which produced death as its fruit. Now that they were slaves to God, freed from sin, their fruit was sanctification that leads to eternal life. Sin earned them death, but God’s free gift was eternal life in Christ.

As ones who knew the law, Paul expected believers to know that the law had power only over those who were alive (6:15). Marriage laws applied to a woman only while her husband was still alive; if he died, she was freed from those laws and could remarry without being an adulteress. In the same way, since we belong to Christ who died and was raised from the dead, we have been released from the law. Our death to sin in Christ has freed us “so that we may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the law” (7:6).
The third question seemed a logical conclusion since believers are under grace and not law: “Is the law sin?” (7:7). Once again, Paul answered with a resounding “Absolutely not!” The problem was not with the law but with sin that used the commandment to produce death. Paul concluded, “So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (7:12).

That conclusion led to the last question: “Did what is good become death to me?” (7:13). The problem lay in the battle between Paul’s desire to do good and the sinful flesh that warred within him. Paul’s dilemma caused him to cry out, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (7:24-25). Paul knew “there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” (8:1).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

DEAD TO SIN (ROM. 6:1-7)

VERSES 1-2

Earlier in his letter, Paul had broached the topic of the relationship between sin and grace. Some opponents had falsely accused him of encouraging people to sin as a means of accomplishing good. Paul concluded, “Their condemnation is deserved!” (Rom. 3:8). In the closing verses of chapter 5, Paul once again raised the issue: “The law came along to multiply the trespass. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more” (5:20). The same accusation raised in 3:8 could be raised against Paul once more. Was Paul encouraging a life of sin as a way to multiply grace? Stated another way, does not grace without law undercut morality? In Romans 3:8, Paul had simply dismissed the charge against him as absurd. Here Paul addressed the issue directly by means of a series of questions, demonstrating the flaw in his opponent’s logic.

It makes no sense for believers who have died to sin to live in that sin to which they have died.

Absolutely not was the answer to Paul’s question in 6:1. Paul followed with two more questions designed to explain his answer. First, believers cannot continue to live in sin because they have died to sin. The phrase died to sin indicates a decisive, final break with sin and ties the believer’s death to sin to Christ’s death on the cross. Paul may have intended the phrase died to sin to refer to sin’s penalty paid at the cross; however, given the commands in 6:12-14, death to sin probably referred to the death of sin’s rule or power in the believers’ lives. Because of Christ’s death on the cross, sin no longer rules in believers’ bodies. It makes no sense for believers who have died to sin to live in that sin to which they have died.

VERSES 1-2

1 What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply?
2 Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

VERSES 3-4

3 Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.

VERSES 5-7

5 For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, 7 since a person who has died is freed from sin.

VERSES 5-7

Paul’s reason for confidence that believers can live changed lives is our union with Christ. He made the point above that through baptism believers had been buried with Christ into death. Since that is true, Paul was confident that believers would also be united with Christ’s resurrection. Here Paul used the phrases in the likeness of his death and in the likeness of his resurrection. The same language is used elsewhere to refer to idols that resemble human beings (1:23) and locust that resembled horses (Rev. 9:7). He also used the word to describe something more than superficial similarity. He used it to describe Jesus’ humanity (Phil. 2:7), probably indicating Jesus as fully God and fully man. He also used the word to describe Jesus as bearing our sinful flesh: “by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering” (Rom. 8:3). We share in the death of Jesus, and we also share in His glory (8:17).

Appeal was once again made to the prior knowledge of the Roman Christians: For we know. Paul reminded them they had been crucified with Christ. He expressed the same idea in his letter to the Galatians: “I have been crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20). The phrase old self refers to
the believer’s whole person before Christ. In writing to the Ephesians, Paul spoke of the old self as a “former way of life,” which is laid aside so that the “new self, the one created according to God’s likeness” might be put on (Eph. 4:22-24). For that old self to be laid aside, it must be crucified with Christ on the cross.

**Sin’s power over us was broken at the cross.**

The crucifixion of the old self made powerless the body ruled by sin. Paul’s point was not that the physical body is inherently sinful but that before Christ our bodies were under the control of sin. Believers whose old selves have been crucified with Christ are no longer enslaved to sin. The Greek word translated rendered powerless can refer to power that has been negated or made ineffective or to someone or something that has come to an end or ceased to exist. Sin’s power over us was broken at the cross.

**Since we have died to sin by our union with Christ’s death, how should we respond to those who treat sin as though it is no big deal?**

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**ALIVE IN CHRIST (ROM. 6:8-11)**

**VERSES 8-9**

Paul had already demonstrated that believers have died with Christ (6:4-6). Now he would draw out the implication of that fact: we believe that we will also live with him. The future tense we will also live has been interpreted in one of two ways. Some Bible teachers have suggested that the future tense expresses logical progression: dying with Christ logically comes before living with Christ. In this case, Paul would have been talking about the new life in Christ that believers experience now. Others have suggested that the future tense should be interpreted as referring to a future action. In that case, Paul would be pointing to the life that believers will experience when Jesus returns and God’s kingdom is fully established. The two choices are not mutually exclusive.

For the third time in this chapter (vv. 3,6,9) Paul grounded what he wrote in the prior knowledge of the community (we know that). Here, it was the knowledge that Christ’s resurrection was unique. The Bible contains several accounts of people who died and were restored to life (1 Kings 17:17-24; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:1-44). In each case those brought back to life died again. Not so with Jesus. Paul wrote that Christ, having been raised from the dead, will not die again. Jesus’ death on the cross broke the power of death. His death and resurrection anticipate the final resurrection of believers and God’s ultimate victory over death (1 Cor. 15:54-57).
VERSES 10-11

10 For the death he died, he died to sin once for all time; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

11 So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

VERSES 10-11

The reason death no longer rules over Jesus is because he died to sin once for all time. Paul began this chapter with a reminder that believers had died to sin (Rom. 6:2). Their death to sin was possible because of Jesus’ once-for-all death. The single Greek word translated “once for all time” is found three times in Hebrews, each time referring to Jesus’ death. The writer of Hebrews said it this way: “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time” (Heb. 10:10).

In verse 11 Paul drew a comparison between Jesus’ situation and that of the Roman Christians. Jesus’ once-for-all death was markedly different from that of believers. Yet His death was the reason they also had died to sin. Their faith commitment to Christ had been expressed in their baptism, and now Paul urged them to consider themselves what they already were—dead to sin. The Greek word translated consider was a mathematical term that could mean to evaluate something as the result of a calculation. The word also could mean to give careful thought to a matter or to hold a particular position or point of view.

Paul was asking the Roman believers to rethink their status. Since they had died to sin and were alive to God in Christ Jesus, the possibility of remaining in sin so grace might increase (Rom. 6:1) was obviously absurd.

How will considering ourselves dead to sin and alive in Christ affect our daily lives? Can you think of specific examples?

VERSES 12-13

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. 13 And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness.

VERSES 12-13

Paul brought to practical conclusion his discussion of sin and death by issuing two prohibitions and a command. These challenges urge believers to be what they actually are: dead to sin and alive in Christ. First, we are not to allow sin to exercise authority over us. The phrase mortal body refers to our physical bodies. The body itself is not sinful. However, we are subject to the temptations common to the world in which we live.

We are to refuse to allow sin to exercise authority in our lives—to obey sin’s desires. These desires would include, but are not limited to, physical appetites and lusts that go beyond basic human needs (for example, gluttony or sexual lust). They would also include the desire for power, greediness, and pride, to name a few.

The same verb is used in both the second prohibition and the command, first stating what believers ought not to do, followed by what believers ought to do. The Greek word translated offer means to put something at someone’s disposal. The word could also be used as a technical term for presenting a sacrifice. Jesus used the word to remind Peter that, if Jesus requested it, the Father would have provided Him with legions of angels
(Matt. 26:53). Paul also used the word to describe believers’ presenting themselves to God as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1).

Here believers are challenged not to present any of their parts to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. The Greek word translated parts usually refers to individual parts of one’s body, but it can also refer to individual members of a larger group. Paul moved from the “mortal body” (6:12) to parts of the body, probably referring to the various functions of the body. The word translated weapons can refer to any type of tool or instrument, though the word frequently refers to an instrument used in military combat (John 18:3). It is also used figuratively of weapons in spiritual combat (2 Cor. 10:4).

Paul was urging them to actively use their whole selves as weapons of righteousness in the battle against sin.

The negative and positive commands in verse 13 are largely parallel. The believer is to allow no part of himself to be available to sin as a weapon of wickedness but is to offer every part of his being as a weapon of righteousness for God. The apostle was not urging believers’ passive refusal to allow sin control over their lives; rather, Paul was urging them to actively use their whole selves as weapons of righteousness in the battle against sin.

Before anything else, believers are to offer themselves to God, who alone will ensure the victory. They are to do this in their status as those who have died to sin and are now alive in Christ.

**In what practical ways can we offer our bodies as weapons in the fight for righteousness?**

**VERSE 14**

Paul ended this section with the declaration that sin will not rule over you. The future tense probably indicates a once-for-all promise: sin will not rule over you now, or any other time. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, sin does not have the right or the power to rule over the believer. The reason for Paul’s bold statement is that believers are not under the law but under grace. What the law demanded is now achieved through grace.

**VERSE 14**

14 For sin will not rule over you, because you are not under the law but under grace.
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: As the group gathers, allow volunteers to share what kind of traffic signs they encountered on their way to the group time. Once several signs have been identified, ask: *What was the purpose of the signs and what value did they bring to you on your trip?*

EXPLAIN: Call attention to **Pack Item 3 (Poster: The Romans Road)** and **Pack Item 11 (Handout: The Romans Road)**. Remind the group that we are tracking the verses on the Romans Road throughout the study. The verses serve as signs along the way that lead to an understanding and acceptance of God’s plan for salvation.

REVIEW: Before we look at today’s sign, let’s review the two we have already encountered. Read Romans 3:23 and 5:8, noting that they are signs one and three. Say: *Today’s memory verse is the second milestone answering the question, Why do we need salvation?* Read Romans 6:23.

HIGHLIGHT: Romans 6:23 can serve as a summary of Paul’s message in Romans 6:1-14 as he speaks to a misconception of the salvation made possible by Jesus. Paul clarifies the freedom from the guilt of sin that those who accept the gospel experience.

CONTEXTUALIZE: Point out the context of today’s passage using **Pack Item 2 (Outline of Romans)** and use information from Understand the Context (pp. 62–63; PSG, p. 52) to position this session in the larger context of the Book of Romans.

TRANSITION: Throughout today’s session, look for motivations for living a God-honoring life and where these motivations originate in a person’s faith in Jesus.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

HIGHLIGHT: Romans 6 begins by addressing a faulty belief in the church in Rome that salvation gives a person the freedom to sin so that greater mercy can be received.

DISCUSS: How do people today express the attitude of being able to live as they please without consequences?

READ: Direct someone to read aloud Romans 6:1-7, inviting the group to listen for the basis of Paul’s argument against such a belief.

EXPLAIN: Paul used the ordinance of baptism to explain the relationship of Jesus’ death and resurrection to the salvation experience of the believer. Invite a volunteer to read the Key Doctrine: Baptism (PSG, p. 56), and instruct the group to underline important words or phrases. *(Baptism is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus (Col. 3:12)).*

DISCUSS: How does the act of baptism demonstrate what has happened in the believer’s life? (PSG, p. 55)
**DISPLAY:** Call attention to **Pack Item 5** (Poster: *Key Words in Romans*) and **Pack Item 13** (Handout: *Key Words in Romans*). Identify the word *sin* on the poster.

**EXPLAIN:** In Romans 6:6-7, Paul declared that *sin* has been rendered lifeless and powerless through Christ’s work on the cross. And His resurrection makes it possible for us to live beyond the reach of *sin*, if we live in the power of Christ.

**READ:** After you read Romans 6:8-11, invite the group to identify the reward for dying to *sin* (eternal life).

**HIGHLIGHT:** Call attention to the paragraph in the Personal Study Guide on page 57 and read it aloud: *As a result of His resurrection, we are free from sin in this life and the next. We are justified (declared righteous), but we are also sanctified (set apart for God’s purposes) in God’s sight. We live in the power and presence of Jesus each day. Identify the words justification and sanctification on Pack Item 5 (Poster: *Key Words in Romans*) and read their definitions on Pack Item 13 (Handout: *Key Words in Romans*).

**DISCUSS:** How will considering ourselves dead to *sin* and alive in Christ affect our daily lives? What might a person considering themselves “dead to *sin*” look like today? (PSG, p. 57)

**READ:** Call for a volunteer to read Romans 6:12-14, and instruct the group to listen for practical ways Paul called believers to embody righteousness.

**COMPARE:** Create two groups. Instruct one group to identify specific examples of weapons for unrighteousness and the other group to do the same with weapons for righteousness. After groups have identified several examples of each, call for reports and compare.

**GUIDE:** *In what practical ways can you offer yourself as a weapon in the fight for righteousness? (PSG, p. 58)* What does it require to live a righteous life every day? How might that impact a person’s ability to point others to Christ?

**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE** *(IN MY CONTEXT)*

**SUMMARIZE:** Remind the group of today’s memory verse and its significance as a sign along the Roman Road. Give copies of **Pack Item 8** (Handout: *Memory Verses Bookmark*) to those who need one. Then invite the group to recite Romans 6:23 together.

**ASK:** How has your understanding of freedom from the guilt of *sin* changed as a result of this study?

**CHALLENGE:** Using the second set of questions under In My Context, discuss ways of encouraging one another to die to *sin* and live for Christ. Ask: *What actions might the group need to take in light of this discussion? (PSG, p. 59)*

**PRAY:** Lead in a time of directed prayer using the third set of questions under In My Context: *How does your everyday life point others toward Christ? What needs to change in your words, actions, and attitudes to more effectively point others to Christ? (PSG, p. 59)*
PRACTICE

• Send an email or text to the group reminding them of the beginning of Easter. Encourage them to devote their personal quiet times with God by recounting Jesus’ experiences during the week and focusing on the significance of each one in their lives.
• Participate in a community ministry activity during Easter where the group can serve and share Christ with others.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
As an option for Focus Attention and as a transition from the last session on peace, greet each person in the group as they enter with a simple, “Peace.” After everyone has arrived, ask: How would you define peace? What are the contributors to securing peace as you define it? After the group responds, say: Freedom from the guilt of sin can be a contributor to experiencing peace. Transition to Romans 6:23 as a milestone along the Romans Road.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• Prior to the session, enlist a volunteer to complete the Bible Skill activity on baptism on page 54 of the PSG. Set aside time during the session for the person to share what he or she learned about the purpose and practice of baptism and how it helps interpret Romans 6:3-4.
• To supplement Romans 6:9, guide the group to share names of influential leaders who died and the locations of their burials. Emphasize that unlike the people identified, Jesus was resurrected. Discuss the significance of Jesus’ power over death in God’s plan for redeeming humanity.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Invite three volunteers to each read one of the bulleted summary statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 59). Instruct the group to select the statement that describes their greatest insight and challenges them in their daily living. Close the session using the Suggested Music Idea below.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
In 1738, upon his conversion Charles Wesley penned “And Can It Be.” The last stanza about no longer dreading condemnation is a jubilant celebration of our new state in Christ. Read it, and invite the group to follow by reciting the chorus.
Session 7

RAISED!

Salvation comes through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

LUKE 24:1-12

MEMORY VERSE: LUKE 24:6

READ Luke 24, First Thoughts (p. 72), and Understand the Context (pp. 72–73). As you read Luke 24:1-12, imagine you are hearing this for the first time.

STUDY Luke 24:1-12, using Explore the Text (pp. 73–77). A helpful study technique is comparing the gospel accounts of significant events in Jesus’ life. Along with Luke 24, read Matthew 28; Mark 16; and John 20 noting the perspective of each Gospel writer. Use Explore the Bible Adult Commentary found in print or digital format at LifeWay.com to aid your understanding of the passage.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 78–79) and More Ideas (p. 80). Enlist volunteers to help find ways to make guests feel welcomed for this Easter session. Consult QuickSource for additional questions that you can use in leading the discussion and a possible Object Lesson idea for this week’s study.

GAIN insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploretheBible) or on iTunes.

GATHER the following items: ☐ Personal Study Guides; and ☐ Create and make copies of an Awe-Inspiring worksheet for Focus Attention (p. 78). For More Ideas (p. 80): ☐ Bible dictionaries (in print or digital format) for the group to use. Prepare to display: ☐ PACK ITEM 4 (Poster: Christ Arose!). Make copies of: ☐ PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark).
FIRST THOUGHTS

Think about the most awe-inspiring sight you've ever witnessed. Now, imagine walking through the darkness of a Sunday morning and finding something even more amazing: an empty tomb. The women who came to anoint Jesus' body expected to find a stone that needed to be removed. Instead, they found a doorway to eternity. The world had been changed forever. We're still experiencing the benefits of that change today.

(In PSG, p. 60) List and rank awe-inspiring sights you have seen. What caused the feelings of awe?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LUKE 24:1-53

Each of the four Gospels ends with the amazing news that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Luke's account of Jesus' resurrection can be divided into four parts: the empty tomb (Luke 24:1-12), the encounter on the road to Emmaus (24:13-32), the gathering of the disciples (24:33-49), and Jesus' ascension into heaven (24:50-53). All four Gospel writers included the women's discovery of the empty tomb and the angelic message that Jesus had been raised. The women were the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection—this is the focus of this week's session.

Luke next related a story not found in the other Gospels: the two men returning to the village of Emmaus. Jesus joined them as they were “discussing and arguing” about the events that had taken place (24:15). The two men were prevented from recognizing Jesus. When asked, they recounted the events of Jesus’ ministry, the crucifixion, and the report of the empty tomb. Jesus chastised the men for their slowness to believe the Scriptures. Beginning with Moses, He explained from Scripture the necessity of the Messiah’s suffering and death. As they were eating the evening meal together, the men’s eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus, who immediately disappeared from their sight.

The two men returned to Jerusalem and joined the apostles and others gathered together. The men heard that Peter had seen Jesus, and they shared their own encounter with Him. During their discussion, Jesus suddenly appeared in the room. John pointed out that the doors were locked because of their fear of the Jewish leaders (John 20:19). After convincing the disciples He was not a ghost, Jesus opened their minds to understand that everything written about Him “in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms” must be fulfilled (Luke 24:44). He then commissioned the disciples to proclaim forgiveness of sins in His name.
They were to begin their mission only after they had received the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke ended his Gospel with a brief description of Jesus’ ascension back to the Father. The confusion and fear the disciples had experienced was replaced with joy and worship.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

DISCOVERED (LUKE 24:1-3)

VERSES 1-3
The women who came to the tomb were likely the same women who had been at the cross and who had traveled with Jesus in Galilee (Luke 23:49). The other Gospels begin the story of the empty tomb by identifying some of the women by name. Luke mentioned the women as a group but did not identify them by name until later (24:10). After determining the location of the tomb where Joseph buried Jesus’ body, the women had returned home and prepared the perfumes and spices that would be necessary for a proper burial (23:55-56). Once Sabbath was over, the women headed for the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. All four Gospels agree that the women left very early in the morning on the day after Sabbath, though each Gospel writer expressed that truth in a slightly different way. John pointed out that it was still dark (John 20:1). Matthew said, “as the first day of the week was dawning” (Matt. 28:1). Luke’s expression could be paraphrased “at the crack of dawn.” The women wasted no time in going to the tomb to complete the customary burial ritual.

A tomb cut into rock typically had a large, wheel-shaped stone that was rolled on a track or rut to cover the opening of the tomb. Joseph used such a stone to close the entrance to the cave in which Jesus was buried (Matt. 27:60). According to Mark, the women discussed the difficulty they might encounter in attempting to remove the stone from the tomb’s entrance (Mark 16:3). All the gospel writers mentioned that when the women arrived at the tomb, the stone had been removed. Matthew alone described the way the stone was removed: an angel of the Lord showed up, accompanied by an earthquake, and rolled the stone away (Matt. 28:2).

The tomb would have had an access opening that generally was small enough to require most people to stoop to enter the cave (John 20:5). The corpse would have been laid out on a stone bench that had been cut out of the wall. The women entered the tomb to finish the burial ritual. To their surprise, not only was the tomb open, but the grave contained no corpse. Luke stated this truth simply and objectively: they went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. Worshiping on the first day of the week celebrates Jesus’ resurrection and reminds us that Jesus’ tomb is still empty.

VERSES 1-3
1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. 3 They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.
REPORTED (LUKE 24:4-9)

VERSES 4-5

4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. 5 So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground. “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” asked the men.

The empty tomb was not enough to convince the women that Jesus had been raised from the dead. The Greek word translated perplexed is the same word used to describe Festus’s state of mind after he heard the charges brought against Paul by the Jewish religious leaders (Acts 25:20). It described one who was confused, uncertain, or in doubt about an issue. When Mary Magdalene encountered the empty tomb, her initial assumption was that someone had taken Jesus’ body (John 20:2, 13, 15). All four Gospel writers describe the tomb as open and empty, but none of those who saw the empty tomb drew from that empty tomb the conclusion that Jesus had been raised from the dead. The significance of the empty tomb had to be interpreted.

Luke recorded that two men suddenly appeared in the tomb with the women. John also mentioned that two angels were present in the tomb, one at the head and the other at the foot of the place where Jesus had lain (John 20:12). On the other hand, Mark (Mark 16:5) and Matthew (Matt. 28:2) mentioned only one person. These types of differences in the various accounts have been challenged by some as inaccuracies. However, mentioning one person does not mean that two were not present. Luke and John mentioned both of the angels, while Mark and Matthew mentioned only the angel who spoke to the women.

