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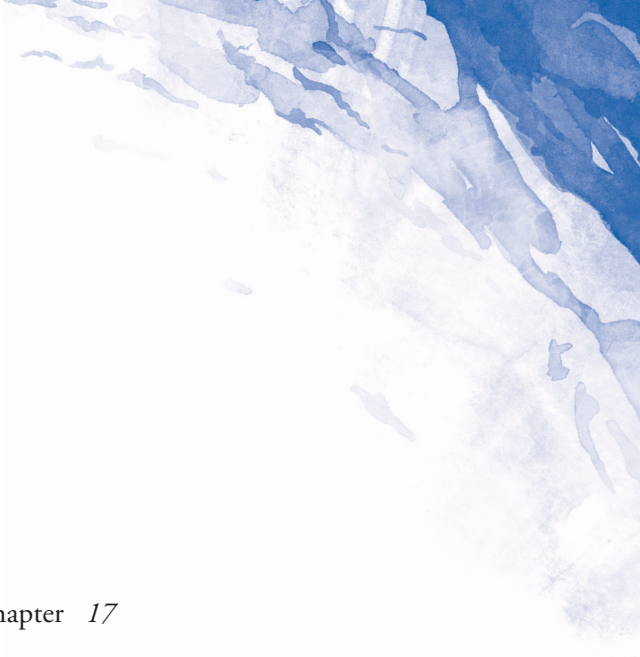
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# no greater message

The goal of week one is to get an overview of Romans and read through its first seven chapters. Although our study focuses primarily on Romans 8, it is good to have a general understanding of what comes before it. Chapter 8 of Romans begins with the word *therefore*, which means that everything that comes before it is important and connected.

Much of this week, *therefore*, involves reading and responding to Romans 1–7. There will be content questions to work through each day as well as a daily devotional and more questions for reflection.

If this seems like a lot of reading and questions, don't worry. Once we get into Romans 8, there will be a lot less reading and more in-depth reflection. In the meantime, don't fret if some of your reading runs over into a sixth day or a seventh or if you don't get through all the questions. Just get through it all the best you can. (If you're working on your own, you might even consider taking an extra week for this first step.) I guarantee it will be worth it in the long run.



## WEEK ONE | DAY ONE

Remember, this initial week is a sweep through the first seven chapters of Romans. Feel free to read and study further into one chapter or another, stick with and cross reference one key verse, or simply spend time working to gain a broader understanding of each day's text.

### READ | ROMANS 1-2

### RESPOND

1. Who wrote the book of Romans? When was it written, and to whom was it written?
2. How would you summarize Romans 1? Why does Paul say he is not ashamed of the gospel, and what might that mean for the rest of the book?
3. What does Romans 1:18–32 say about the human condition—what people are like and what it's like to live in this world? What do these verses say about God? And what might they say about you specifically?

4. Why do you think Paul repeats the phrase translated “O man” in the ESV translation of 2:1–3? How do other versions translate these verses? (Note: there is repetition in the original Greek too.)
  
5. Why do you think Paul mentions the Jews and Greeks in reference to both the gospel (1:16) as well as in the wrath to come (2:10)? Why might Paul repeat the “Jews come first” idea for each?
  
6. The word *law* is mentioned several times in 2:12–29. In verse 12, when Paul refers to those “in the law” and those “outside of the law” he is referring to Jews (the people of Israel or covenant people) as opposed to the Gentiles (those who were not Jews). Look up 1 Corinthians 9:20–22, where Paul explains how he “became a Jew” to win Jews and “became as one outside the law” in order to win Gentiles. With some of this context in mind, review the references to the *law* in Romans 2:12–29. What are some of the implications you see in this text concerning the law?
  
7. Circumcision is mentioned several times in our text (2:25–29). It also appears throughout the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