The physical appearance of the men in the dark tomb was striking. The word used to describe their clothing, dazzling, also was used to describe a flash of lightning (Luke 17:24). Matthew described it this way: “His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow” (Matt. 28:3).

Luke described the two beings as men, not angels, though later the men on the road to Emmaus said that the women reported seeing “angels” (Luke 24:23). Mark identified the messenger as a young man. Matthew referred to the visitor as an “angel of the Lord” (Matt. 28:2). John called the messengers angels. Luke opened his Gospel with descriptions of Gabriel explaining to Zechariah and Mary the significance of the two births that were about to take place (Luke 1:11-20, 26-38). Now, at the end of the Gospel, angels again appear to explain the significance of the death and resurrection that had just occurred.

The sudden presence of the angels startled the women and produced a strong sense of fear. The same word described the reaction of the disciples to Jesus’ sudden appearance in the room where they were meeting (24:37). The women’s immediate response was submission and reverence—they bowed down to the ground.

The empty tomb changed everything.

The angels’ first words to the women could be taken as a mild rebuke. Their rhetorical question pointed out the women’s basic error: you don’t look for a living person by searching among dead people. Of course, the
women had come to the tomb not seeking a living person but to pay their respect to one who was dead. The empty tomb changed everything.

(In PSG, p. 64) **What are some ways people seek life among the dead today?**

**VERSES 6-9**

The angels stated explicitly what they had implied in their rhetorical question: **He is not here, but he has risen!** The women's devotion and piety in coming to anoint Jesus' body was based on a misunderstanding. The way to correct that misunderstanding was to remember. Although the empty tomb did not, by itself, convince the women of the resurrection, they were challenged to believe the proclamation of the angels and remember what Jesus had said to them while they were still in Galilee.

Luke alone among the Gospel writers mentioned Jesus' prediction of His death and resurrection in his account of the resurrection. In three different settings, the details of Jesus' predictions were used to interpret His death and resurrection (the tomb, the road to Emmaus, and the room with the disciples). The angels' proclamation is similar to Jesus' first passion prediction in Galilee (9:22) with a few minor differences drawn from other occasions when Jesus predicted His death and resurrection. Rather than “rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes,” Jesus was betrayed into the hands of sinful men. In addition, the angels changed “killed” to crucified, reflecting the method by which Jesus actually died, perhaps influenced by Jesus' words in Luke 18:31-33.

While walking with the two men on the road to Emmaus, Jesus used the teaching of Moses and the prophets to explain to them the necessity of the Messiah suffering as He entered His glory (24:25-27). In the room with His disciples, Jesus once again tied His suffering and death to the teaching of Moses and the prophets and used Scripture to interpret His resurrection (24:44-46). Jesus had prepared His disciples for His death and resurrection, but sorrow had overwhelmed them (John 16:6). Standing in an empty tomb, the angels' call to the women to remember worked: they remembered his words. The empty tomb alone did not convince the women that Jesus was alive, but remembering Jesus' promise that He would be raised from the dead did.

These women had followed Jesus in Galilee, had been present at the cross, had watched Him be buried, and finally had shown up at an empty tomb. Having heard the testimony of the angels, the women returned to the place where the disciples had gathered to report what they had seen and heard. The reference to the Eleven is a reminder of Judas's betrayal and departure from the group; the Twelve are now the Eleven. Others were also gathered with the Eleven when the women gave their report (all the rest). Later, when the two men from Emmaus showed up, Luke referred...
to the group as “the Eleven and those with them” (24:33). The group may have included Jesus’ mother and brothers as well as other disciples (Acts 1:14-15).

The antidote prescribed by the angel for the women’s confusion was to remember the words of Jesus. Can you think of a recent time when not remembering Jesus’ words caused you confusion or led you into wrong behavior?

CONFIRMED (LUKE 24:10-12)

VERSES 10-11
While the other three Gospel writers mentioned the names of the women before the discovery of the empty tomb, Luke delayed naming the women until after they reported their findings to the apostles. Women were not generally viewed as reliable witnesses, especially in a court of law. Although the Old Testament did not specifically forbid women from serving as witnesses, most Jews at that time generally treated the testimony of women with suspicion. About 200 years after the fact, the pagan philosopher Celsus, discussing the resurrection with the church leader Origen, made fun of the fact that women were the first witnesses. He viewed the women’s testimony as unreliable, and therefore, a major weakness in the resurrection story. However, the women being the first witnesses to the empty tomb actually adds to the veracity of the Gospels’ accounts. It is more likely that a made-up story would have avoided the problem of women as witnesses by making men the first witnesses.

The women being the first witnesses to the empty tomb actually adds to the veracity of the Gospels’ accounts.

Mary Magdalene was mentioned first by each of the Gospel writers. Luke alone mentioned Joanna. Both of these women were mentioned as women who followed Jesus in Galilee and used their financial resources to support Jesus and His disciples. Joanna’s husband was a steward who served under Herod (Luke 8:2-3). Mark and Luke mentioned Mary the mother of James, who was probably the same as Matthew’s “the other Mary.” Salome was mentioned only by Mark. However, Luke indicated that women other than those named were involved: the other women with them. John mentioned only Mary Magdalene by name at the tomb, but her reply to the Peter and John implies that she was not alone: “we don’t know where they’ve put him” (John 20:2).

For the second time in two verses, Luke recorded the testimony of the women. The phrase were telling indicates a process rather than a single action. Apparently, the women’s initial report was greeted with skepticism by the men, so the women continued to make their case.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR
The apostles found the women’s report to lack any credibility. The Greek word translated *nonsense* occurs only here in the New Testament. The same word could serve as a medical term to describe delirium caused by high fever.

The apostles were not naïve or gullible people who could be easily fooled into believing someone had been raised from the dead. They understood dead people normally stay dead. They had to be convinced that Jesus was actually alive.

**VERSE 12**

Although Peter did not believe the report of the women, apparently his curiosity got the better of him because he *got up and ran to the tomb*. According to John’s Gospel, Peter and John (the beloved disciple) ran to the tomb together, with John out-running Peter and arriving at the tomb first (John 20:3-10). Cleopas, talking with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, reported that “some of those who were with us” went to the tomb to confirm the women’s testimony (Luke 24:24). As with the names of the women and the number of angels at the tomb, the mention of only one person does not mean two people were not there. Luke focused his story on Peter, leaving John out of his description.

As mentioned above, the entrances to these types of tombs were usually rather small, requiring most adults to stoop to enter. The linen cloth that had been used to wrap the body of Jesus for burial was lying where Jesus’ body had lain earlier. The report of the women was accurate: the tomb was empty. Peter left the tomb *amazed at what had happened*. The Greek word translated *amazed* could describe someone who was impressed or someone who was disturbed. Luke gave no indication at this point as to what Peter’s state of mind was. The narrative shifts abruptly to the story of the two men walking to Emmaus. However, when these two men return to Jerusalem after talking with Jesus, they were told that Jesus had appeared to Peter (24:34). Luke did not give the details of this meeting, but the presence of the empty tomb, accompanied by a face-to-face meeting with Jesus, convinced Peter that Jesus had truly been raised from the dead.

The apostles were unconvinced by the witness of the women. Do you think their unbelief was a result of their attitude toward women or the enormity of testimony that they brought? Can you think of a time when you let your attitude toward God’s messenger keep you from hearing a word that God had for you?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

SHARE: Prepare a simple Awe-Inspiring worksheet that contains the title and five blank lines numbered one through five. Give each person a copy of the worksheet as they gather and instruct them to list five awe-inspiring experiences or locations. After everyone is present, use a round-robin approach to sharing what each person wrote. Encourage short responses so everyone has a chance to speak. When everyone has shared their five experiences, ask: What caused the feelings of awe? (PSG, p. 60)

TRANSITION: Awe-inspiring experiences are often those that happen at a special moment in God’s creation, or maybe they are unexpected moments that catch us off guard. What about an awe-inspiring experience that goes beyond human understanding, like the discovery of an empty tomb?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Paul was very articulate early in his Letter to the Romans concerning sin and salvation. He wrote about dying to sin, being buried with Christ, and rising again to a new life. That imagery was familiar to the followers of Christ in Rome because everything they knew about their newfound faith was rooted in the truth of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

GUIDE: Lead the group to recount the burial of Jesus following the crucifixion. Focus on the timing of events and the impact of the Sabbath that began at sunset on Friday and lasted until sunset on Saturday. Note the role of the women surrounding Jesus. Invite a volunteer to read Luke 23:49,55-56.

READ: Explain that Luke 24 describes resurrection morning. Call for someone to read aloud Luke 24:1-3, and invite the group to listen for two surprises the women experienced upon arriving at the tomb.

DISCOVER: Ask: What were the two surprises the women experienced? After the group responds, say, Mark’s account noted that the women were worried about moving the stone (Mark 16:3). But to their surprise, the stone had been moved—not for Jesus to leave but for the women to enter. When they entered, they were surprised because Jesus’ body was not there.

DISCUSS: An explanation of the empty tomb is at the heart of Easter and the heart of the Christian faith. Ask: How does a person’s explanation of the empty tomb expose his or her biases and values? (PSG, p. 63)

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read aloud Luke 24:4-5, and invite the group to identify the emotions experienced by the women. Say: The women were perplexed (confused) by the empty tomb and then terrified (not afraid but in the sense of awe and respect) by the “men in dazzling clothes” (angels).

EXPLORE: The angels posed a question that challenged the reason for the women’s presence at the empty tomb: “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5) Ask: What are some ways people seek life among the dead today? (PSG, p. 64)
**READ:** Invite someone to read aloud Luke 24:6-9, as you lead the group to identify how the angels answered their own question.

**DISCUSS:** Why should the women not have been surprised that the tomb was empty? After the group responds, say: The women either did not understand Jesus’ explanation of His purpose or they failed to remember it in their grief. Once they heard the angels’ reminder, all of Jesus’ teachings came back to them and the light of truth began to clear some of their confusion.

**HIGHLIGHT:** To further clarify the confusion of Jesus’ followers, read the paragraph beginning “Once the women heard the angels’ reminder ...” on pages 64–65 of the PSG.

**DISCUSS:** What keeps a person from considering the claims of Jesus and His resurrection?

**PROBE:** How does God’s Word validate the resurrection of Jesus? How does the Bible help a person understand Jesus’ resurrection? (PSG, p. 66) **Instruct the group to read Luke 24:10-12** to discover answers to these questions (reliable witnesses experienced the empty tomb; the resurrection was real enough to warrant sharing it with others; the disciples’ skepticism was satisfied with actual experiences with Jesus).

**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)**

**SUMMARIZE:** Call attention to **Pack Item 4 (Poster: Christ Arose!).** Remind the group of today’s memory verse when the angels said to the women, “He is not here, but he has risen!” (Luke 24:6). Highlight that salvation comes through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark)** to those who need one.

**KEY DOCTRINE:** Invite a volunteer to lead the group in reading the Key Doctrine: Jesus (PSG, p. 63): Jesus was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion (1 Cor. 15:1-8).

**REFLECT:** Jesus’ death and resurrection provides salvation to all who believe. Ask: What impact does the empty tomb have on your life? How are you living out Jesus’ resurrection each day? (PSG, p. 67)

**CHALLENGE:** Jesus’ death and resurrection demand a response. Ask: With whom can you share about the resurrection of Jesus? Write their initials and begin to pray each day for the opportunity to share. (PSG, pp. 67) Refer to the inside cover of the PSG and instruct the group to discuss with someone sitting next to them how they can use this information to share Christ with a friend.

**CELEBRATE:** Lead in a time of celebration of the risen Savior using the Suggested Music Idea (p. 80). Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for God’s gift of His Son who died and rose for our salvation.
PRACTICE

- Churches often see people on Easter who are rarely seen at other times of the year. Follow up on guests who attended for the first time. Encourage them to make group Bible study a regular part of their lives.
- Email the group with the single message, Christ is risen! Be prepared for responses like, He is risen indeed, or He certainly is.
- Consider those in your life who need to hear the message of salvation and plan to share the gospel with them this week.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As an option for Focus Attention, display pictures of several national icons that draw people’s attention (i.e., Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, Mount Rushmore, Golden Gate Bridge). Ask: List and rank awe-inspiring sights you have seen. What caused the feelings of awe? (PSG, p. 60)

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To enhance the discussion of the angels at the tomb, use a Bible dictionary to research and share information about the presence of angels in the New Testament. For example, Luke wrote in Luke 2:8-14 about angels announcing Jesus’ birth to terrified shepherds, and in Luke 24:4-7 he wrote about angels appearing to confused women to explain Jesus’ resurrection.
- Use the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 65) to contrast the response of the apostles to the account of the women who visited the tomb to the response of the chief priests’ and Pharisees’ recollection of Jesus’ words: Read Matthew 27:62-66. The chief priests and Pharisees remembered Jesus’ words. What steps did they take to ensure that Jesus’ body stayed in the tomb? Read Matthew 28:11-15. To what extent did the Jewish leaders go to discredit the reports that Jesus had been raised from the dead? How effective were their efforts in changing the reports about Jesus’ resurrection?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Guide the group to read and discuss the second question set on page 67 of the PSG: Discuss ways people today are guilty of forgetting the words of Jesus. How can you and the members of your Bible study hold one another accountable for remembering and obeying Jesus’ words?

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Lead the group in a responsive reading of Charles Wesley’s “Hymn for Easter Day” (known today as “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today”). Read the text and invite the group to chime in with the alleluias.
Secured

All who accept the gospel have a sure hope for a future as children of God.

Session 8

Romans 8:12-25

Memory Verse: Romans 8:1

**READ** Romans 8:1-39, First Thoughts (p. 82), and Understand the Context (pp. 82–83). As you read Romans 8:12-25, note the image Paul depicts of the glorious future for God’s children.

**STUDY** Romans 8:12-25, using Explore the Text (pp. 83–87). Complete the Bible Skill activity on page 82 for Romans 8:23. To dig deeper into the Scripture passage, use the Explore the Bible Adult Commentary, found in print or digital format at LifeWay.com.

**PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 88–89), More Ideas (p. 90), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Look for ways to further connect any guests who return from last week’s Easter session.

**GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

**GATHER** the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; □ Prepared index cards for the opposites activity (p. 88); and □ Two prepared posters that say “Creation Restored (Romans 8:19-22)” and “Humanity Restored (Romans 8:23-25)” (p. 89). Prepare to display: □ PACK ITEM 2 (Outline of Romans); and □ PACK ITEM 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans). Make copies of □ PACK ITEM 13 (Handout: Key Words in Romans).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

When a buyer borrows money from an institution, he signs a contract. At that point, the buyer is under obligation to the lender. If he does not keep the terms of the contract, a penalty will be assessed. Unable to fulfill the law of sin and death, we were under its penalty. However, Jesus died on the cross as our sin offering, releasing us from the penalty of sin and death. Paul reminded us that we have no obligation to live according to the flesh. We are free to be guided by the Spirit.

(In PSG, p. 68) How would you describe the emotions that come with signing a loan agreement? How does paying off a loan free you?

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**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**ROMANS 8:1-39**

Romans 8 is one of the great chapters in the Bible. It begins with the promise that “there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” (8:1) and ends with the promise that nothing in all of creation “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39). In this chapter Paul highlighted the role of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification and in our assurance of salvation.

The first part of the chapter focuses on the role of the law and the role of the Spirit. The law, weakened by sinful flesh, could not fulfill God’s righteous requirements. However, God sent His Son as our sin offering so that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in those who walk according to the Spirit. Paul laid out two possible ways to live: according to the flesh and according to the Spirit. Living according to the flesh sets one’s mind on the things of the flesh and results in death. Living according to the Spirit sets one’s mind on the things of the Spirit and results in life and peace. The person living according to the flesh is hostile to God and cannot please Him. The person living according to the Spirit has the Spirit living within. Only those who are children of God have the Spirit of God, and the Spirit produces life and righteousness in the believer.

Those who are led by God’s Spirit are adopted children of God, and as such, they are heirs with God and coheirs with Jesus. Our status as heirs means we share in the suffering that results from living in a world marred by sin as we wait patiently for the fulfillment of God’s salvation.

Paul provided a reminder of the role of the Holy Spirit in representing the believer before God. When we do not know what to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us to the Father. When things look bleak, God works things together for our benefit, just as He works to complete our salvation.
Paul ended this chapter and this section of Romans by returning to his theme of no condemnation for those in Christ. He answered his rhetorical question, “Who can bring an accusation against God’s elect?” (v. 33), with a resounding no one. Just as there is no one who can condemn, so also there is no one who can separate us from God’s love. It is hard to imagine a chapter that more fully lays out our blessings as believers.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

ETERNAL FUTURE (ROM. 8:12-13)

VERSES 12-13
The connection between this verse and the preceding verses is very strong (so then). Earlier, Paul had contrasted a life lived in the flesh and a life lived in the Spirit: “Now the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). Because the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead lives in the believer, that Spirit will bring life to the believer (8:11). The Spirit of Christ living in believers (8:9) means we are not obligated to the flesh.

The Greek word translated obligated can refer to someone who is in debt financially or to someone who is under moral obligation. Here Paul obviously meant the latter sense. Paul used the Greek word translated flesh twenty-six times in the Letter to the Romans; thirteen of those are found in the first thirteen verses of this chapter. For Paul, the word “flesh” referred not just to our physical appetites but also to the entirety of life in a world that is in rebellion to God. As believers, we are under no obligation to live according to the flesh. Our obligation is to the Spirit of God within us.

Paul contrasted two different lifestyles, using two “if-then” sentences. If you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. Paul must have been talking about spiritual, eschatological death, not physical death, since physical death will be the fate of both believers and nonbelievers who are not still alive when Jesus returns. This death will involve God’s final judgment on sin and the eternal punishment that will accompany it. On the contrary, if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. The deeds of the body are those acts of the flesh that are done according to the flesh. Again, this life is not physical but spiritual and eternal life. Believers are able to put these deeds to death because of the Spirit working within them (by the Spirit).

(12) So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

What does living by the Spirit look like? How is living by the Spirit connected to living in eternity?

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ETERNAL INHERITANCE (ROM. 8:14-18)

**VERSES 14-15**

14 For all those led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons. 15 You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father!”

**VERSES 16-17**

16 The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children, and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.
power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). On his first missionary trip, after having been stoned and left for dead, Paul encouraged new believers to remain strong in their faith: “It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

The present suffering believers must endure pales in comparison with the glory yet to be revealed.

**VERSE 18**
Paul’s evaluation of his present situation was not the result of wishful thinking. The present suffering believers must endure pales in comparison with the glory yet to be revealed. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul said it this way: “For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). While suffering never seems light while we are enduring it, the glory awaiting us is beyond our ability to comprehend.

In what ways does our position as adopted children of God affect the ways we relate to God? How does Hebrews 4:14-15 fit with our status as children of God?

**CREATION RESTORED** (ROM. 8:19-22)

**VERSES 19-21**
The suffering Paul described was not just human suffering; when Adam sinned, God cursed the ground because of Adam (Gen. 3:17). Paul pictured all of creation waiting with eager anticipation for restoration. When writing to the Philippian believers, Paul used the same Greek word to express his “eager expectation and hope” that he would not be ashamed but that Christ would be honored in his life (Phil. 1:20). On the day when God’s sons will be revealed, believers will see in God’s glory the true nature of what it means to be a child of God. The whole creation will be involved, as we wait eagerly for the curse to be reversed.

The Greek word translated futility in verse 20 describes a state of being that fulfills no purpose or has no use. The cause of this futility lay not in some fault in creation but in sin, which led creation to be subjected unwillingly to this futility. Creation was the victim of the sinful choices of the first couple. God’s subjection of creation to futility refers to the curse God placed on the ground in judgment for Adam’s sin (Gen 3:17-19). However, the subjection of creation to futility was not God’s final word; if it had been, there would be no hope.

Hope is possible because God will set free creation itself. The phrase translated bondage to decay describes the current state of fallen creation.
The creation, enslaved to decay and corruption, will one day be set free. The goal of that freedom will be the glorious freedom of God’s children. Paul envisioned the renewal and restoration of God’s creation. Because of their sin, the very ones whom God had appointed as stewards of His glorious creation (Gen. 1:26-28) were responsible for its slavery to decay. However, God promised a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22) in which righteousness will dwell (2 Pet. 3:13).

VERSE 22
22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now.

VERSE 22
Exactly what Paul meant by the phrase the whole creation is not clear. Paul may have been referring to both human and nonhuman creation suffering together. In this case, Paul would have been referring to the entire world and the people who inhabit it. However, in verse 23 Paul seems to have distinguished human suffering from the suffering of God’s nonhuman creation (everything created before the creation of humans). Therefore, Paul probably was referring in verse 22 to the created order of this earth—all of those things that humans were charged with overseeing (Gen. 1–2).

Paul’s description of the whole creation groaning together with labor pains brings to mind the curse Eve received in connection to childbirth (Gen. 3:16). This suffering was going on right up to the time that Paul was writing (until now) and is still going on today. However, just as the result of suffering in childbirth is the birth of a new human being (John 16:21), so the suffering of creation will result in freedom from bondage to decay when the children of God are revealed in glorious freedom. The present fallen world will one day be replaced with a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1).

As believers, how should we relate to the physical world in which we live?

VERSE 23
23 Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

VERSE 23
What Paul said about creation he now applied to believers. Just as creation groans together, so we as believers groan within ourselves. Our bodies are susceptible to the same decay as the rest of creation. We experience hardship and suffering as the result of bodies crippled by sin and relationships too often characterized by ego and pride. However, we have the Spirit as the firstfruits. Just as the first crops to be harvested were a sign of the full harvest to follow, believers have the Holy Spirit as a sign of what is to come. In writing to the Ephesians, Paul made the same point with a different image. There, the Holy Spirit was described as the down payment for the believer’s full inheritance to come (Eph. 1:14).
During this time of frustration and groaning, believers are **eagerly waiting for adoption**. Earlier, Paul had said believers already have the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15-17). Some have tried to alleviate the tension by suggesting that at present believers have only the Spirit, not adoption itself. But in the preceding verses Paul made it abundantly clear that believers are, in fact, children of God. We live in a fallen world in which we do not yet see what we will be when Christ returns again (1 John 3:2). Here we see the already/not yet of the gospel. We are in fact adopted children of God, and the Holy Spirit is the sign that when our glorious freedom as God’s children is fully revealed, we will see Him as He really is.

**In that day God will free our bodies from decay and corruption.**

Paul described adoption as the **redemption of our bodies**. In that day God will free our bodies from decay and corruption. Paul could speak of redemption as something we already possess (“In him we have redemption,” Eph. 1:7) and as something we are yet to receive (“until the redemption of the possession,” Eph. 1:14).

**VERSES 24-25**

In verse 24 Paul returned to the concept of hope he had introduced earlier (Rom. 8:20). Hope, by its nature, is something that is not yet received: **hope that is seen is not hope**. Once we have received what we hoped for, we no longer hope. It makes no sense to hope for something you already have. Yet Paul was able to say that **in this hope we were saved** (past tense).

Although we have been saved, given the Spirit as firstfruits, and adopted into God’s family as beloved children, we still live in a fallen world, waiting for the full completion of our salvation when we receive our glorified bodies and dwell in heaven with the Lord forever. That is the unseen thing for which we hope; **we eagerly wait for it with patience**. The word translated patience describes the capacity to bear up under difficult circumstances. As believers, we need to approach the suffering and trials of this present life with patience as we eagerly wait for the fulfillment of our salvation.

**What are some specific ways the Spirit as firstfruits helps us as we wait patiently for Jesus’ return?**
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

MATCH: In advance, write one word listed below for each opposite on an index card and prepare enough for one card per participant. Here are enough words for sixteen cards:

MALE — FEMALE     HIGH — LOW     BIG — SMALL     TALL — SHORT
NEAR — FAR         UP — DOWN      YOUNG — OLD      CLEAR — FOGGY

As the group arrives, give each person an index card. Ask them not to show it to anyone and wait for instructions. Once everyone has arrived and cards are distributed, instruct the group to find the person who has the opposite of their card. Once matches are made, explain: Contrasting the differences between your two cards is one approach to describing each one. It also can be used to frame a discussion. In this session we will see how Paul contrasts opposites to explain a spiritual truth.

TRANSITION: Point out the context of today’s passage using Pack Item 2 (Outline of Romans) and Pack Item 7 (Handout: Romans Time Line). Use the information from Understand the Context (pp. 82–83; PSG, p. 69) to summarize what Paul covered in Romans 8.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Paul began Romans 8 by explaining that those who have accepted God’s grace are His children. They no longer live under God’s condemnation (Rom. 8:1-2). God has given His Spirit to help them live according to His desires (Rom. 8:3-4) and with confidence that He is actively working in their lives (Rom. 8:5-11).

READ: Instruct a volunteer to read Romans 8:12-13, and invite the rest of the group to listen for the contrast between living according to the flesh and living by the Spirit.

DEFINE: Call attention to Pack Item 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans). Identify the word flesh on the poster. Then read the definition of flesh on Pack Item 13 (Handout: Key Words in Romans). Explain: In Romans 8:12-13, Paul declares that those who live in the flesh are going to die, but those who live by the Spirit will enjoy a much different eternal existence.

ASK: What does it mean to “live according to the flesh” (v. 13)? How can we know when we’re living by the flesh or by the Spirit?

GUIDE: What titles do you hold in your family that identify relationships you have with other members? After the group has shared, ask: What rights and responsibilities go along with each of those titles?

TRANSITION: Just as we have responsibilities and privileges in our families, we are accountable to God for what He expects from us.
READ: Read Romans 8:14-18, and instruct the group to listen for the relationship Paul identified between God and those who follow the Spirit. Lead the group to contrast the difference between “spirit of slavery” and “Spirit of adoption” in verse 15. Highlight the significance of calling out to God as “Abba, Father!”

DISCUSS: What are the benefits of being children of God based on verses 16-18? (testimony of the Spirit, full membership in God’s family, glorified with Christ) If you had to describe being a child of God in one word, what would it be? What single word would you use to describe being separated from Him? (PSG, p. 72)

TRANSITION: Prepare two posters (or create columns on a board): Creation Restored (Romans 8:19-22) and Humanity Restored (Romans 8:23-25). Display each poster to introduce the following sections of today’s text.

READ: Display the Creation Restored poster, and ask: What happened that resulted in the need for creation to be restored? Read Genesis 1:31 followed by Genesis 3:17. Explain that creation became collateral damage as a result of humanity’s sin. Invite a volunteer to read Romans 8:19-22.

EXAMINE: Where do you see the impact of sin on nature? What can you do to be a better steward of God’s creation? (PSG, p. 74)

READ: Paul used the imagery of childbirth to depict the restoration process. The stress and strain that marks the current situation point to an incredible new birth. This is true for creation and humanity. Display the Humanity Restored poster, and read Romans 8:23-25.

IDENTIFY: What are the characteristics of hope as explained by Paul in verses 24-25? (secures salvation, real but unseen, requires patience)

DISCUSS: How does the groaning of creation compare to our groaning for renewal? (PSG, p. 75)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

SUMMARIZE: Read today’s memory verse (Rom. 8:1). Encourage the group to memorize the verse as a reminder of the saving act of God through Jesus Christ to which Paul referred.

CHALLENGE: Using the third set of questions under In My Context, invite the group to discuss the connection between our hope and our witness. Ask: Discuss as a group the connection between our hope and our witness. How can you and the members of your Bible study learn to more effectively share His hope with others? (PSG, p. 76)

PRAY: Lead in a prayer of commitment to live according to the Spirit until death or the time when creation and humanity have been restored.
PRACTICE

• Contact those present for this session, reminding them of the constant challenge of dealing with the flesh. Encourage them to faithfully take the actions they identified in their daily routines.

• Follow up with answers to questions that came up during group time that were not adequately addressed.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
As an option for Focus Attention, ask: How would you describe the emotions that come with signing a loan agreement? How does paying off a loan free you? (PSG, p. 68) Say: In this session, Paul reminds us that we are free to be guided by the Spirit, assured of a glory beyond our ability to comprehend.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• To introduce the text, direct the group to read Romans 8:12-25, underlining words and phrases that describe a believer’s future. Ask: Why was it so important for Paul to remind his readers of the believer’s future? (PSG, p. 69)

• To supplement Romans 8:12-13, read Titus 2:11-13. Ask: How did Titus describe the way a believer should live? Note that Paul included this element in his expectations for Christian living. Ask: What does living by the Spirit look like? How is living by the Spirit connected to living in eternity? (PSG, p. 70)

• Report on your use of the Bible Skill activity for Romans 8:23 and invite the input from those in the group who may have used the activity: Focus on the phrase “redemption of our bodies” in Romans 8:23. Compare the phrase in several trusted Bible translations. Jot down the various renderings of the term that you find. Using a Bible dictionary, review articles on our future hope. Scan passages listed and make notes of any findings that help you better understand the meaning. (PSG, p. 74)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Call for a volunteer to read aloud the Summary Statements under In My Context on page 76 of the PSG. Invite the group to contemplate what it means for believers to rest in the knowledge of these statements. Ask: Which of these challenges you the most today? Explain.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
Each stanza of “How Firm a Foundation,” from John Rippon’s Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors, is based on a biblical promise of security for the future of the children of God. Read each stanza, and invite the group to paraphrase it in contemporary language. Conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving for the salvation provided through Christ to all who believe.
SALVATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN GRANTED THROUGH FAITH.

SESSION 9

ROMANS 10:5-15
MEMORY VERSE: ROMANS 10:9

READ Romans 9:1–10:21, First Thoughts (p. 92), and Understand the Context (pp. 92–93). As you read Romans 10:5-15, note Paul’s use of Old Testament Scripture to present God’s message of salvation.

STUDY Romans 10:5-15, using Explore the Text (pp. 93–97). Throughout the text for this session, Paul quoted the Old Testament. Study each in their original context. Use Explore the Bible Adult Commentary found in print or digital format at LifeWay.com to aid your understanding of the passage.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 98–99) and More Ideas (p. 100). Plan to use the Suggested Music Idea (p. 100). Consult QuickSource for additional questions you can use in leading the discussion and an Object Lesson idea for the study.

GAIN insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploretheBible) or on iTunes.

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; and □ A prepared poster. (See p. 98 for instructions.) Prepare to display: □ PACK ITEM 2 (Outline of Romans); □ PACK ITEM 3 (Poster: The Romans Road); □ PACK ITEM 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans); and □ PACK ITEM 6 (Key Verse: Romans 10:9). Make copies of: □ PACK ITEM 10 (Handout: Doctrinal Emphases in Paul’s Letters); □ PACK ITEM 11 (Handout: The Romans Road); and □ PACK ITEM 13 (Handout: Key Words in Romans).
FIRST THOUGHTS

People try all kinds of things to be right with God. In some cultures, sacrifices are offered to appease the gods. People bathe in sacred rivers and meditate on sacred mountains. Others bow down before statues and burn incense. Paul answered this age-old question. Salvation is available only to those who call upon Jesus. Our salvation is rooted in the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus and available only through His completed work on the cross.

(In PSG, p. 77) What are some ways people try to gain God’s favor? Why do people try to gain His favor?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 9:1–10:21

Paul ended chapter 8 with a magnificent climax to his discussion of the believer’s status in Christ. Those who have been freely justified by faith in Jesus stand in a special relationship with God. Because God is for us, no one can stand against us (Rom 8:31). Paul asked and answered the question as to who could possibly separate the believer from God’s love (8:35); no one can (8:39). At this point Paul might have been expected to move into the application of his theology, something he did later in chapter 12. However, Paul had earlier made the point that Jews who rejected the gospel would not find the righteousness that comes through faith. One who was circumcised inwardly, whose heart was circumcised, was a true Jew (2:28-29). Paul then raised the question of the Jews’ advantage (3:1). That question is the focus of chapters 9–11: How did the Jews’ rejection of the gospel affect God’s promises to the nation of Israel?

Some Bible teachers have argued that chapters 9–11 were added by Paul as an afterthought, serving as a digression before he returned again to his main point in chapter 12. However, for Paul, the gospel and the Old Testament were intricately linked. About one-third of the content of chapters 9–11 comes from Old Testament quotations. Israel’s role as God’s chosen people was rooted in the Old Testament: “The Lord your God has chosen you to be his own possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth” (Deut. 7:6). In these chapters, Paul reconciled the role of Israel as a chosen people, who, for the most part, rejected the gospel preached by Paul and the status of Gentile believers who came to God through faith in Jesus’ completed work on the cross.

This week’s session focuses on the first two chapters of this section. Paul began this section with a heartfelt expression of his desire that his people...
be saved, listing the benefits that God had given the Jews (Rom. 9:1-5). Paul pointed out that Israel’s situation was not the result of a failure of God’s word (9:6). God had chosen one of Abraham’s sons (Isaac) over the other and had chosen Jacob over Esau. God chose in His sovereignty, and His choices were just (9:14). As creatures we must accept the fact that we don’t always understand God’s plans and purpose (9:20-21). Paul ended this chapter with quotations from Hosea and Isaiah, emphasizing God’s establishing His people and preserving a remnant (9:25-29).

After examining God’s sovereignty in the situation, Paul looked at Israel’s culpability in their failure. Israel’s problem was that they did not pursue righteousness by faith but by works (9:32). Paul once again expressed his strong desire that his people be saved (10:1). Not recognizing that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (10:4), they did not submit to God’s righteousness (10:3). Based on the completed work of Christ on the cross, one must confess and believe in order to be saved. Paul emphasized that the gospel is for all people and the need for messengers to proclaim the good news. Paul closed out chapter 10 with the acknowledgment that Israel, as a whole, had not been obedient to the gospel. As God said, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and defiant people” (10:21).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONFESS AND BELIEVE (ROM. 10:5-10)

VERSE 5
Paul explained why Jesus was “the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4). He had just contrasted the righteousness of God with their own righteousness (10:3). In this section he continued that contrast, referring to the righteousness that is from the law and “the righteousness that comes from faith” (10:6).

Paul quoted from Leviticus 18:5 to make his point. In its original context, this verse was part of God’s warning to the people of Israel not to imitate the behavior of either the Egyptians, whom they had left, or the Canaanites, to whose land they were going. The following verses in Leviticus 18 provide a list of behaviors that the Israelites were to avoid. To achieve the blessing of living in the land to which God was leading them, they must be obedient to God’s commands. God was driving the Canaanites from the land because of their despicable behavior; Israelites who imitated that behavior would be cut off from His people (18:24-30).

God’s blessings were contingent on Israel’s obedience, a point frequently made elsewhere in the Old Testament (Deut. 5:32–6:3). However, Israel rebelled and did not keep the Lord’s commands (Ezek. 20:10-13).
VERSES 6-7

In each of these verses, Paul quoted from the Old Testament and then used a phrase introduced by **that is** to explain and apply each quotation. In the first quotation Paul combined two passages from Deuteronomy. The phrase **do not say in your heart** is a quotation from Deuteronomy 9:4. God warned the Israelites that when He delivered them safely into the land of Canaan, they were not to claim that He did this because of their own righteousness. Israel had done nothing to deserve God’s gracious choice. This context fits well with Paul’s warning against a righteousness based on our own effort.

The rest of Paul’s quotation was taken from Deuteronomy 30:11-14. In this section of Deuteronomy, Moses had warned Israel that God’s blessings came through obedience, and disobedience brought cursing. Moses warned the people they would disobey and be punished, but God would bring them back from the lands to which He had driven them (30:1-3). When Israel returned, God would circumcise their hearts, and they would obey Him with all of their hearts (30:6). The section quoted here (Who will go up to heaven?) was used by Moses to impress on Israel their ready access to the command of God. Israel did not need someone to go up to heaven to bring God’s command back down. In the same way, Paul reminded his readers that Christ had already come down from heaven, and believers had access to Him through faith.

Paul next asked, **Who will go down into the abyss?** The text in Deuteronomy 30:13 reads, “Who will cross the sea?” Abyss can refer to the deep parts of the sea. Paul may have changed the horizontal direction found in Deuteronomy to a vertical direction that fit the point he was making. His point was that Jesus had already been raised from the dead, so no one was needed to bring Him back from the dead. These two quotations emphasize the completed work of Christ in the incarnation and resurrection. No further deed was necessary.

VERSES 8-9

On the contrary, what does it say? After explaining what the righteousness based on faith did not say, Paul turned to what it did say. Just as Moses had reminded Israel that God’s commands were not a hidden, inaccessible secret, Paul made the same point about the righteousness based on faith: **The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.** God’s message of faith has been brought near in Christ. Paul made a similar point when he wrote to the Ephesians: “But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13). All that remains is a response of faith to the message of faith.

Paul further explained the message of faith he had been proclaiming by using two elements from Deuteronomy 30:14 (mouth and heart). Confessing with the mouth and believing in the heart are not two separate steps in the process of salvation but rather two aspects of a single confession of faith. Paul’s order in this verse reflects the order in Deuteronomy 30:14, but he reversed the order in verse 10, probably indicating that the order was not significant.

The Greek word translated **confess** means to agree that something is true. The believer publicly agrees with other believers that **Jesus is Lord.** The declaration **Jesus is Lord** is one of the oldest confessions of faith in the
early church. The Greek word translated Lord was frequently used in the Greek Old Testament for the personal name of God (Yahweh). This outward confession was rooted in the personal belief that Jesus was no longer dead: believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is foundational for the Christian faith. Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, “And if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain, and so is your faith” (1 Cor. 15:14). This belief is not just intellectual assent but an abiding faith commitment that affects our whole being.

When writing to the Philippians, Paul tied Jesus’ incarnation (“he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant,” Phil. 2:7) and God’s exaltation of Him (2:9) with the universal recognition of Jesus as Lord: “and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (2:11). Paul’s point in Philippians was that a time will come when it will no longer be possible to deny Jesus’ lordship. For many that recognition will come too late. Here in Romans Paul urged unbelievers to confess and believe while salvation was still possible.

VERSE 10
Paul provided the reason for confessing and believing. The order of the two phrases (one believes with the heart and one confesses with the mouth) is reversed from the previous verse, probably indicating that Paul saw no special significance in the order. In the previous verse, Paul taught that the one who confessed and believed would be saved. Here Paul expanded that idea, stating that belief resulted in righteousness and confession resulted in salvation. While it is possible to make a distinction between righteousness and salvation, that does not appear to have been Paul’s point here. Just as confessing and believing are two aspects of a single act of faith, so also righteousness and salvation are two ways of describing the new relationship with God that a believer enters through faith in the risen Lord.

(In PSG, p. 79) How might the idea of gaining righteousness from the law be expressed today? What is the appeal of earning salvation when we can have it for free?

VERSE 11-12
Paul again turned to Scripture to validate his connection between faith and salvation. Earlier he had turned to Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 to explain why Israel had faltered in their pursuit of righteousness. They sought righteousness by works rather than by faith, and they stumbled over the rock who was Christ (Rom. 9:31-33). Here Paul turned to the last phrase in Isaiah 28:16 to emphasize the believer’s security in Christ. The Greek word translated put to shame was used in Romans 5:5 to describe that

VERSES 11-12
11 For the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame, 12 since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord of all richly blesses all who call on him.

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“this hope will not disappoint.” No one who puts his faith in Christ will ever have reason to be disappointed in Him.

No one who puts his faith in Christ will ever have reason to be disappointed in Him.

Paul once again returned to the relationship between Jews and Gentiles: **there is no distinction between Jew and Greek.** Paul had used this phrase earlier in his letter to demonstrate that both Jews and Greeks had sinned and both were justified freely through faith (3:22-24). Here Paul made the point that both Jews and Greeks have the same Lord over them, and that the Lord **richly blesses all who call on him.** Not only will everyone who believes on Jesus not be ashamed, but those who believe can call upon a gracious Lord who will bless them richly. In writing to the Ephesians, Paul tied the riches of God’s blessing to our forgiveness of sin: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he richly poured out on us with all wisdom and understanding” (Eph. 1:7-8). These blessings are available to all who call on Jesus.

**VERSE 13**

Paul once more turned to the Old Testament with a quotation that emphasized the universal availability of salvation: **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.** (See Joel 2:32.) In its original context this quotation comes at the end of a description of God’s pouring out His Spirit on the Day of the Lord (2:28-31), a passage quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost to explain the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17-21). In Joel 2:32, the **name of the Lord** was an obvious reference to God the Father. However, Paul applied the verse to Jesus. One of the ways Bible writers demonstrated the deity of Jesus was by applying names originally meant for God to Jesus as well. Paul used the same idea of calling on the **name** in his hymn in Philippians 2:9-11, where the name above every name is the name of Jesus.

Paul emphasized that the gospel is for all people. Everyone, regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic background, has equal access to the gospel. In what ways does your church reflect this diversity of background? What are you doing to make it possible for everyone to respond in faith to the gospel message?
TELL ALL (ROM. 10:14-15)

VERSES 14-15

If everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved, then it is necessary for everyone to have access to the gospel. In this section Paul used four rhetorical questions, each beginning with the word how. Each question builds off of the previous question by repeating the verb from the preceding question (call on ... believe/believe ... hear/hear ... preach/preach ... sent). The series of questions begins with the goal of calling on the Lord and works backward to sending. Paul then closed the section with another quotation from the Old Testament.

The first question takes up the theme of calling on the Lord that was developed in the previous verses. A person must believe in the Lord before that person can call on Him. But belief is possible only if that person has heard about the One in whom he must believe. Hearing requires a herald who will share the message with which he has been entrusted.

The final question points out the necessity of sending heralds to those who have not heard. Paul had received his own commission from the Lord, and he and Barnabas had been sent out by the church in Antioch. In the opening of Romans, Paul described his commission in this way: he had received “grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the Gentiles” (Rom. 1:5).

Those who proclaim the good news of the gospel have a timely message.

In its original context, the quotation from Isaiah 52:7 was part of the prophecy that referred to heralds who brought the good news of Israel’s deliverance from Babylonian captivity. However, in later Judaism the passage was applied to the coming of the Messiah. The Greek word that is translated beautiful can also mean “timely.” Those who proclaim the good news of the gospel have a timely message. The point of this Old Testament quotation was to provide scriptural confirmation for the necessity of preaching. The church has a responsibility not only to proclaim the gospel wherever we are but also to commission those who can go out to the ends of the earth to preach to those who have never heard. Just as Paul received financial assistance from established churches (one thinks immediately of the church in Philippi), churches today have an obligation to provide support, both financial and emotional, in fulfilling this great commission.

What can your church do to send proclaimers to those who have not heard?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, create three teams. (A person can be a team.) Assign each team one of the following: family, friends, and coworkers. Instruct each team to answer this question based on their assigned word: What are some practical ways to gain favor with your _______? Allow time for teams to generate several ideas, and then call for each team to report their thoughts. After all have reported, ask: What are some ways people try to gain God’s favor? Why do people try to gain His favor? (PSG, p. 77)

TRANSITION: Point out the context of today’s passage using Pack Item 2 (Outline of Romans) and Pack Item 10 (Handout: Doctrinal Emphases in Paul’s Letters). Then explain: In the section of Romans for this session, Paul explained what brings favor to God. God desires a right relationship with all humanity. God offers salvation as a means of reconciliation, and salvation is and has always been available to all people through faith in Jesus.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Romans consists of two distinct sections: chapters 1–8 build a theological framework for salvation; chapters 12–16 address practical challenges of Christian living. In between these two sections, Paul included an extended sidebar (an excursus). Chapters 9–11 focus on the role of the Jews under the new covenant based on faith. While the old covenant was based on a sacrificial system, Jesus’ death had ushered in a new era. Paul believed the original chosen people continued to have a role in God’s kingdom if they believed in Christ.

CONTRAST: Paul stated in Romans 10:4 that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” In verse 5, Paul contrasted the law and faith using the words of Moses.

EXPLAIN: Instruct a volunteer to read Leviticus 18:5, and call for the group to identify how individuals could earn righteousness from the law. Then say: Paul then contrasted that idea in verses 6-7 using Moses’ words related to the law and applying them to the work of Christ. Invite a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 30:12-14.

READ: Building upon this foundation, read Romans 10:5-10, and ask the group to identify the action verbs. Ask: How do these action verbs help you understand what is required for salvation? (PSG, p. 78)

DEFINE: In verse 8, Paul linked Moses’ Old Testament message to the message of faith (the gospel) he has been proclaiming. Call attention to Pack Item 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans) and Pack Item 13 (Handout: Key Words in Romans). Identify the word gospel and read its definition.

ILLUSTRATE: Display the poster in the image of a coin representing the gospel. Call attention to the two sides of the coin: one side shows a person’s mouth and the words Confess and Salvation; the other side shows a heart and the words Believe and Righteousness. Ask: Based on verses 9-10, why is this a good representation of the gospel? How would you describe the relationship between confess and believe? Why are both necessary?
**DEFINE:** In verse 10, Paul said a person gains salvation through believing and confessing. Identify the word salvation on Pack Item 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans). Ask from the PSG (p. 79): What is the appeal of earning salvation when we can have it for free?

**HIGHLIGHT:** Call attention to Pack Item 3 (Poster: The Romans Road) and distribute Pack Item 11 (Handout: The Romans Road). Romans 10:9-10 (along with verse 13) includes the fourth milestone along the road answering the question, How do we receive salvation? Call attention to Pack Item 6 (Key Verse: Romans 10:9) and remind the group that Romans 10:9 is the memory verse for this session. Invite a volunteer to read aloud verses 9-10 and 13.

**TRANSITION:** Paul shifted to identifying who can receive salvation.

READ: Before a volunteer reads aloud Romans 10:11-13, explain that Paul based his message on the words of the prophets Isaiah (Isa. 28:16) and Joel (Joel 2:32) to say that everyone, Jew and Greek, who calls on the name of Jesus will receive salvation.

DISCUSS: What makes salvation through faith in Jesus being offered to all so wonderful and so difficult at the same time? (PSG, p. 83)

READ: Read Romans 10:14-15, and invite the group to note the progression in Paul’s questions.

STUDY: Use the information under Verse 14 on pages 83–84 in the PSG to explain Paul’s use of rhetorical questions.

HIGHLIGHT: Emphasize the statement on page 84 of the PSG: Gospel witnesses are sent into the world. They don’t wait for people to come find them in sanctuaries on Sunday.

DISCUSS: What makes the feet of a person who shares the gospel beautiful? (PSG, p. 84) How has your perspective on sharing the gospel changed as a result of today’s conversation?

**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)**

REVIEW: Call for a volunteer to read aloud the Summary Statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 85). Invite the group to contemplate living out these statements as believers. Ask: Which of these challenges you the most today? Explain.

CHALLENGE: Answer the third set of questions under In My Context (PSG, p. 85): Believers can support missions through praying, giving, and going. How can you participate more actively in each of those areas? What obstacles do you need to overcome?

PRAY: Invite the group to read together the Key Doctrine (Salvation) for this session (PSG, p. 83). Encourage volunteers to vocally offer a brief prayer of commitment to live daily lives that reflect the gift of salvation.
PRACTICE

• Email the group, encouraging anyone with doubts or questions about their faith to talk with you or another church leader.

• Prayerfully consider those you know who need to hear the gospel and make plans to share with them this week.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As an option for Focus Attention, guide the group to identify the different ways cultures have attempted to find favor with their belief in a higher being. Use the introduction in the Personal Study Guide on page 77 to fuel the discussion.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• To supplement Romans 10:5, ask: How might the idea of gaining righteousness from the law be expressed today? (PSG, p. 79)

• In addition to Explore the Text: Transition, invite the group to define everyone. Encourage the group to use the word in a sentence as one way to define it. Also invite them to share other words that might be used synonymously for everyone.

• In verse 15, Paul used the words of Isaiah (read Isa. 52:7) to express God’s favor with those who share the gospel with others. Direct a volunteer to read Matthew 28:18-20, and instruct the group to compare Paul’s message in Romans with Jesus’ command to reach the world.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Close the session by using the second set of questions under In My Context, invite the group to identify who the “Gentiles” are in our culture (PSG, p. 85): Who are the “Gentiles” in our culture these days—not just ethnically, but maybe socially or economically? How can you and your Bible study members intentionally reach out to those groups this week?

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

The famed blind hymnist Fanny J. Crosby spent her later years living in a small apartment and ministering nearby in the Bowery in New York City, where every kind of vice flourished. A hymn she wrote earlier in life became her testimony as she went each day to “Rescue the Perishing.” Conclude the session by reading the lyrics.
SESSION 10

MERCY

The gospel continues to be offered to all people, Jews and Gentiles.

ROMANS 11:17-32

MEMORY VERSE: ROMANS 11:36

READ Romans 11:1-36, First Thoughts (p. 102), and Understand the Context (pp. 102–103). As you read Romans 11:17-32, note the ways Gentiles are in the same position as Jews when it comes to salvation.

STUDY Romans 11:17-32, using Explore the Text (pp. 103–107). Gain a deeper understanding of mercy using the Holman Bible Dictionary. Use Explore the Bible Adult Commentary, found in print or digital format at LifeWay.com, to aid your understanding of the passage.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 108–109) and More Ideas (p. 110). Look for ways of incorporating one of the More Ideas. Consult QuickSource for additional questions you can use in leading the discussion and an Object Lesson idea for the study.

GROW with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

GATHER the following items: Personal Study Guides; a small branch from a tree or shrub; a board and marker; and Equipment to share the YouTube® video in the Suggested Music Idea (p. 110). Prepare to display: PACK ITEM 2 (Outline of Romans). Make copies of: PACK ITEM 7 (Handout: Romans Time Line); and PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark).
FIRST THOUGHTS

Think back to when you were a kid. When the time came to choose players for kickball, how quickly were you picked? Were you one of the first or were you one of the last to be picked? All of us want to be included. The good news is God includes all who come to Him in faith. Paul reminded his readers that salvation through faith in Jesus is available to everyone.

(In PSG, p. 86) When was the last time you felt like you were on the outside looking in? What emotions does that stir up in your heart and mind?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 11:1-36

This chapter can be divided into two sections following the two rhetorical questions Paul asked. The first question was, “Has God rejected his people?” (Rom. 11:1). Paul’s answer was “Absolutely not! ... God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew” (vv. 1-2). Paul was a perfect example of a Jew whom God had not rejected. Paul next traced the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Elijah was convinced that he alone was left among God’s prophets; God informed Elijah that He had seven thousand prophets who had not bowed a knee to Baal. Elijah was far from alone (vv. 2-4). Paul concluded that, in the same way, God had preserved “a remnant chosen by grace” not by works (vv. 5-6).

The second section of this chapter answers the question, “Have they stumbled so as to fall?” Again, Paul’s short answer was “Absolutely not!” (11:11). God intended that the salvation offered to Gentiles by means of Israel’s transgression would make Israel jealous. Israel’s transgression had brought spiritual riches to the world and to the Gentiles, specifically reconciliation for the world. Their acceptance would result in life from death (v. 15).

The last half of the chapter was addressed specifically to the Gentiles: “Now I am speaking to you Gentiles” (v. 13). Paul desired that his own ministry to the Gentiles would be used by God as part of His purpose in making Israel jealous, resulting in the salvation of some of them. Paul’s purpose in explaining this mystery was to demonstrate to the Gentiles the utter futility of pride. The illustration of the cultivated olive tree and the wild olive tree was designed to explain God’s plan to include both believing Jews and believing Gentiles into the same root where both would grow together. The fact that many of the Jews had not accepted the gospel message of salvation through faith did not mean that God’s severity was His final answer. Through disobedience, God brought obedience; where there was no mercy, God brought mercy.

KEY DOCTRINE

God’s Purpose of Grace

Election is the glorious display of God’s sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility (Phil. 2:5-7).

BIBLE SKILL

Use a Bible dictionary to learn more about a practice.

Look up “graft” in a Bible dictionary. In what ways does Paul’s use of the illustration of grafting differ from the ancient practice of grafting? In what ways is Paul’s description similar? What points do you think Paul was making with this illustration?
Paul ended this section of his letter with a doxology praising God’s wisdom: “How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways!” (v. 33). Paul included three questions, the first two from Isaiah 40:13, the third probably from Job 41:3. No human being could stand before God as His advisor. God’s sovereign plan of salvation could be trusted to accomplish His sovereign will. Paul ended his discussion of the role of Israel in God’s plan with an acknowledgment of God’s sovereignty over all: “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen” (v. 36).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

BE HUMBLE (ROM. 11:17-21)

VERSES 17-18
Paul ended the preceding section with two analogies related to holiness. If the firstfruits and the root are holy, then the rest of the batch and the branches will be holy as well (Rom. 11:16). The image of the tree, specifically the process of grafting branches, provided Paul with the vehicle to demonstrate to the Gentiles the role of Israel in God’s plan and to warn the Gentiles against arrogance with respect to the Jews.

Paul’s two points of comparison were a cultivated olive tree and one that grew wild. The olive tree was occasionally used as a symbol for Israel and the image appeared on many of Israel’s coins. The branches that have been broken off were those unbelieving Jews who had rejected the gospel of faith. The phrase some of the branches was a reminder that not all of the branches had been removed. In place of the branches that had been removed, the branches of a wild olive tree had been grafted in among the original branches.

At this point, Paul’s example departs from common grafting practice. Generally, a shoot from the cultivated olive tree was grafted into the root of a wild olive tree. Wild olive trees did not produce quality fruit, but the stalk of the wild olive tree usually was harder and could better support the cultivated olive branch, which grew better fruit. Bible teachers have attempted to find theological reasons for Paul departing from the standard method of grafting. Paul likely changed the agricultural process to fit the chronology of the truth he was illustrating. The wild olive branches (the Gentiles) had been grafted into the cultivated olive tree (Israel), thus joining believing Israel as the people of God. As such, the Gentiles have come to share in the rich root of the cultivated olive tree, do not boast that you are better than those branches. But if you do boast—you do not sustain the root, but the root sustains you.

Paul’s primary point here was to discourage the Gentiles from boasting that they were superior to the Jews. Having experienced first hand God’s opening the door of salvation to the Gentiles, the danger existed that the Gentiles would begin to think God’s action somehow grew out of their own worth. God’s grafting in of the Gentiles was an act of pure grace, unmerited on the part of the Gentiles.
If the Gentiles were predisposed to boast, Paul had a reminder for them: you do not sustain the root, but the root sustains you. The root was not the Jewish people themselves, since both Jews and Gentiles were branches on the tree. Rather, the root referred to the patriarchs, particularly Abraham, who were the ones who received and passed on the promises of God given to Israel. Both believing Jews and believing Gentiles shared in the rich, spiritual nourishment of the root. This nourishment sustained the Gentiles, not the other way around.

VERSES 19-21

The Gentiles might have been tempted to say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” Paul granted the truth of that statement but challenged the inference that the Gentiles might be tempted to draw from it. The removal of some branches and the grafting in of others had only to do with faith. The unbelieving Jews were removed because of their unbelief, just as the believing Gentiles stood because of their faith. Rather than a point of pride that could lead to arrogance, Paul insisted that Gentiles should beware.

Paul exhorted the Gentiles to think about the situation in which the Jews found themselves. They had trusted the righteousness based on the law rather than the righteousness based on faith. Their lack of faith in the completed work of Christ on the cross led to their being broken off from the tree. Paul warned that if God did not spare these natural branches, the Gentiles could expect nothing less if they boasted in their own accomplishments rather than having faith in the gracious gift of Christ. Because salvation comes through faith alone, any arrogance or false pride toward those who have not believed is unwarranted.

Paul warned the believing Gentiles against the danger of arrogance in assuming they were better than the unbelieving Jews. How does Jesus’ story of the prayers of the Pharisee and tax collector (Luke 18:10-14) relate to Paul’s point in these verses?

VERSE 22

Therefore, consider God’s kindness and severity: severity toward those who have fallen but God’s kindness toward you—if you remain in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.
answered his rhetorical question about the Jews (“Have they stumbled so as to fall?”) with a resounding “Absolutely not!” (11:11). God’s purpose was to use the inclusion of the Gentiles to make Israel jealous.

God’s kindness was directed toward believing Gentiles (toward you). Paul’s point in this comparison becomes obvious at the end of the verse: believing Gentiles must remain in his kindness. Earlier in the letter, Paul had reminded the Jews that God’s kindness was meant to lead them to repentance (2:4). A hardened and unrepentant heart would inevitably lead them to God’s righteous judgment (2:5). As Paul had warned in the previous verse (11:21), an arrogant, unrepentant attitude would lead to the Gentiles being cut off.

VERSES 23-24
Paul emphasized the equal treatment of both Jew and Gentile. Just as the believing Gentiles were grafted into the olive tree, so Jews who do not remain in unbelief can be grafted back into the tree. Obviously, branches removed from a tree die and physically are not able to be grafted again. However, what is impossible for people is possible for God: God has the power to graft them in again.

Paul used a “how much more” argument to solidify his point. God had no trouble grafting the believing Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, into the cultivated olive tree. How much more will these—the natural branches—be grafted into their own olive tree? Underlying Paul’s argument was the assertion that there is only one tree, deeply rooted in God’s salvific action from Abraham to Jesus, into which both believing Jews and believing Gentiles are grafted.

God’s kindness and severity are seen in His activity both in salvation and in judgment. In what ways do we show our gratitude for God’s kindness that comes through faith?

BE AWARE (ROM. 11:25-32)

VERSE 25
Several issues in this section are difficult to understand, and various Bible teachers have interpreted them differently. However, Paul’s purpose in this section is clear; it is one he had stated earlier (11:20). He didn’t want the Gentile believers to be conceited. Having a proper perspective of the mystery God had revealed to Paul in Christ would rid these believers of the conceit they may have been tempted to feel toward unbelieving Jews.

Paul used the word mystery to refer to God’s plan of salvation that could only be understood by God’s revelation (16:25-26). When writing to the Ephesian believers, he explained the mystery as the inclusion of Gentiles into the body as coheirs (Eph. 3:3-7).
In Romans, the mystery relates directly to the salvation of Israel, specifically the partial hardening that has come upon Israel. This hardening was limited in scope; not every single member of Israel was hardened, as evidenced by the fact that not every branch was broken out of the cultivated olive tree (Rom. 11:17). The hardening was also limited in time. It will last until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Paul had earlier pointed out that one reason for the inclusion of the Gentiles was to make Israel jealous (11:11-15). Paul was convinced that God had not rejected His people Israel (11:1-2) and would continue to work with them.

VERSES 26-27

26 And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, The Deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. 27 And this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.

Salvation will always be through faith in Christ’s completed work on the cross.

However we interpret this verse, at least two things seem clear. First, the reference to Israel as a whole (all Israel) does not necessarily refer to every individual Jew. Second, however God works out the inclusion of Israel, salvation will always be through faith in Christ’s completed work on the cross. In chapter 3, Paul made abundantly clear that faith in Christ was the way for salvation for both Jew and Gentile.

Paul used a quotation from Isaiah to reinforce his point. In the context of Isaiah, God was the Deliverer who will come from Zion (Isa. 59:20). Paul applied this verse to Jesus, indicating his understanding of the unique relationship between the Father and the Son. Paul trusted God’s promise to remove ungodliness from Jacob through the Deliverer.

The promise of God’s covenant in Isaiah 59:21 brought to mind the forgiveness of sins, also promised by God. The last phrase of this quotation (when I take away their sins) probably echoes God’s promise of a covenant written on their hearts (Jer. 31:31-34). Some Bible teachers have suggested that Paul was echoing the promise of forgiveness recorded in Isaiah 27:9. In either case, the Deliverer of Jacob would provide forgiveness of sins through His death on the cross.
VERSES 28-29
Israel is both an enemy and a friend of God. **Regarding the gospel,** Israel had demonstrated itself to be God’s enemy because by and large it had rejected that gospel, opening the door for the Gentiles. Paul dealt with this aspect of Israel’s relationship in Romans 9:30–10:21.

On the other hand, with respect to the election of Israel as God’s chosen people, it is **loved because of the patriarchs.** Paul dealt with this in chapter 11. It is to the nourishing root of these patriarchs that the believing Gentiles have been grafted (11:17).

Paul grounded God’s love for Israel because of the patriarchs in the fact that **God’s gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable.** The Greek word translated irrevocable means to be without regret. The word is used only one other time in the New Testament, where it carries this meaning (2 Cor. 7:10). The calling probably refers to Israel’s status as the chosen people of God. The gifts may be a reference to the benefits associated with God’s calling, benefits that were summarized in Romans 9:4-5. God’s calling and gifts demonstrate clearly that God has not rejected His people (11:1).

VERSES 30-32
God’s calling and gifts for Israel are related to the disobedience and subsequent mercy received by the believing Gentiles. Formerly, the Gentiles had been disobedient to God and were separated from His promises (Eph. 2:11-12). However, Israel’s disobedience to God led to the Gentiles receiving **mercy.**

Just as the disobedience of the Jews led to mercy for the Gentiles, the Jews would receive mercy because of the mercy shown to the Gentiles. In God’s grace, disobedience led to obedience, and no mercy led to mercy. God used the disobedience of both the Jews and the Gentiles to bring mercy to both of them.

Paul used the same word imprisoned when he wrote to the Galatians, where he argued that Scripture had imprisoned everything under sin so the promise could be given on the basis of faith and under the law until the coming of faith (Gal. 3:22-23). Verse 32, taken out of context, has been used to argue for universalism: God imprisoned every single person so that He might show mercy to every single person. In the preceding verses, Paul had indicated how God brought mercy both to believing Gentiles and believing Jews. Here, Paul summarized how God used disobedience to achieve His mercy. The **all** must refer to both believing Gentiles and believing Jews. Those who were imprisoned in disobedience have found mercy in Christ.

**In light of Paul’s teaching about the partial hardening of Israel, how should the church approach unbelieving Jews?**

**VERSES 28-29**
28 Regarding the gospel, they are enemies for your advantage, but regarding election, they are loved because of the patriarchs, 29 since God’s gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable.

**VERSES 30-32**
30 As you once disobeyed God but now have received mercy through their disobedience, 31 so they too have now disobeyed, resulting in mercy to you, so that they also may now receive mercy. 32 For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may have mercy on all.
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

ENGAGE: Before the group arrives, arrange the seating so that two seats are distinctively outside the main circle of seats. As the group arrives, without any explanation, randomly select two people to sit in the seats outside the circle. Once everyone is in place, ask the group: When was the last time you felt like you were on the outside looking in? What emotions does that stir up in your heart and mind? (PSG, p. 86)

TRANSITION: Point out the context of today’s passage using Pack Item 2 (Outline of Romans) and Pack Item 7 (Handout: Romans Time Line). Say: In Romans 11, Paul informed his readers that salvation through faith in Jesus is open to everyone; no one is excluded.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Romans 9–11 consists of an excursus, or appendix, that focuses on the role of the Jews under the new covenant based on faith. Many Jews failed to see Jesus as the Messiah. Nevertheless, Paul believed that God had not given up on them. Paul believed that a remnant of faithful Israelites would embrace grace (11:5-6), and in time God’s work among the Gentiles would convince Israel to come back to God on His terms, not their own (11:11-16).

ILLUSTRATE: Display a small branch from a tree or shrub as a visual of the image Paul used of an olive tree. Say: Normally a farmer would grow some cultivated olive branches to graft into a wild tree. Paul reversed the order by grafting wild branches into the trunk of the olive tree.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Romans 11:13 to identify who Paul was addressing in these verses (Gentiles). Read Romans 11:17-21, and ask the group to identify what is represented in Paul’s use of the parts of the olive tree.

DISPLAY: Write the following on a poster or white board and add answers generated from the group: Broken off branches = (Jews); Wild olive branches = (Gentiles); Rich root = (God). Lead the group to explain the meaning and relationship of each part in Paul’s message to the Gentiles in these verses.

DISCUSS: Why was it important for Paul to remind the Gentile believers to refrain from boasting about their salvation?

EXPLAIN: Paul was reminding the Gentiles that their salvation was all about God’s grace and not about anything they accomplished or contributed. The Gentiles should express gratitude instead of pride.

ILLUSTRATE: Ask: What is a balance scale and how does one work? (For clarification, explain that two plates or bowls are suspended at equal distances from a pivot point; one plate holds an object of unknown weight while known objects are added to the other plate until the plates level off, which happens when the weights on the two plates are equal.)

READ: As you read Romans 11:22-24, invite the group to imagine a balance scale weighing two attributes of God.
**DISCUSS:** What are the two attributes Paul contrasts in these verses? From the PSG (p. 91): How would you describe the balance between God’s severity and His kindness? Highlight that God is not so kind that He overlooks evil and not so harsh that He condemns without cause.

**READ:** Emphasize that Paul believed Israel’s rejection of the gospel was not final. As you read Romans 11:25-29, invite the group to notice the roles the Jews and the Gentiles played in demonstrating that all people have an opportunity to receive God’s salvation.

**STATE:** God’s plan has always been based on faith. Since God has all authority, He can graft anyone who expresses faith. God had done it for the Gentiles, and He would do it for the Jews if they would overcome their lack of faith. Paul believed that day was coming. He illustrated his belief by quoting the prophecy of Isaiah in verse 26 and further explaining in verses 28-29 how God would bring things together for good and His glory (Rom. 8:28).

**READ:** Direct a volunteer to read aloud Romans 11:30-32, instructing the group to circle in their PSGs each time Paul used the word mercy.

**CLARIFY:** Stress the Key Doctrine (God’s Purpose of Grace) on page 91 of the PSG: Election is the glorious display of God’s sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility (Phil. 2:5-7). Then ask: How does this statement impact a person’s response to the question on page 92?

**HIGHLIGHT:** Note that God’s promises cannot be changed or altered. He is committed to following through on His restoration of the world through His grace and mercy.

**DISCUSS:** How does God’s offer of salvation through faith in Jesus alone show His justice and mercy? From the PSG (p. 93): What does God’s plans being irrevocable tell us about His character?

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**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)**

**CONSIDER:** Instruct a volunteer to read the first bulleted point under In My Context (PSG, p. 94): Because salvation comes through faith in Jesus alone, there is no room for arrogance expressed toward unbelievers. Ask: What makes religious pride so crippling and dangerous? (PSG, p. 89)

**REVIEW:** Highlight Romans 11:36 as today’s memory verse. Read the verse and lead the group to discuss how we can more regularly acknowledge that all things come from God. Distribute copies of Pack Item 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark) to any who need one.

**CHALLENGE:** Read the third bulleted point under In My Context (PSG, p. 94): God is merciful to everyone, giving salvation to all who place their faith in His Son. Lead the group to answer the second set of questions under In My Context (PSG, p. 94): How would you rate your awareness that God’s offer of salvation is made to all people? To what evidence can you point to justify your answer? What adjustments do you need to make?

**PRAY:** Close in prayer, asking God to reveal opportunities during the coming days for group members to share the gospel with others. Commit to trusting the Holy Spirit to guide and equip each person to seize the moment.
PRACTICE

- Remember to contact those who have visited during this study in Romans and make sure they know they are welcome anytime.
- Follow up with anyone you shared the gospel with this past week. Encourage each person by sharing one thing you took away from this session about God’s offer of salvation to every person.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
As an option for Focus Attention, lead the group to recall an experience when they felt unappreciated or not welcome. Without stirring deep emotions, ask if anyone would be willing to share their experience. Be prepared to set the example by sharing from your past.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement Romans 11:17, work through the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 89) and lead the group to share what they learned about the ancient practice of grafting. You could also enlist a volunteer to complete this study prior to the session and share what he or she learned during the group time.
- When discussing Romans 11:18, remind the group that Jesus made a similar statement in John 15:1-8. Instead of an olive tree, Jesus used the illustration of grape vines. Nourishment comes through the roots and not the branches.
- To enhance the discussion of Romans 11:25-32, ask: What was God’s promise to the Israelites when He initially set them apart as His chosen people? Call for a volunteer to read Genesis 12:1-3. Explain: The Gentiles needed to realize that Israel’s rebellion was part of God’s plan for bringing all kinds of people into His kingdom. God had blessed Israel so that the entire world would be blessed.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Summarize the session by reading the main headings that outline the study in the Personal Study Guide. Read the bulleted point under In My Context that supports each heading. Call for any observations learned during today’s session. Close in prayer, acknowledging God’s mercy and thanking God for His deep love.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
Support the memory verse at the end of the hymn of praise in Romans 11:33-36 by either sharing an online presentation (search the Internet using the song title and author’s name) of “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us” by Stuart Townend, or reading the lyrics aloud.
Sacrifices

Believers are to demonstrate Christlike character, living as sacrifices in all they do.

**Romans 12:1-2, 9-18**

**Memory Verse:** Romans 12:2

- **Read** Romans 12:1-21, First Thoughts (p. 112), and Understand the Context (p. 112). As you read Romans 12:1-2,9-18, note the specific commands given by Paul to the Romans.

- **Study** Romans 12:1-2,9-18, using Explore the Text (pp. 113–117). Compare Romans 12:1-2 in several Bible translations. Use Explore the Bible Adult Commentary found in print or digital format at LifeWay.com to aid your understanding of the passage.

- **Plan** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 118–119), More Ideas (p. 120), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Plan to use the Suggested Music Idea (p. 120). Consult QuickSource for additional questions you can use in leading the discussion and an Object Lesson idea for the study.

- **Gain** insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploretheBible) or on iTunes.

- **Gather** the following items: ☐ Personal Study Guides; ☐ A glass of water; and ☐ Two posters or a whiteboard and marker. Prepare to display: **Pack Item 2** (Outline of Romans).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

In 1940, a Polish military officer named Witold Pilecki let himself get arrested by the Nazis so he could be sent to Auschwitz. At the time, the world didn’t realize the horrors of the concentration camps, but Pilecki’s reports eventually revealed it all. He spent nearly three years as a spy in the camp before escaping. People like Pilecki are celebrated because they willingly sacrificed for a greater cause. Paul told the Roman believers that Christians were also called to live as sacrifices.

(In PSG, p. 95) **When have you sacrificed something important to you for a higher cause? What mental and emotional hurdles did you have to get over to make that sacrifice?**

**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**ROMANS 12:1-21**

In the final section of his letter, Paul addressed ways God’s mercy and grace should be expressed in the life of the body. The ethical demands of the gospel are based on the theological truths Paul laid out in chapters 1–11. Without that theological foundation, the ethical demands are little more than self-help advice. This final section of the letter can be divided into two parts. In chapters 12–13, Paul addressed issues of a more general nature, those not specifically tied to the church in Rome. Chapters 14–15 are directed toward problems immediately relevant to the Roman believers.

This week’s session begins with the admonition to present our whole beings to God in sacrificial service, allowing the renewing of our minds through the Holy Spirit to determine for us the will of God. As we pursue God’s will, life in the community of believers will be affected by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Paul used the illustration of the physical body, whose various parts function together. Believers have been given various gifts, which, when used together, cause the spiritual body to function properly.

When the body is functioning properly, its members will be characterized by genuine love. Paul began and ended this section by urging believers to reject evil and cling to what is good (Rom. 12:9,21). The way we relate to those inside and outside the body will be affected by the salvation given to us through Jesus’ completed work on the cross.

**KEY DOCTRINE**

*The Christian and Social Order*

Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Col. 3:12-17).

**BIBLE SKILL**

*Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.*

Read Romans 12:1-2 aloud several times. Each time, emphasize different words or phrases as you read. For example, in one reading emphasize the word “you” or “your” each time it appears. Then read the verse again, emphasizing all the action words. Take note of your thoughts. How does the verse move you emotionally? What feelings were evoked by the different words and phrases as you emphasized them?
VERSES 1-2

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

VERSES 1-2

These two verses are among the best-known verses in the New Testament, and rightly so. They look back at Paul’s description of God’s gracious salvation offered to those who believe, and they provide the transition into Paul’s discussion of how God’s grace plays out in the life of the individual believer and in the life of the church. Toward the end of chapter 11, Paul had begun to specifically address the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13). As he transitioned into the last section of his letter, he once again addressed the whole believing community (brothers and sisters).

The Greek word translated urge can mean to comfort or encourage (2 Cor. 1:4), but here it means to strongly urge or to make a strong request. (See also Rom. 15:30; 16:17.) Paul often based his commands on his apostolic authority. However, his request here is given in view of the mercies of God. Paul had just summarized God’s mercy both to Jews and to Gentiles (11:30-32). Based on that mercy and grace, Paul urged his readers to respond appropriately. Paul framed that appropriate response using language from the Jewish sacrificial system, which was still active in Jerusalem when Paul wrote this letter to the Romans. However, Paul used the sacrificial language figuratively, as he often did. Later in this letter Paul referred to himself as “priest of the gospel” so that “the Gentiles may be an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:16). He also referred to his own ministry (Phil. 2:17) and the Philippians offering to him (4:18) in sacrificial language. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews urged his readers to offer a sacrifice of praise, that is “the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Heb. 13:15). In Romans 12:1, Paul urged the believers to offer not some specific service to God but their whole beings.

Paul used three words to qualify the type of sacrifices we are to offer: living ... holy and pleasing to God. The sacrifice Paul urged was not one that died as it was given, but one that kept being offered as long as the person offering it was alive. To be holy meant to be separated from the world and consecrated to God. Such a sacrifice would be pleasing to God. The phrase pleasing to God was used to describe Epaphroditus’s gift to Paul on behalf of the congregation at Philippi (Phil. 4:18).

The Greek word translated true is notoriously difficult to translate. The word appears in the New Testament only here and in 1 Peter 2:2. The word has been translated “spiritual,” “rational,” and “reasonable.” Paul’s point seems to be that offering our bodies to God as sacrifices is an appropriate response of spiritual worship.

In verse 2, Paul used a negative command followed by a positive command to explain how the believer was to offer a holy, pleasing sacrifice to God. Using the negative command, Paul admonished the Roman believers against being conformed to this age. Paul used the same Greek word translated age when he reminded the Galatian Christians that Jesus had rescued them “from this present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). This segment of
time that human beings live in is, and has been, dominated by sin and death. Paul warned believers not to allow the evil of this present age to push them into its mold. Such conformity is the opposite of the sacrifice Paul urged us to offer.

Rather than being influenced by this age, believers are to **be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** The process of renewal is accomplished in the life of the believer by the power of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; Eph. 4:22-24). The result of this transformation is the opposite of a “corrupt mind” to which God had delivered over those who refused to acknowledge Him as God (Rom. 1:28). Their mind was such that they were unable to do what was right. Believers, on the other hand, are to adjust their way of thinking in accordance with the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. This is an ongoing process.

Through this renewal believers will be able to **discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.** The Greek word translated *discern* means to draw conclusions about the worth of something on the basis of testing. This mind-renewing work of the Spirit enables the Christian to understand what God would have done in a particular situation and to act accordingly. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives changes the way we view the world and what we deem valuable.

**In what ways do we allow this sin-dominated world in which we live to shape our values, thoughts, and actions?**

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**LIVE AUTHENTICALLY** *(ROM. 12:9-13)*

**VERSES 9-10**

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. 10 Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Outdo one another in showing honor.

After dealing with the use of gifts within the church (12:3-8), Paul turned his attention to the topic of love. Jesus ranked love of God and love of neighbor as the most important commandments (Mark 12:30-31). The love that the believers had for one another was the sign by which the world would know they were Jesus’ disciples (John 13:34-35). Paul assumed that Christians would love since “God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5). The believers in Rome were urged to make sure this love was **without hypocrisy.** Love must be more than a pretense or outward actions that do not reflect the nature of God.

Paul followed up with two more exhortations: **Detest evil** and **cling to what is good.** The Greek word translated *detest* was used to express an exceptionally harsh emotion. Believer are to strongly reject anything God’s Word says is evil. The good to which believers are to cling probably echoes “the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God” (12:2).

In the following verses, Paul unpacked what genuine love looks like. The list of ten qualities Paul gave here parallels his list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. The list is terse, giving the topic followed by the proper response. The first example relates specifically to **love.** With respect to
brotherly love, believers are to be warmly devoted to each other. Genuine love will be obvious by the devotion and affection believers have for each other.

Growing out of a genuine affection for one another, believers are called on to **outdo one another in showing honor.** Rather than seek recognition or favored position, genuine love will lead believers to work diligently at praising the achievements of others.

**VERSE 11**
The two commands in this verse are related to each other. The Greek word translated **zeal** was used to describe eagerness in discharging a duty or responsibility. The Greek word translated **lack diligence** was used by Jesus in one of His parables to describe an evil, lazy servant (Matt. 25:26). Paul did not specify the object of their zeal, though we should probably understand it to be either our true worship (Rom. 12:1) or the genuine love that believers are to pursue (12:9). Paul gave similar instruction to the Galatians: “Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don’t give up” (Gal. 6:9).

The second command continues the idea of zeal: **be fervent in the Spirit.** The Greek word translated **fervent** literally meant to “boil” or “seethe.” The same phrase was used in Acts to describe Apollos (Acts 18:25). The phrase could refer to a spiritual fervor, or it could refer to being fervent in the Holy Spirit. Assuming that Paul was referring to the Holy Spirit, then we could paraphrase his command, “Be set on fire by the Holy Spirit.”

The final command in this verse may be seen as a correction to an unbridled enthusiasm for the Spirit that leads to the kind of grandstanding that apparently was going on in the church at Corinth. The fervor that Paul sought was to be expressed in service to God.

**VERSE 12**
The three exhortations in this verse flow logically from first to last. As believers, we are called on to **rejoice in hope.** Earlier in the letter, Paul had urged believers to rejoice with him: “we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2). Believers are able to rejoice because of the hope of our salvation (1 Thess. 5:8) and our glorious inheritance (Eph. 1:18). However, the path to the final manifestation of God’s glory is filled with suffering. Paul saw suffering as a precious privilege granted to believers (Phil. 1:29). In the context of tribulation, believers must endure. Our ability to patiently endure suffering is contingent on the degree to which we persevere in prayer. Even a cursory reading of Paul’s letters reveals the degree to which he was dependent on prayer. We can rejoice in our hope even in the midst of tribulation when we are faithful in prayer.

**VERSE 13**
The Greek word translated **share with** was sometimes translated “fellowship” (1 John 1:3,6-7). The word could also describe, as here, participation in meeting the needs of other believers (2 Cor. 8:4; Phil. 4:15). Paul charged the believers in Ephesus to work hard in order to have something to share with those in need (Eph. 4:28). John questioned how
the love of God could abide in someone who refused to help provide for the needs of a fellow believer (1 John 3:17).

Paul’s last exhortation was to pursue hospitality. Hospitality was the process by which a stranger became a guest. It was especially important in Paul’s time because of the lack of safe, clean, inexpensive places where a traveler could eat and sleep. The church depended on hospitality to carry out its commission to send out evangelists and missionaries. The writer of Hebrews suggested that Christians who practiced hospitality might actually have entertained angels (Heb. 13:2). Believers were not just to take advantage of those opportunities for hospitality that came their way; they were to go out of their way to minister to travelers.

Our new life in Christ changes the way we look at the world, including how we allocate the resources that God has placed in our care.

We have been changed by Jesus’ work on the cross. We are being transformed by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. Our new life in Christ changes the way we look at the world, including how we allocate the resources that God has placed in our care.

What are the signs Paul listed in these verses that we can look for in our lives to determine whether our love is hypocritical or genuine?

BE AT PEACE (ROM. 12:14-18)

VERSES 14-15

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.

Paul turned his attention from a proper perspective on life within the body to the proper way to relate to outsiders. Paul admonished believers to bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. To bless someone is to call down God’s gracious action in that person’s life. To curse someone is to call on God to punish that person, especially by bringing disaster upon him or her. We have no record of any state sponsored persecution against the Christians in Rome at the time Paul wrote this letter. So, Paul must have been addressing the exclusion and pressure that was (and is) often part of daily life for the Christian. On his missionary journeys Paul often encountered persecution. Paul’s advice here echoes the words of Jesus: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44).

Believers who are sensitive to the joys and sorrows of fellow believers ensure a sense of intimacy that speaks well not only to those in the body but also to outsiders who are watching the church. Jealousy that keeps us from rejoicing in the good fortune of fellow believers and callousness that pays no attention to the pain and hurt in the life of a brother or sister has no place in the body. Paul made a similar point when addressing the
Corinthians: “So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:26).

**VERSES 16-18**

Paul’s call for believers to share their joys and sorrows would be realized only if believers shared a common mindset. In his charge to *live in harmony with one another*, Paul used the same Greek word he used to call the Philippian believers to think the same way (Phil. 2:2). The goal is not to agree on every point but to approach each issue with a renewed mind, sensitive to the needs of others.

The biggest obstacle to this type of mindset is pride: *Do not be proud*. The phrase could be translated, “Don’t be social climbers.” Rather, Paul urged believers to *associate with the humble*. The word that is translated *associate* could also mean to accommodate to a situation or circumstance. In that case, Paul placed the responsibility on the believer who had financial means to adjust to the person in the lowly position. Paul’s antidote for pride was association with the needy, the outcast, and the less fortunate. Such an attitude will keep us from thinking more of ourselves than we ought.

In verse 17, Paul again turned an eye toward the believer’s attitude toward outsiders. The call to forego retaliation can be found in several places in the New Testament. Paul gave similar instruction to the Christians in Thessalonica: “See to it that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all” (1 Thess. 5:15). These teachings echo Jesus’ instructions in the Sermon on the Mount. Rather than insisting on an eye for an eye, believers were told not to resist someone doing evil to them (Matt. 5:38-42). The counter point to refusing to retaliate is the positive command to think of others: *Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes.*

The command in verse 18 is tied to the prohibition against retaliation in verse 17. Paul acknowledged that hostility is an inevitable part of living the Christian life, and that much of the hostility will be beyond the control of the believer. (See John 16:33.) However, Paul warned believers not to use that tension as an excuse to create more tension. Believers are to do everything within their power to *live at peace with everyone*.

**How do you measure up to Paul’s commands about how to treat people who mistreat you?**
LEAD 

GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

CONSIDER: After welcoming the group, call attention to the glass of water on the table. Ask: What happens when water boils? Share the following explanation:

“Water, as it is heated, becomes turbulent, and gives up its dissolved air in the form of bubbles. Then intermolecular hydrogen bonds begin to break apart and molecules of water change from liquid to vapor form. The vapor coalesces into water vapor bubbles, which in the turbulence coalesce to form larger bubbles. These are prevented from escaping into the atmosphere until the force of the atmosphere, caused by gravity, is overcome, the bubbles escaping. This adds to the turbulence of the water. We call this ever increasing turbulence bringing water to a rolling boil.”

Ask sarcastically: So, what?

EXPLORE: Do you think about the science behind boiling water every time you boil water? Probably not, but it’s important for many reasons. Can you name a few things that occur in our world based on the principles behind boiling water? (If not mentioned, suggest steam engines powering machinery; sweat evaporating from our bodies to cool them; cooking pasta or hard-boiled eggs.) Understanding the complexity of common actions can open the door to new ideas.

TRANSITION: Paul introduced Romans 5 and 8 with “Therefore” to identify the coming connection of what he had been teaching to what he was about to teach. In Romans 12, Paul used “Therefore” to signify a major shift separating the first half of Romans with the remaining chapters. In Romans 12, Paul transitioned his message from a philosophic journey through the theology of sin and salvation to the practical application of salvation. With the theological foundation firmly set, Paul challenged his readers to live out their faith practically each day. Point out the context of today’s passage using Pack Item 2 (Outline of Romans).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Direct a volunteer to read Romans 12:1-2, while the group listens for words and phrases that define “living sacrifice.” Once read, invite the group to create a definition of “living sacrifice” using the words and phrases from the text. As ideas are shared, elaborate on the meaning and significance of each one.

ASK: What is the goal of being a living sacrifice? Support the discussion by reading the paragraph beginning “In the Old Testament, sacrifices were to be holy ...” on page 97 of the PSG.

HIGHLIGHT: Romans 12:2 is the memory verse. Instruct the group to read it aloud together and memorize it in the days ahead as an encouragement for daily living.

COMPARE: What is the difference between being conformed and being transformed? Explain that to be conformed means a person takes the shape of the surrounding culture; but to be transformed means a person experiences complete change from one thing to another. Guide the group to share examples of each.
DISCUSS: How does salvation change the way a person thinks? What impact does salvation have on what a person values? (PSG, p. 99)

READ: Stress that salvation changes how a believer relates to other believers. As you read Romans 12:9-13, instruct the group to underline key words in each of the directives Paul gave his readers.

REVIEW: Call for volunteers to share what they underlined. As words are named, write them randomly on a poster or board labeled Other Believers. Instruct the group to identify the directions they do well and the ones they struggle to follow. Ask: Reviewing our list, what are some ways we can improve in relating to other believers?

EVALUATE: Salvation changes how we relate to all people, including those who seek to harm us. As you read Romans 12:14-18, instruct the group to underline key words in each of the directives Paul gave his readers.

REVIEW: As the group shares their key words, write them randomly on a poster or board labeled All People. Instruct the group: Identify the actions you do well and the ones you struggle to follow. How can you improve in relating to all people, especially those who seek to harm you?

DISCUSS: What can believers do to foster peace with others? How does the phrase “as far as it depends on you” change the limits believers should go to foster peace? (PSG, p. 102)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REFLECT: Lead the group to discuss the first question set under In My Context on page 103 of the PSG: What would becoming a living sacrifice look like in your life? What would you need to give up? What would you need to add?

CHALLENGE: Review the two lists of words on the boards labeled Other Believers and All People. Allow several volunteers to share their responses to the second question set under In My Context on page 103 of the PSG: Review the commands given, identifying the actions you do well and the ones you struggle to follow. How can you improve in carrying out each action commanded?

GROUPTHINK: As a group, identify people who suffer for the gospel. How can your Bible study group support those individuals? What can your group learn from their example? (PSG, p. 103)

PRAY: Close the session in prayer using the lyrics of “I Surrender All” in the Suggested Music Idea on page 120.

PRACTICE

• Encourage the group through an email or text to live each moment as a follower of Christ. Recall Paul’s directions in Romans 12 to demonstrate Christlike character to all people.

• As the group leader, reflect on Romans 12:1-2 and how you are modeling a transformed life.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
As an option for Focus Attention, share the story of Polish military officer Witold Pilecki in the Personal Study Guide (p. 95). Invite the group to recall similar stories of individuals who sacrificed for the good of others. Ask: Why are those stories important, and what can they do for those who hear them?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• Follow the example of the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 98) and direct volunteers to read aloud Romans 12:1-2 while emphasizing different words or phrases each time. For example, one reader might emphasize the word “you” or “your.” The next reader might emphasize action words. Another reader might emphasize characteristics of God. Ask: What feelings were evoked by the different words and phrases as you emphasized them? (PSG, p. 98)

• Incorporate further discussion of Romans 12:10 by asking: How does a believer’s genuine love for others reveal his or her new identity in Christ? How does this love reflect his or her relationship with the Father? (PSG, p. 100)

• To enhance the discussion of Romans 12:16, ask: How does the love demonstrated by believers attract non-believers to the gospel? Compare and contrast which has a greater impact—the love shown between believers or the love shown to non-believers.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Summarize the session by reviewing the Key Doctrine (The Christian and Social Order) on page 102 of the PSG: Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Col. 3:12-17).

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
As a commitment to follow Jesus in daily living, sing or read the lyrics of “I Surrender All,” by Judson W. Van DeVenter.
Citizens

Believers should seek to represent Christ well in their communities and world.

ROMANS 13:1-14

MEMORY VERSE: ROMANS 13:10

READ Romans 13:1-14, First Thoughts (p. 122), and Understand the Context (p. 122). As you read Romans 13:1-14, circle the actions Paul identified that believers were to take. Note how the actions are a means of representing Christ.

STUDY Romans 13:1-14, using Explore the Text (pp. 123–127). Complete the Bible Skill activity (p. 122; PSG, p. 111) on using multiple Scripture passages to understand a biblical truth. Compare what it means to be a citizen of your country with being a citizen of God’s kingdom.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 128–129) and More Ideas (p. 130). Review Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Identify new ways to involve guests in the group.

GROW with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; □ Index cards prepared for Focus Attention (p. 128); □ A board and marker. For More Ideas (p. 130): □ A coin. Prepare to display: □ PACK ITEM 2 (Outline of Romans). Make copies of: □ PACK ITEM 7 (Handout: Romans Time Line).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

Our view of the government often depends on our current circumstances. At tax season, some may feel the government is too intrusive. When a police officer stops someone for speeding, the complaint may be, “Don’t they have anything better to do?” In Romans 13, Paul dealt with the believer’s relationship to governing authorities. He called for submission to authority, balancing government’s God-given right to rule with our submission to God, who alone holds absolute authority.

(In PSG, p. 104) **How would you describe your relationship with local government? What do you value the most in your local government?**

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**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**ROMANS 13:1-14**

The two commands related to evil and good form bookends for the last part of chapter 12 (Rom. 12:9,21). In today’s session, Paul developed three concrete ways for the Roman believers to do good and avoid evil. First, believers were commanded to submit to governing authorities. Paul based this command on the fact that all authority ultimately comes from God and governing authorities serve as God’s servants to punish evil and reward good. In this section, Paul did not discuss how Christians are to behave in situations where authorities act in ways that are contrary to the gospel.

From Paul’s own experience and from the experiences of other disciples, we can know that Paul never submitted to a command to stop preaching the gospel. Although authorities deserve respect and taxes, God alone is the ultimate authority.

Second, Paul discussed the believer’s responsibility to love. All other obligations should be paid, but the obligation to love one another can never be completely repaid. Jesus saw the two commands to love God and to love one’s neighbor as the commands on which all the Law and Prophets depend. Twice in this section Paul declared that love for one another fulfilled the law. A life transformed by a renewed mind (12:2) will not harm but will love one’s neighbor.

Third, Paul reminded his audience they were living in a time that demanded action. The night was far spent and the new day was dawning. Believers needed to awake from their sleep and get dressed for combat. Deeds of darkness have no place in the life of the believer; as a result, the believer should have no time for planning ways to gratify the desires of the flesh.
Paul shifted from a series of commands to the single topic of the believer’s relationship to governmental authorities. Submission to governmental authorities was one of the good things to which the Roman believers were to cling to (Rom. 12:9) so they could discern the good and perfect will of God (12:2). Paul also instructed Titus to remind the churches to “submit to rulers and authorities” (Titus 3:1). Paul was not alone in arguing for submission to authorities. After urging Christians to conduct themselves “honorsbly among the Gentiles” (1 Pet. 2:12), Peter specifically exhorted believers to submit to the authorities (2:13-17). These passages echo Jesus’ instruction to the Pharisees and Herodians: “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17).

The Greek word translated submit meant to place oneself in a subordinate relationship to someone or something. Submission involved recognition of one’s particular status in a hierarchy. Paul gave two reasons why believers should submit to governing authorities, one general and one specific. First, no authority can exist that is outside the scope of God’s authority. All authority is subordinate to Him. Second, the specific governing structures that do exist are put in place by God. When Pilate claimed to have authority over Jesus, Jesus answered, “You would have no authority over me at all … if it hadn’t been given you from above” (John 19:11).

Since God ordains governing authorities, the logical conclusion is that those who oppose that authority are opposing God’s ordinance. Opposing God inevitably leads to judgment. It is unclear whether Paul was referring to judgment given by the authorities or judgment given by God. While either view is possible, the judgment appears to be judgment issued by God.

In verse 3, Paul offered another reason for believers to submit. Not only did God ordain the governmental structures that exist, He has given them the task of maintaining order in society. Ideally, people who refrain from bad conduct and do what is good have nothing to fear from rulers. Good conduct is the antidote for fear of authorities and may, in fact, lead to positive recognition by those authorities.

Paul made two points about the role of authorities based on the assertion that authorities are the servants of God. Paul normally used the Greek word translated servant to refer to Christian leaders, but the word was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to the king’s attendants (Esth. 1:10; 2:2). Both Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 25:9) and Cyrus (Isa. 45:1) were pagan kings who were portrayed as servants of God. First, from a positive perspective, the authorities were God’s servants for the benefit of the citizens. Second, Paul unpacked the negative role of authorities toward those whose conduct was bad. Earlier, Paul had reassured his readers they had nothing to fear from the governing authorities as long as their conduct was proper. However, if their behavior was bad, they had every reason to be afraid. The phrase, does not carry the sword for no reason,
refers generally to the right of the government to punish those who break the law. In Paul’s day that would have included, but not have been limited to, the death penalty.

Just as rulers were God’s servants for good, so also they could be God’s servants for vengeance. In this role the ruler was an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. Vengeance was denied to the believer because vengeance was God’s prerogative (Rom. 12:19). However, God uses governmental authorities to inflict His punishment on wrongdoers. Paul’s working assumption was that the evil being punished and the good being rewarded were in line with God’s moral principles. In that case, the ruler’s sword was God’s instrument for wrath.

VERSES 5-7
Paul summarized the instructions he had just given by insisting on the necessity of submission to rulers, followed by two concise “because” phrases. The first reason for submission parallels the rulers’ role in punishing those who do wrong. Refusal to submit to this legitimate function of government will bring punishment.

The second reason believers must submit is because of your conscience. For the Christian, conscience is moral sensitivity to the will and purpose of God. It is tied to the believer’s transformed mind that seeks to understand the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God (12:2). In a word, Paul urged believers to submit because it was the right thing to do.

Once again Paul reminded his audience that the governing authorities were God’s servants (vv. 4,6). Paul used a different Greek word in verse 6 than the one he had used in verse 4, but it appears the change was only stylistic. Because the rulers were continually attending to these tasks, believers should continue to pay taxes. The task to which Paul was referring is not completely clear. Some Bible teachers think Paul was referring to the act of governing in general. Others would limit the tasks strictly to the act of collecting taxes. Paul may have had in mind the authorities’ task of rewarding good and punishing evil. Paul’s point was that these rulers were accomplishing God’s purpose in the act of governing.

Absolute authority belongs to God alone, and believers must always evaluate the demands of authorities in light of the gospel.

Paul summarized his discussion of the believer’s relationship to government authorities using the language of debt. Because of the authorities’ role as servants of God, believers have an obligation that needs to be paid. The phrase to everyone should be read in its context in this passage and as such probably refers to all governing authorities and not to everyone in general. The obligation is summarized with four categories: direct taxes, indirect taxes such as tolls or fees, respect, and honor.

We are to willingly fulfill our obligations as citizens. Government is not a nuisance to be avoided but an institution created by God to
serve people. Governing authorities deserve the respect and honor due them as God’s servants. We should give thanks for governing authorities and pray for them (1 Tim. 2:1-2). However, absolute authority belongs to God alone, and believers must always evaluate the demands of authorities in light of the gospel.

How can we put Paul’s teachings about authorities into practice? What aspects of our culture are the same as Paul’s day? What is different? What would be different for Christians living in a totalitarian country?

**LOVE** (ROM. 13:8-10)

**VERSES 8-10**

Paul tied verse 8 to the previous section using the concept of debt. Believers are to repay all obligations (v. 7) so that they do not owe anything to anyone. Paul’s exception clause left one obligation open, one that can never be fully repaid: **except to love one another.** It is unclear to whom the words one another point. Many Bible teachers appeal to Paul’s normal use of “one another” and conclude that he was referring specifically to other believers. However, in the following two verses the introduction of the word neighbor recalls the parable of the Good Samaritan and Jesus’ definition of neighbor. In that case, this debt of love is owed to both believers and non-believers, both those friendly toward us and those hostile toward us.

Believers have an obligation to love because the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. This concept was important to Paul, as evidenced by his repetition of it at the end of this passage (13:10). It should be evident that Paul was referring to the part of the law that dealt with human interaction with one another and not the part that dealt with our interaction with God.

To make his point that love for another fulfills the law, Paul quoted four commandments that deal with the way humans are to relate to one another. The phrase and any other commandment probably referred to any other command in the Ten Commandments that also relates to human interaction. All of these commands are summed up by the command love your neighbor as yourself. The command is found in the Old Testament (Lev. 19:18) but was also the second of two commands on which Jesus said all of the Law and Prophets depend (Matt. 22:37-40).

The reason why love for neighbor was able to sum up all of the other commands was that love does no wrong to a neighbor. The one who truly loves will do no harm to his neighbor; he will do what is good for his neighbor. Once again, Paul affirmed that the law is fulfilled in love. When writing to the Galatians, Paul instructed them to use their freedom to serve one another in love because the law is fulfilled in loving one’s neighbor (Gal. 5:13-14).
How does keeping the commandments listed by Paul demonstrate love for others?

VERSE 11
11 Besides this, since you know the time, it is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep, because now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

VERSE 12-13
12 The night is nearly over, and the day is near; so let us discard the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy.

Every day is one day closer to Jesus’ return.

VERSE 11
Earlier, Paul urged his audience to look at the present in view of the past, specifically the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 6:3-11; 12:1). In this passage he urged them to look at the present in view of the future. Paul wanted his audience to understand the nature of the time in which they lived. The hour was marked by an uncertainty as to the timing of Jesus’ return. As a result, Paul urged his audience to remain ready for His return, using the imagery of someone who was being roused from a deep sleep. Paul used the same imagery in addressing the believers in Thessalonica: “So then, let us not sleep, like the rest, but let us stay awake and be self-controlled” (1 Thess. 5:6). Although there is uncertainty about the timing of the second coming, there is no uncertainty about the reality of that return. Paul assured the Roman believers that our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. Every day is one day closer to Jesus’ return.

VERSE 12-13
Paul continued the imagery of sleep by suggesting that the night is nearly over, and the day is near. An astute observer will be able to see the signs that the night is ending and a new day is dawning. John used the same imagery in his first letter: “Yet I am writing you a new command, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining” (1 John 2:8).

Paul moved from a description of the time in which the believers lived to exhortation about how to live during that time. The first image is related to changing clothes, taking off one set of clothes so as to be able to put on another. What are to be discarded are the deeds of darkness, those activities that are characteristic of the old life. Paul gave a representative list of the deeds of darkness in verse 13.

Believers were then commanded to put on the armor of light. The Greek word translated armor could refer to the garments worn for protection in battle, but the word was often used to refer to weapons carried into conflict. In either case, the bedclothes worn for sleep were totally inadequate for the conflict in which believers were to engage. They were children of light who needed weapons of light. Paul explained to the believers in Thessalonica: “But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark, for this day to surprise...
you like a thief. For you are all children of light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness” (1 Thess. 5:4-5). As such, we need the armor of light and not the deeds of darkness.

The New Testament commonly uses the image of walking as a way to describe one’s lifestyle. Here, the Christian lifestyle is described positively by two phrases. First, believers are to walk with decency. The Greek word translated decency referred to behavior that is proper or appropriate. The word occurs two other times in the New Testament, once in referring to the proper way to conduct worship (1 Cor. 14:40) and another time to describe how believers should behave toward outsiders (1 Thess. 4:12). Second, believers were to behave as in the daytime. They are of the light and must live as such.

Paul used three pairs of words to show what deeds of darkness looked like. The first two pairs may have been chosen because they were commonly carried out in darkness. The first, carousing and drunkenness, refers to excessive drinking and partying. The second pair is sexual impurity and promiscuity. Although not exclusively nighttime activities, they are frequently carried out under the cover of darkness. The third pair, quarreling and jealousy, may have been chosen looking ahead at conflict between weak and strong believers that Paul would deal with in the next chapter.

VERSE 14

Paul returned to the language of clothing he had used in verse 12. Here, however, rather than put on armor, believers are charged to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Although Paul used put on frequently, the only other time he told believers they were clothed with Christ was when addressing the Galatian Christians concerning baptism. Paul described being incorporated into Christ, pictured in baptism, as being clothed in Christ (Gal. 3:27). Believers are to embrace Christ to the point that they are transformed into His likeness by the renewing of their minds (Rom. 12:2).

Negatively, believers are not to make plans to gratify the desires of the flesh. Paul instructed the Galatian Christians to walk in the Spirit so that they would “not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). Since the desire of the flesh is opposed to the desire of the Spirit, believers too must be opposed to the desire of the flesh. Are there ways that we make plans to “gratify the desires of the flesh”? In what ways does putting on the Lord Jesus Christ enable us to resist the desires of the flesh?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

CONSIDER: As the group arrives, give each person an index card with one of the following words printed on it: employee, spouse, parent, child, club member, citizen, church member, teammate, and neighbor. After everyone is present, ask: As the person on your card, what are you responsible for within your control or power? Allow the group to respond and observe any similarities in their answers.

TRANSITION: In these final chapters of Romans, Paul reminded believers of their responsibilities as Christ followers. In Romans 13, Paul identified three significant areas in living as believers. Point out the context of today’s passage using Pack Item 2 (Outline of Romans) and Pack Item 7 (Handout: Romans Time Line). Write on a poster or board the title Responsibilities Toward ...

As you introduce each section of Romans 13, add the title to identify the focus of Paul’s teachings.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Write Government on the poster or board. As you read Romans 13:1-4, instruct the group to identify the rationale behind Paul’s directive to submit to governing authorities.

EMPHASIZE: Focus on the Key Doctrine (Religious Liberty) on page 108 of the PSG: Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God (1 Pet. 3:11-17).

IDENTIFY: Invite volunteers to explain the theological rationale for Paul’s instructions regarding a Christian’s duty to the ruling government. Highlight that the rationale for submission is God’s sovereignty over human affairs.

DISCUSS: How might a believer show respect to government leaders even when they disagree with government leaders? (PSG, p. 107)

READ: Say: Paul said there was more to honoring government than simply avoiding punishment. As you read Romans 13:5-7, instruct the group to identify another theological reason for honoring government. Once read, explain: Believers are to walk in freedom from guilt resulting from disobedience. Honoring the laws of the government removes any guilt from disobeying them.

DISCUSS: Paul made it clear that paying taxes and other fees was not up for debate. Ask: How does paying taxes and other government fees bring honor to God? What other obligations might a believer need to fulfill to a government as a means of honoring Him?

TRANSITION: We know that not all human governments function in godly ways; some throughout history have been dominated by evil people and systems. Christians should always be at the forefront of standing for, participating in, and honoring good, godly government. They do that by demonstrating Christlike love to all people. Write Neighbors on the poster or board.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Romans 13:8-10. Guide the group to note how Paul used the Ten Commandments to illustrate the relationship between love and the law.
HIGHLIGHT: Emphasize from the PSG (p. 109): Neighbors are not defined by geography or ethnicity. Instead, our neighbors are anyone we can help. As a result, our love should extend as far as God’s love—to the entire world (John 3:16). We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19), and we reflect Him to the world through our love. Solicit response.

DISCUSS: How does keeping the commandments listed by Paul demonstrate love for others? (PSG, p. 109) Guide the group to develop a working definition of love.

MEMORY VERSE: Point to Romans 13:10 as today’s memory verse, and read it together as a group. Assign one of the following passages to volunteers: John 3:16; 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 John 3:18; 4:19; and 1 Peter 4:8. Instruct the volunteers to read each passage without comment to illustrate the significance of love in New Testament teachings. Make edits or additions to the group’s definition of love.

EXPLAIN: Paul’s final directives were intended to encourage his readers in Rome (and all believers who followed). Introduce the last section of Romans 13 by writing Readers on the poster or board.

READ: Encourage someone to read aloud Romans 13:11-14, inviting the group to note the motivation Paul implemented to get the attention of his audience.

DISCUSS: How does thinking about Jesus’ return serve as motivation for believers to make a difference today? (PSG, p. 110) How can a believer shed light in a dark world and do so with love? Are there inappropriate ways of being light in a dark world? Explain. (PSG, p. 111)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REFLECT: Guide the group to reflect on the subtitle for today’s session on Romans 13 on page 104 of the PSG: Believers should seek to represent Christ well in their communities and world.

REVIEW: Guide a discussion of the bulleted statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 112).

RESPOND: Use the following adapted version of the three sets of questions under In My Context to challenge the group in living for Christ each day (PSG, p. 112).

• What are some things we can do personally and as a group to make our community a better place? How can we be a light by ministering to our government leaders?
• As a church, who are some people we struggle to love? How can we learn to love them better? What are some practical ways to show God’s love to those people?
• What are some dark places around us that need the love of Christ? How can we represent Christ in those areas? What holds us back? How can we overcome those barriers?

PRAY: Close the session with the Suggested Music Idea (p. 130) and a prayer for discernment and courage in living daily for Christ.
PRACTICE

• Send the group an email or text encouraging them to pray for each other that God would be honored through their obedience to His standards.
• Follow up with any response to questions the group had during the session.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
As an option for Focus Attention, ask: How would you describe your relationship with local government? What do you value the most in your local government? (PSG, p. 104) After the group responds, move to Focus Attention: Transition on page 128.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• Supplement the discussion on the Key Doctrine by inviting the group to compare Romans 13:1-4 with 1 Peter 3:10-17.
• Expand the discussion on Romans 13:6-7 by reminding the group that Paul’s teaching reflected Jesus’ teaching. Illustrate by holding up a coin as you read Matthew 22:15-22.
• Use the following adaptation of the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 111) as an additional step in the section on Romans 13:11-14: Paul used the phrase “put on” to describe the activity of Christians (Rom. 13:12,14). Assign one of the following passages to volunteers to gain deeper insight into what Paul was telling Christians to do: Ephesians 6:11-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10. Instruct the volunteers to read their assigned passages and then explain how the passage helps us understand Paul’s commands in Romans 13. Read aloud 1 Corinthians 15:53-54 and ask: How does it differ from the other passages?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Summarize the session by reviewing the bulleted points under In My Context (PSG, p. 112), highlighting the three areas of responsibility on the poster or white board.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
“Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus” was written by Rev. George Duffield Jr. following the final request of his dying friend Dudley Tyng to tell his fellow believers to stand for Jesus. Upon that request and the military imagery in Ephesians 6:14, Duffield wrote the hymn in 1858. Read the lyrics as a commitment to serve Jesus until His return.
Accepting

Believers should accept and encourage other believers to facilitate unity.

ROMANS 14:1-12

MEMORY VERSE: ROMANS 14:19

READ Romans 14:1–15:13, First Thoughts (p. 132), and Understand the Context (pp. 132–133).
As you read Romans 14:1-12, circle preferences and underline commands, noting how confusion between a preference and a command can create strife.

STUDY Romans 14:1-12, using Explore the Text (pp. 133–137). Use Explore the Bible Adult Commentary found in print or digital format at LifeWay.com to aid your understanding of the passage.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 138–139), More Ideas (p. 140), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Consult QuickSource for additional questions you can use in leading the discussion and an Object Lesson idea for the study.

GAIN insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploretheBible) or on iTunes.

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; □ A poster illustrating systems of the human body for Focus Attention (p. 138). Prepare to display: □ PACK ITEM 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans). Make copies of: □ PACK ITEM 13 (Handout: Key Words in Romans).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

The human body is an amazing creation. A series of systems—such as the circulatory system, the digestive system, the skeletal system, and the nervous system—all work together to keep things moving and growing. Any problem in one system can create problems in another. The body of Christ works the same way. To keep the body healthy and effective, believers must live in unity.

(In PSG, p. 113) When have you seen a breakdown in one area create another problem in a different area of your body? How might that same type of cause and effect happen in a church?

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**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**ROMANS 14:1–15:13**

Paul opened and closed this section of his letter with an appeal for believers to accept one another. First he urged believers to accept those who were weak in faith (Rom. 14:1), and then for all believers to accept one another (15:7). When we accept others, we reflect Christ’s acceptance of us, which will bring glory to God (15:7).

The problem Paul was addressing involved behavior that in itself was not good or bad. However, the way believers were reacting to the behavior was creating disharmony. Two problems in particular seemed to be at issue: differing dietary habits and special status given to certain days. People who disagreed on these topics were relating to each other with judgment and disdain, creating rifts in the church. Paul offered two reasons why their behavior was not acceptable. First, as servants of God, believers are responsible to God alone. Servants don’t judge servants; masters judge servants. We are responsible to Jesus alone. Second, a believer who judged another believer was usurping God’s authority as the only righteous Judge.

Rather than judging fellow brothers or sisters, believers should be diligent not to place stumbling blocks before weaker Christians. Paul’s foundational principle in this matter was that nothing was unclean in itself (14:14). Obviously, Paul did not mean that nothing was evil or harmful. But in the case of clean or unclean food, it was a matter of indifference to Paul. What was of great concern to him was the church’s attitude toward people with whom they disagreed. Since the kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking but righteousness, peace, and joy, believers should be pursuing peace and building up each other. Paul stated his position this way: “Do not tear down God’s work because of food. Everything is clean, but it is wrong to make someone fall by what he eats” (14:20).
Paul assigned the primary responsibility for solving the problem to the strong in faith: “Now we who are strong have an obligation to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, and not to please ourselves” (15:1). Forbearance toward the weak did not mean catering to their every desire but rather building up their faith in the Lord. Pleasing our neighbor is always for the purpose of building him or her up (15:2).

Paul ended this section by returning to the status of the Gentiles. Because of Christ’s saving work, Jews and Gentiles were able to praise God together, confirming the promises God had made to the fathers. Paul quoted from four Old Testament passages as evidence of God’s desire that Gentiles and Jews worship together. The section ends with a benediction in 15:13.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

STOP JUDGING (ROM. 14:1-4)

VERSES 1-3
Paul’s ethical admonitions in the previous two chapters had been of a more general nature. In this section, Paul dealt specifically with two groups within the church at Rome: the weak (Rom. 14:1) and the strong (15:1). Paul did not identify the two groups beyond listing three activities that were causing problems: eating meat (14:2), honoring special days (14:5), and drinking wine (14:21).

When Paul dealt with a similar issue in Corinth, he talked of those whose consciences were weak (1 Cor. 8:7). The primary concern in Corinth was related to the issue of eating food offered to idols (8:4). Paul did not mention idolatry in Romans, but his answer was the same. Food itself was not the issue (1 Cor. 8:8; Rom. 14:14). Paul was concerned with the spiritual growth of all believers.

The Greek word translated accept was used of receiving a person into one’s home or circle of friends. Paul was not talking about mere tolerance for the weak but rather full acceptance in the body. He used the same word at the end of this section, encouraging believers to accept one another as Christ had accepted them (Rom. 15:7).

The English phrase argue about disputed matters translates two Greek words. The first word describes a verbal conflict resulting from differing points of view. The second word describes the content of that thought or opinion. The context indicates that these opinions were a matter of dispute within the church. Paul urged unity in the body and acceptance of all believers. These disputed matters were not to be the source of conflict among believers.

The first point of contention Paul dealt with related to dietary concerns. Jesus taught that all foods were clean and could be eaten (Mark 7:18-19), a lesson Peter learned in a vision before going to Cornelius’s home (Acts 10:15). Some believers rightly understood they were free to eat all kinds of food. Paul drew a similar conclusion when writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 10:25-26).
However, some believers did not feel the same freedom. They restricted their diet to vegetables. Paul explicitly labeled the person who held this belief as one who is weak. Although not stated explicitly, this group may have feared that meat sold in the marketplace may not have been prepared following Old Testament rules or that it may have been part of pagan sacrifice. Paul had dealt with meat offered to idols in 1 Corinthians; here he was more concerned with how the two groups related to each other.

Both groups were behaving in uncharitable ways. The commands given to each appear to have been chosen with that group in mind. Those who were strong in faith looked down with disdain on those who were weaker in faith. The Greek word translated look down on in verse 3 described a person who by his attitude or manner indicated that the other person had little worth. An attitude of self-righteous pride may have caused the strong to consider those believers who struggled with dietary rules to be second-class members of the body.

On the other hand, those members who limited their diet to only vegetables may have considered themselves the defenders of orthodoxy. They may have viewed those believers who didn’t restrict their diets to be morally lax, not holding to the true standard of righteousness. Paul condemned both attitudes.

The last clause provides Paul’s ultimate reason for his commands: because God has accepted him. The word used here is the same word Paul directed to the strong a few verses earlier. The strong were to accept the weak (Rom. 14:1) because God had already accepted him. The word him could refer to the strong believer whom the weak believer is not to judge, or it could refer to both weak and strong believers. The one eating everything is not to look down on the weaker believer because God has accepted the weaker believer. By the same token, the weak believer is not to judge the one who eats anything for the same reason: God has accepted him, too.

In matters of religious practices we need to show grace and acceptance, not judgment and disdain.

VERSE 4

Paul used a rhetorical question to reinforce his admonition that believers should not judge fellow believers: Who are you to judge another’s household servant? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And he will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand.

VERSE 4

Paul reminded the weak believers that God was able to cause the believer to stand. Standing was the result of God’s grace not the result of dietary rules. As believers, we have a responsibility to accept other believers as God has accepted them and to refrain from being judgmental about their state of spiritual maturity. Obviously, matters of false doctrine and unchristian
behavior must be corrected, but in matters of religious practices we need to show grace and acceptance, not judgment and disdain.

(In PSG, p. 117) **What are some issues that stir debates in the church today? How do these compare to the issues pointed to by Paul?**

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**HONOR GOD** (ROM. 14:5-8)

**VERSES 5-6**

Paul’s second example of differences among the Roman believers related to the observance of special days. Paul did not identify which days were considered special or why. Some scholars have suggested Paul was referring to Gentile Christians who still paid attention to Roman “lucky” and “unlucky” days or to special days related to pagan feasts. More likely, Paul was referring to Jewish Christians who still observed Jewish feast days, possibly including observance of the Sabbath or special days of fasting. The same reactions of judgment and disdain seem to be at play here as well. Those believers who saw some days as more sacred than others would likely judge those who didn’t, and those who treated all days the same would likely look down on those who didn’t.

Paul warned both groups: **Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind.** Paul did not commend one position nor condemn the other. For him, it was a matter of indifference. Each group should carefully think through their position and then put it into practice, making sure they did not react wrongly to the other group of believers. Later in this section Paul wrote, “Whatever you believe about these things, keep between yourself and God” (14:22). Paul took a stronger stance when he dealt with the Galatian believers, who appear to have linked the keeping of days with a person’s salvation (Gal. 4:9-11). But that was not the case with the believers in Rome; their issue was not salvation but fellowship.

The reason for Paul’s indifference in these matters relates to the believers’ motives. First, he addressed the motive for the weak believers who observed certain special days: they did it for the honor of the Lord. The same was said for the strong believers who ate meat and the weak believers who refrained from eating meat. Their goal was to honor Christ. In addition, both groups of believers gave thanks to God, whether they ate only vegetables or whether their diet included an array of food. Their action in seeking to honor God by the days they did or did not observe and by the food they did or did not eat should be recognized and appreciated by fellow believers, not judged or looked down on.
VERSES 7-8

7 For none of us lives for himself, and no one dies for himself. 8 If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Paul returned to the issue of ownership, a point he had introduced a few verses earlier: "Who are you to judge another’s household servant?” (Rom. 14:4). He began with the simple, negative observation that no one lives or dies for himself. This statement could be taken to mean that all actions influence or affect other people. While this statement is true, Paul was making a point about the way we relate to God, not the way we relate to other people, as verse 8 makes clear.

Rather than living or dying for oneself, Christians live and die for the Lord. Living for the Lord surely means that every aspect of our lives (what we think, what we feel, what we desire, what we do) is done for the Lord. Christ is to be in control of every aspect of the way we live, with everything done for Him. Dying for the Lord may indicate that the believer’s attitude toward death should reflect the hope that we have in Christ who has conquered death. While this statement is true, Paul may have had something broader in mind. Just as Christ is to control every aspect of the believer’s life, He also controls every aspect related to the believer’s death. He sets the time and the circumstances of our deaths according to His purpose. As with our lives, so every aspect of our deaths belongs to Christ.

Our goal in life must be to honor Him no matter the cost.

Paul ended this thought with a summary statement: Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. We belong to Him because He bought us. As Paul told the Corinthian Christians: “For you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body” (1 Cor. 6:20). As Christ’s own possession, we are to order our lives in accordance with His will and purpose for our lives. Our goal in life must be to honor Him no matter the cost.

In what ways can we turn arguments about things that don’t matter into opportunities to honor the Lord?

VERSE 9

9 Christ died and returned to life for this: that he might be Lord over both the dead and the living.

Jesus died and returned to life ... that he might be Lord over both the dead and the living. Paul’s more common way of expressing this truth was to use the word “raised” or “resurrection” rather than returned to life. He may have been closely linking Jesus’ death and return to life as a single redemptive event. He made a similar point when addressing the Corinthian Christians: “And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:15).
Whether the Roman Christians were “weak” or “strong,” they all had one thing in common. They claimed Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The thing they shared was infinitely more significant than any differences that might separate them. Jesus’ death and resurrection unifies believers.

The thing they shared was infinitely more significant than any differences that might separate them.

VERSE 10

The English word despise translates the same Greek word that was rendered “look down on” in verse 3. Paul commanded believers not to judge or despise because God had accepted both the weak and the strong believer; fellow church members should accept him or her as well (14:3). In verse 10, Paul charged those who judged other believers with usurping the authority that belongs only to God. All believers will one day stand before the judgment seat of God. At that time, God, who knows the heart, will judge the activities of believers. Again, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10). Rather than judging others, we need to remember our position as those whom God will judge.

VERSE 10

10 But you, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

VERSES 11-12

Paul supported his claim with a quotation from Isaiah: As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will give praise to God. Paul’s introductory clause as I live, says the Lord is not found in the text of Isaiah. However, the passage in Isaiah begins with an oath: “By myself I have sworn” ( Isa. 45:23). The phrase as I live, says the Lord was often used as an oath formula (Num. 14:21,28), so Paul may have been paraphrasing the beginning statement of Isaiah 45:23. The passage in its context is a plea for people to turn to God and be saved, a plea based on God’s sovereignty (Isa. 44:22). Turning to God involved bowing a knee to His authority and praising the God to whom we pledge our allegiance. God’s irrevocable truth is that everyone will appear before Him in judgment. Paul used the same quotation from Isaiah in developing his Christ hymn in Philippians 2:10-11.

Paul’s conclusion in verse 12 summarizes his earlier contention that all of us will stand before God’s judgment seat (Rom. 14:10). At that time, each of us will give an account of himself to God. The shift from “we will all” to “each of us will” highlights the individual nature of that experience. The knowledge that God will require from us an assessment of what we have done should cure us of the desire to judge or look down on fellow believers.

(In PSG, p. 120) Which action do you consider to be more divisive: judging others or looking down on others? Explain.
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

GUIDE: Prior to the group’s arrival, prepare a poster illustrating the circulatory system, the digestive system, the skeletal system, and the nervous system of the human body. The poster may simply be a list of these systems or pictures illustrating each one. (Free printable posters are available online by doing an Internet search of “circulatory system of the body.”) Once the group arrives, allow volunteers to explain how these systems work together.

DISCUSS: When have you seen a breakdown in one area create another problem in a different area of your body? How might that same type of cause and effect happen in a church? (PSG, p. 113)

TRANSITION: After addressing a believer’s relationship toward authorities in Romans 13, Paul returned to relationships between believers, calling on the Romans to demonstrate unity within the church body. In Romans 14, Paul introduced the law of liberty and the law of love as guides for attitudes and behavior during disagreements. Point out the context of the law of liberty in Romans 14:1-12.

KEY DOCTRINE: Invite a volunteer to read the Key Doctrine (The Church) on page 118 of the PSG, and invite the group to keep this statement in mind during the session: Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes, with each member being responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord (Col. 1:18).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 7:1-2, and remind the group that this was Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount against religious hypocrisy. Say: Paul applied this teaching to the church in Rome.

GUIDE: Read Romans 14:1. Say: Paul drew a distinction between doctrine (truth that never changes) and practice (methods that can be adapted). Paul also emphasized that “weakness” is likely a matter of opinion and should not become a litmus test for righteousness.

READ: Paul illustrated his point with two real-life experiences in the Roman church. Read Romans 14:2-4, and instruct the group to listen for the dilemma created between Gentile and Jewish Christians over the food they each ate. After several volunteers have shared, say: Christianity is not a one-size-fits-all belief system. The Bible speaks clearly on many topics, but the key to reconciling differences surrounding the rest requires a commitment to unity and grace.

DISCUSS: What are some issues that stir debates in the church today? How do these compare to the issues pointed to by Paul? (PSG, p. 117)

EXPLAIN: Paul’s second illustration focused on the divisions in Rome over holy days. Some members observed some days as more important than others. Others in the church believed that every day is holy for a Christ follower.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Romans 14:5-6, and lead the group to identify the motives and convictions that make any day holy.
**LOCATE:** Read Romans 14:7-8, and instruct the group to locate the foundational principle of Paul’s logic (ownership). Say: Paul had reminded the Romans that salvation means we die to our old life of sin and are raised with Christ (Rom. 6:1-11). So, every believer now lives and belongs to the Lord.

**DISPLAY:** Point out the word *salvation* on Pack Item 5 *(Poster: Key Words in Romans)* and read its definition on Pack Item 13 *(Key Words in Romans)*.

**DISCUSS:** How should viewing God as owner change a person’s perspective on worship practices? How should it impact how believers treat one another? (PSG, p. 118)

**READ:** Direct a volunteer to read Romans 14:9-12, and invite the group to identify two questions Paul posed to the church.

**GUIDE:** Lead the group to answer the two questions based on Paul’s statement of faith in verse 9. Say: Paul would answer that neither judgment nor contempt is appropriate in the body of Christ. Believers are to be understanding of each other and not obstacles within the church. And Paul reminded his readers that everyone will be held accountable for their actions.

**EXPLAIN:** Highlight this statement from the PSG (p. 119): It is wrong for any believer to attempt to put a brother or sister in Christ back under any form of bondage.

**DISCUSS:** How has your response to the question on page 120 of the PSG changed as a result of today’s discussion?

**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)**

**DISPLAY:** Call attention to Pack Item 5 *(Poster: Key Words in Romans)* and Pack Item 13 *(Key Words in Romans)*. Identify the word *faith* on the poster. Invite someone to share the definition on the handout. Then call for volunteers to share examples of either being weak or strong in faith in their lives.

**CHALLENGE:** Believers are to honor God regardless of what doing so may require. One way to do that in practical terms is to recognize the efforts of others who are also striving to please God—albeit in different ways. We can enjoy freedom to serve God as He leads us, but we also must allow others the same privilege. Our rights do not extend so far as to trample the practices of others. Our faith in God should guide us to act and treat others in the way He guides us.

**REFLECT:** Believers are to express understanding toward other believers and their God-honoring practices. Examine your life for areas in which you need to be more understanding toward other believers and their practices. Lead the group to discuss the second question set under In My Context on page 121 of the PSG: What are some practical ways you and the members of your Bible study group can demonstrate God’s ownership of your lives? How can you honor Him by honoring someone who is different?

**PRAY:** Close the session with a prayer of thanksgiving for the body of Christ.
**PRACTICE**

- Send the group an email or text assuring them of your prayer as they work to maintain healthy relationships within the church.
- Follow up with any concerns shared by the group through personal contact or a written word of encouragement.

**MORE IDEAS**

**FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)**
To enhance Focus Attention, invite the group to pinch themselves on the arm. Ask: **How did your body react to being pinched? Which of the four systems on the poster worked together to let you know your arm was pinched? Did the pinch on your arm affect other parts of your body?**

**EXPLORE THE TEXT**

- Supplement the discussion on Romans 14:1-4 by asking: **Are you more likely to judge others or look down on others? Give an example. What adjustments do you need to make based on today’s study?** (PSG, p. 121)
- Expand the discussion on Romans 14:5-6 by making a list of days that believers might identify as holy days. Ask the group to share how these days differ from every other day.
- Use the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 116) as a transition to Summarize and Challenge. Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:25-33. Ask: **What problem was Paul addressing in these verses? How is the problem Paul addressed in Romans 14 similar to the problem in Corinth? How is it different? What insights about the problem in Corinth apply to the situation in Rome?**

**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)**
Summarize the session by inviting the group to recite together the Memory Verse, Romans 14:19: “So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.”

**SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA**
Used as the closing of many worship experiences in various church settings, “Blest Be the Tie That Binds,” by John Fawcett, has served as both an expression of unity and a commitment among believers “that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other” (1 Cor. 12:25). Sing the hymn together or read the lyrics to close the session.
Reach

Believers must make every effort to share the gospel with everyone.

ROMANS 15:14-21,30-33

MEMORY VERSE: ROMANS 15:13

READ Romans 15:14–16:27, First Thoughts (p. 142), and Understand the Context (p. 142). As you read Romans 15:14-21,30-33, note the number of times Paul pointed to Christ and what the frequency of the references reveals about Paul’s view of Christ.

STUDY Romans 15:14-21,30-33, using Explore the Text (pp. 143–147). Review the summary statements for each of the sessions in this study of Romans. Use Explore the Bible Adult Commentary found in print or digital format at LifeWay.com to aid your understanding of the passage.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 148–149) and More Ideas (p. 150). Plan to use the Suggested Music Idea (p. 150). Consult QuickSource for additional questions you can use in leading the discussion and an Object Lesson idea for the study.

GROW with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides; and □ A mask like the one worn by “The Lone Ranger.” Prepare to display: □ PACK ITEM 1 (Map: Paul’s Voyage to Rome); □ PACK ITEM 2 (Outline of Romans); □ PACK ITEM 3 (Poster: The Romans Road); □ PACK ITEM 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans); and □ PACK ITEM 6 (Key Verse: Romans 10:9).
FIRST THOUGHTS

John Reid—the name of the masked man known as “The Lone Ranger”—was rarely alone. He was “lone” in that he was the sole survivor of an ambush by outlaws, but he was far from alone because he had a companion. Sometimes we may think of Paul as a lone ranger, but his mission required him to depend on others. The sharing of the gospel requires a team effort, and Paul reminded the Roman believers of this in the closing section of the letter.

(In PSG, p. 122) **Why might a believer take a lone ranger approach to sharing the gospel with others? What are the dangers of failing to invite others to be part of sharing the gospel?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

**ROMANS 15:14–16:27**

Paul brought his letter to a close by reminding the Roman believers why he was writing to them. As a minister to the Gentiles by the grace of God, he felt a responsibility for their spiritual welfare. He praised their goodness and knowledge but felt the need to speak frankly about some issues. His goal was that the Gentiles would be “an acceptable offering” (Rom. 15:16).

Paul’s work in modern-day Turkey and Greece was drawing to an end, and he felt God leading him to areas where the gospel was not known, specifically to Spain. Paul wanted to avoid areas where he would build on the foundation laid by others.

Before Paul could travel to Rome on his way to Spain, he had to make sure the financial contribution that had been collected for the poor in Jerusalem was properly delivered. He apparently experienced a sense of uneasiness at the possible outcomes of the Jerusalem trip, so he enlisted the believers in Rome to pray specifically that God would rescue him from the unbelievers in Jerusalem and that the offering he was carrying would be accepted by fellow believers in the spirit with which it had been given.

The last section of the letter was dedicated primarily to discussing people. Paul commended Phoebe, who may have carried the letter from Corinth to Rome for Paul. Paul did not specify Phoebe’s mission in Rome, but he urged the church to help her in any way they could. After greeting a long list of Roman church members with whom Paul was acquainted, he gave one final warning about people who might disrupt the unity of the church by teaching things contrary to what the believers had been taught. Those people deceived by flattery and smooth talk.

Paul gave greetings from several of his co-workers and then closed out the letter with a benediction giving praise and glory to God through Christ.

**KEY DOCTRINE**

**Cooperation**

Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ’s Kingdom (1 Cor. 1:10-17).

**BIBLE SKILL**

Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.

Usually when a New Testament author quoted an Old Testament passage, he had in mind not just the portion quoted but also the larger Old Testament context in which the verse was found. In Romans 15:21, Paul quoted the second half of Isaiah 52:15, which was part of Isaiah’s fourth Servant Song (52:13–53:12). Read and outline the entire passage. Notice the tone set at the beginning of the passage (52:13-14): exaltation in the midst of humiliation. In what ways does understanding this Old Testament passage help you understand Paul’s church planting strategy?
Paul saw the gospel as God’s climax to salvation history and his mission to the Gentiles as a direct command from God.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

FULFILL YOUR CALLING (ROM. 15:14-16)

VERSE 14
The phrase my brothers and sisters indicates a shift in topic. The use of language related to family signals a softer tone. After admonishing the Roman Christians for their divisive attitudes toward believers who didn’t agree with them (Rom. 14:1–15:13), Paul now commended them for their spiritual maturity. He used an emphatic pronoun, I myself, to drive home his conviction that the Roman believers were full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. Paul probably had learned about the divisions within the body from fellow workers like Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila (Acts 18:2,18; Rom. 16:3). These coworkers likely also informed him of the congregation’s goodness and knowledge that led to their ability to teach others. There is no reason to assume Paul was being insincere in addressing the Roman believers in this way. Most churches are a mix of Christians at different levels of spiritual maturity, all of them having areas in which they need to grow.

VERSES 15-16
Paul acknowledged that in parts of his letter he had been rather frank in his teaching, especially from one who had no personal relationship with the church. Paul’s boldness came as a result of the grace God had given him. God had graciously given to Paul the gift of apostleship (Rom. 1:5).

When Paul referred to his task in relationship to the Gentiles, he normally used the title “apostle.” However, here he chose the title minister. The word was used to describe anyone who performed a public service in general, and Paul may have used this word in this generic sense. However, in light of the language related to sacrifice in verse 16, the word must have referred to ministry in a specific, religious sense. From the moment of his conversion, Paul had been called by God to minister to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15), serving as a priest of the gospel of God. As the Gentiles responded in obedience to the gospel, they were Paul’s acceptable offering to God. For the Gentiles to be acceptable to God, the Holy Spirit must produce His sanctifying work in their lives. Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice of Himself led to that sanctification (Heb. 10:10,14). Paul’s words here echo his earlier admonition that believers should present themselves as living, holy, pleasing sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1). Paul attributed this work to the triune God: a minister of Christ Jesus … to the gospel of God … sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Like Paul, we are called on to proclaim the gospel so that those who respond in obedience might be an acceptable sacrifice to God.
In addressing the Roman believers, Paul combined compliments (15:14) with frank talk about their behavior that didn’t measure up (15:15). Are you more comfortable complimenting or speaking frankly? Why are both important for balanced spiritual growth?

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BOAST ABOUT JESUS (ROM. 15:17-19)

**VERSES 17-19**

Paul understood that boasting in one’s own achievements was excluded (Rom. 3:27). James said that such boasting was evil (Jas. 4:16). However, Paul had a **reason to boast in Christ Jesus**. The phrase **regarding what pertains to God** refers back to Paul’s description of the role God had given him in reaching the Gentiles. Paul could boast in the obedience of those with whom he had shared the gospel (1 Thess. 2:19).

Paul was able to boast because of the object of his boasting. His boasting was not about anything he had done himself but rather was about what Christ had accomplished through him. Paul **would not dare say anything except what Christ has accomplished through him**. He was a minister to the Gentiles because of the grace God had given him (Rom. 15:15). His work among the Gentiles had been accomplished through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. The goal of Paul’s ministry had been the **obedience of the Gentiles** (Rom. 1:5). That obedience was accomplished by word and deed, a phrase that was used frequently to cover everything a person said and did. (See Luke 24:19; Acts 7:22; Col. 3:17; 2 Thess. 2:17.)

Christ had accomplished the obedience of the Gentiles through Paul’s speech and actions.

The words and deeds God had accomplished through Paul were accomplished by the **power of miraculous signs and wonders**. The two words signs and wonders were frequently used to describe God’s powerful deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Ex. 7:3; Deut. 11:3; Ps. 135:9). During his Pentecost sermon, Peter proclaimed that Jesus had been attested by God “with miracles, wonders, and signs” (Acts 2:22), and God continued to perform signs and wonders through the apostles (2:43; 5:12; 6:8). Signs and wonders had been evident in Paul’s ministry as well (14:3; 15:12). The words, deeds, signs, and wonders taken together describe the totality of Paul’s ministry among the Gentiles. Just as the sanctification of the Gentiles had been accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16), so the signs and wonders that accompanied Paul’s ministry among the Gentiles had been performed by the **power of God’s Spirit**.

Paul gave the geographical scope of his ministry as being **from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum**. He did not mean that he had preached in every city of this area, but that he had planted churches in significant locations and those churches were continuing to spread...
the gospel. The church in Colossae apparently was started by some of Paul’s converts in Ephesus.

One might have expected Paul to have referred to Antioch as the beginning point of his gospel preaching, especially since he left from and returned to Antioch throughout his missionary journeys (Acts 13:2-3; 14:26). However, shortly after his conversion in Damascus, Paul traveled to Jerusalem and spoke “boldly in the name of the Lord” (9:28). Illyricum, which is mentioned only here in the New Testament, designated a Roman province located northwest of Macedonia. While in prison in Rome, Paul reported to Timothy that he had sent Titus to Dalmatia, one of two major divisions of Illyricum (2 Tim. 4:10). Paul laid out the eastern and western boundaries of his missionary travels, setting the stage for the request he was about to make (Rom. 15:22-24).

Is it possible for a person to “brag on God” in a way that is designed to make him or her look good? How can we avoid doing that?

SEEK THE LOST (ROM. 15:20-21)

VERSES 20-21
To fulfill the gospel ministry that had been given to him, Paul aspired to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named. Paul’s reason for this strategy was so that he would not build on someone else’s foundation. He reminded the Corinthians that he had laid a foundation upon which others were building (1 Cor. 3:10). Using an agricultural metaphor, Paul had planted, Apollos was watering, but God was causing the growth (1 Cor. 3:6). We should not read Paul as making little of the ministry of discipleship and continued evangelism in local churches. Paul and Apollos were part of a team reaching their area for Christ.

We need to seek ways to engage those who have never heard the name of Jesus with the gospel.

Paul turned to the Old Testament for support for his strategy. The quotation from the second half of Isaiah 52:15 was especially appropriate, since it referred to proclaiming God’s good news of His Servant to those who had not heard. This was the heart of Paul’s strategy. Also, the first half of the verse identified the nations and the kings as the audience to whom the good news of the Servant of the Lord would be proclaimed. In his role as a minister to the Gentiles, Paul was seeing the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. In addition, this verse is part of Isaiah’s fourth Servant Song, predicting the Servant who would come and die for His people (Isa. 53:4-6).

VERSES 20-21
20 My aim is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, so that I will not build on someone else’s foundation, 21 but, as it is written, Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.
Like Paul, we need to seek ways to engage those who have never heard the name of Jesus with the gospel Paul proclaimed.

**Paul desired to preach the gospel where it had not been heard. How can the church support believers who are called by God to reach the unreached people groups of the world?**

**PARTNER WITH OTHERS (ROM. 15:30-33)**

**VERSE 30**

30 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in fervent prayers to God on my behalf.

The discussion of his planned trip to Jerusalem to deliver the offering from the Gentile believers (15:22-29) reminded Paul of the gravity of the situation he was about to encounter. As a result, Paul solicited the support of the believers in Rome. The Greek word translated *appeal* denotes a strong, urgent request (12:1). Paul qualified this appeal in two ways. First, the appeal was made *through our Lord Jesus Christ*. Paul was establishing the authority on which the appeal was based. Second, Paul appealed *through the love of the Spirit*. This phrase can be understood either as the love that the Spirit has for us as believers or the love that the Spirit generates within us. Given the situation Paul was about the face in Jerusalem, the second option probably was what Paul had in mind; the love the Holy Spirit creates in the lives of believers was the solution to the conflict that Paul seemed to think was inevitable otherwise.

Paul urged the Roman Christians to strive together with him. This word also was used of competing in an athletic contest or engaging in a military action. Paul used a form of this word to describe to the Colossian Christians the fervor with which their friend Epaphras prayed for them (“He is always wrestling for you in his prayers,” Col. 4:12). Here Paul urged the Roman Christians to wrestle with him in prayer over the situation in Jerusalem.

**VERSE 31**

31 Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints.

Paul had two specific items for which he wanted prayer. First, he asked for prayer that he might be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea. Paul had reason for thinking that the Jews who had not accepted Jesus as Messiah would cause trouble for him. In fact, when Paul was worshiping in the temple in Jerusalem, he had to be rescued by Roman soldiers from a mob intent on killing him (Acts 21:30-33). Later, he had to be taken to Caesarea at night by Roman soldiers to thwart an assassination attempt by Jewish radicals (23:12-24). God used Roman soldiers to answer Paul’s prayer.

Second, Paul asked for prayer that his ministry to Jerusalem might be acceptable to the saints. Paul was referring to the financial contribution
that the Gentile Christians had collected for the benefit of the poor among the believers in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26). Paul desired the unity of both Gentiles and Jews within the church. The willingness of the Jewish believers to accept assistance from the Gentile believers would be evidence that they were growing into unity. Just as Paul wanted the Gentiles to “be an acceptable offering” (15:16), he also wanted the contribution of the Gentiles to be acceptable to the saints.

VERSES 32-33
The answer to the two prayer requests in verse 31 would lead to two additional requests being granted. First, Paul desired to come to the Roman Christians. He probably visualized leaving Jerusalem headed for Rome, looking forward to sharing with the believers in Rome the ways God had answered their prayers. Paul acknowledged that his path was directed by God’s will. Second, Paul looked forward to enjoying the fellowship of the believers in Rome. The Greek word translated be refreshed together meant to relax in someone’s company.

Paul here renewed a theme from the beginning of his letter: his desire to visit the believers in Rome. He wanted to share spiritual blessings with them and “to be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (Rom. 1:12). God eventually allowed Paul to visit Rome. Even though he arrived as a Roman prisoner, he surely came “in the fullness of the blessing of Christ” (15:29). The last word Luke shared about Paul in Acts was that even though Paul was a prisoner, he was “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31).

Paul ended this section of his letter by invoking a blessing on the Roman believers. Throughout his letter he used the word peace to refer both to the believer’s relationship to God through Christ’s atoning sacrifice and to the relationship believers should have together as a result of Jesus’ work. Choosing between the two meanings probably is not necessary.

Paul had never visited Rome but had awareness of the church. He called them to be prayer warriors for his trip to Jerusalem. What are additional ways we can partner with other believers to advance the gospel?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

ROLE PLAY: As the group arrives, invite them to imagine they are being interviewed for a position in a new company. Select a volunteer and ask: Do you prefer to work alone or work with a team? Follow up by asking why the volunteer feels more comfortable working that way. After the role play, ask the group, Which situations work better when we work alone, and which work better when we work with a team? Allow time for responses.

DISCUSS: Why might a believer take a lone ranger approach to sharing the gospel with others? What are the dangers of failing to invite others to be part of sharing the gospel? (PSG, p. 122)

TRANSITION: On many occasions in his ministry Paul was the sole actor, but his mission required him to depend on others and to invite them to be part of the work. Briefly review the full outline of Romans using Pack Item 2 (Outline of Romans). Conclude by saying: The sharing of the gospel requires a team effort, and Paul reminded the Roman believers of this as he closed out his letter to them.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Romans 15:14-16 reveals Paul’s confidence in the Roman Christians. As you read Romans 15:14-16, invite the group to listen for characteristics of a spiritually-healthy Christian.

RESPOND: Allow the group to share their thoughts, making sure the following are included: maintains close personal relationships (brothers and sisters), understands the difference between right and wrong and selects what is right (full of goodness), taught well and holds firmly to those teachings (filled with knowledge), encourages one another and holds each other accountable (instruct one another), and open to instruction (remind you more boldly of some points).

CONSIDER: Paul had a heart and passion to be a minister to the Gentiles. Paul also saw himself as a priest of the gospel. Invite the group to define those two words (minister and priest) in terms of what actions each would require. For example, Old Testament priests spoke on God’s behalf and presented offerings. Ask: How do these two words explain Paul’s calling?

DISCUSS: How did Paul’s understanding of his ministry follow Jesus’ commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8? (PSG, p. 125)

READ: Enlist someone to read aloud Romans 15:17-19, inviting the group to identify the three ways God accomplished His work through Paul (word and deed, miraculous signs and wonders, God’s Holy Spirit).

EMPHASIZE: Explain from the PSG (p. 126): Paul demonstrated incredible humility and a keen understanding of what the Christian life is all about. He knew it would be foolish to dare say anything about his own achievements. Paul realized that Christ alone accomplished this work through him.

DISCUSS: What does it look like to boast in Christ and not in ourselves?
EXPLORE: As you read Romans 15:20-21, instruct the group to observe the passion expressed in Paul’s words about his mission to share Jesus with people who have never heard about Him.

DISCUSS: What are the dangers of preaching the gospel only to the people who have already heard it? What are the dangers of going only to places where people have never heard Jesus’ name? Where is the balance? (PSG, p. 127)

READ: Instruct a volunteer to read Romans 15:30-33, inviting the group to identify the specific areas for which Paul requested prayer (protection from Jews in Judea who considered him a traitor to their faith, reception of the financial gift from Gentile believers for hurting Christians in Judea, and opportunity to personally visit the church in Rome).

DISCUSS: What do Paul’s prayer requests reveal about his priorities? How are his requests consistent with the rest of the letter to the Romans? (PSG, p. 129)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REFLECT: Guide the group to read and reflect on the summary statement for today’s session (PSG, p. 122): Believers must make every effort to share the gospel with everyone. After a brief time of reflection, ask the group to consider: Who has God placed in your life who needs to hear the gospel? What do you need to do to make sure they hear it? (PSG, p. 130)

KEY DOCTRINE: Call attention to the Key Doctrine (Cooperation) on page 129 of the Personal Study Guide. Invite a volunteer to read the doctrine: Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ’s Kingdom (1 Cor. 1:10-17).

DISCUSS: Along with prayers, what are some other ways you and the members of your Bible study can partner with other believers? What steps do you need to take to build those partnerships? (PSG, p. 130)

MUSIC IDEA: Use the Suggested Music Idea (p. 150) to present a contemporary statement of Paul’s message to the Romans in this session’s text. Invite the group to compare the lyrics with words Paul used to call the Romans to reach people for Christ. Point to the key words on Pack Item 5 (Poster: Key Words in Romans) for guidance.

REVIEW: Guide the group to review Pack Item 3 (Poster: The Romans Road) and Pack Item 6 (Key Verse: Romans 10:9). Ask: How has your understanding of salvation and daily living out the gospel changed as a result of this study?

CONCLUSION: Close the session and the study by reading Romans 15:13 as the memory verse. Share it as a benediction, followed by a prayer of thanksgiving for Paul in recording God’s Word. Conclude the prayer with a commitment to grow in faithfulness to God to become the Christ follower presented in Romans.
PRACTICE

- Send the group an email or text thanking each member for participating in the study and encouraging them to pray for each other as they honor God in their daily living.
- Contact each member of the group with an invitation to continue exploring the Bible in the upcoming study of Proverbs and Song of Songs.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)
As an option for Focus Attention, secure a mask like the one worn by “The Lone Ranger.” Show it to the group and ask: What does this mask represent? After several have responded, say: We think of people who act on their own as lone rangers, but The Lone Ranger was rarely alone. He was “lone” in that he was the sole survivor of an outlaw ambush, but he had a companion whom he relied on. Move to Focus Attention: Discuss.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- Remind the group of Jesus’ commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8. Invite two volunteers to each read one of the passages and instruct the group to consider how Paul’s words in verse 16 follow Jesus’ commands. Once read, allow time for discussion.
- Expand the discussion on Romans 15:17-19 by asking the group: How can a believer overcome the temptation of taking the credit instead of pointing to Christ? (PSG, p. 126)
- For further emphasis on Romans 15:20-21 and the scope of Paul’s ministry, say from the PSG (p. 127): Paul had spent his ministry breaking new ground for the gospel. In fact, one reason he had not yet visited Rome was that he was busy planting churches where none had existed before. So, this was the next reasonable step for him. While we should never downplay the importance of discipling believers, we also should never shy away from proclaiming Him to those who have never heard. Then use Pack Item 1 (Map: Paul’s Voyage to Rome) to review Paul’s travels from “Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum” (v. 19).

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)
Expand Summarize and Challenge: Reflect by asking the group: How can you and the members of your Bible study group point others to Jesus? What will you need to change to get the spotlight off yourselves and on to Him? (PSG, p. 130) Record several ideas mentioned and commit as a group to pursuing them in the future.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA
“People Need the Lord,” written by Greg Nelson and Phill McHugh, was introduced in a recording by Steve Green. Lead the group to sing the song or read the lyrics as a commitment.
These items are available on the Explore the Bible Leader Pack digital download file as PDFs to create your own handouts or media presentations for your group. Items marked as handouts are also available as reproducible masters included in the Explore the Bible Leader Pack digital files.

**PACK ITEM 1**

*Map: Paul’s Voyage to Rome*

Sessions 1-14

Use the map on page 155 or locate a map in a Bible atlas that shows the possible journeys of Paul.

**PACK ITEM 2**

*Outline of Romans*

Sessions 1-14

Refer to an outline for Romans in the CSB Study Bible.

**PACK ITEM 3**

*Poster: The Romans Road*

Sessions 4-6, 9, 14

Create a poster that lists the following Scripture passages:

- Romans 3:23
- Romans 6:23
- Romans 5:8
- Romans 10:9-10
- Romans 10:13

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**Pack Item 1 example** from Explore the Bible Leader Pack (The Pack is available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.)

**Pack Item 3 example** from Explore the Bible Leader Pack (The Pack is available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.)
PACK ITEM 4
Poster: Christ Arose!
Session 7

PACK ITEM 5
Poster: Key Words in Romans
Sessions 3-6,8-9,13-14
Create a poster that lists the following key words from Romans:
• Atonement
• Faith
• Flesh
• Glory
• Gospel
• Grace
• Justification
• Law
• Promise
• Righteousness
• Salvation
• Sanctification
• Sin
• Works

PACK ITEM 6
Key Verse: Romans 10:9
Sessions 9,14
Create a poster that lists Romans 10:9: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

PACK ITEM 7
Handout: Romans Time Line
Sessions 1,10,12
Locate a study Bible with a time line of the major people and events in Romans (from 800 BC–AD 80). Use it as a reference during this study.

PACK ITEM 8
Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark
Sessions 1-14
Make a list of these suggested memory verses to distribute to your group:
• Romans 1:16
• Romans 2:11
• Romans 3:10
• Romans 3:23-24
• Romans 5:8
• Romans 6:23
• Luke 24:6
• Romans 8:1
• Romans 10:9
• Romans 11:36
• Romans 12:2
• Romans 13:10
• Romans 14:19
• Romans 15:13

Pack Item 5 example from Explore the Bible Leader Pack (The Pack is available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.)
PACK ITEM 9
Handout: Justification by Faith
Session 4
Use a Bible dictionary to create a handout that defines justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

PACK ITEM 10
Handout: Doctrinal Emphases in Paul’s Letters
Sessions 1, 4, 9
Use a Bible concordance or dictionary to create a chart that lists the purposes, major doctrines, and passages of each of Paul’s Letters.

PACK ITEM 11
Handout: The Romans Road
Session 4–6, 9
Create a handout for your group that lists the following Scripture passages:
- Romans 3:23
- Romans 6:23
- Romans 5:8
- Romans 10:9-10
- Romans 10:13

PACK ITEM 12
Handout: Paul’s Use of Abraham in Romans
Session 4
Use a Bible dictionary or commentary to create a handout that discusses Paul’s references to Abraham within his Letter to the Romans.

PACK ITEM 13
Handout: Key Words in Romans
Sessions 3–6, 8–9, 13
Use a Bible dictionary or commentary to create a handout that defines the following key words from Romans:
- Atonement
- Faith
- Flesh
- Glory
- Gospel
- Grace
- Justification
- Law
- Promise
- Righteousness
- Salvation
- Sanctification
- Sin
- Works
COMING NEXT QUARTER

PROVERBS; SONG OF SONGS

Session 1  Charted Waters  >  Proverbs 1:7-19
Session 2  Direction Offered  >  Proverbs 3:1-12
Session 3  Compassion Demonstrated  >  Proverbs 3:21-35
Session 4  The Choice  >  Proverbs 4:11-27
Session 5  Following God’s Design  >  Proverbs 5:3-11,15-18
Session 6  Pursuing Wisdom  >  Proverbs 8:6-21
Session 7  Living Wisely  >  Proverbs 14:8-15
Session 8  Pleasing God  >  Proverbs 15:33–16:11
Session 9  Staying Sober  >  Proverbs 23:17-21,29-35
Session 10  Accepting Discipline  >  Proverbs 29:1-3,12-20
Session 11  Finding Honor  >  Proverbs 31:10-16,23-31
Session 12  Relational Foundations  >  Song of Songs 2:15–3:5
Session 13  Relational Investment  >  Song of Songs 5:6-16
Paul’s Voyage to Rome

Paul’s Voyage to Rome is adapted from the Holman Bible Atlas (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2014), 256. Used by permission.
Coming Up Next

Proverbs; Song of Songs

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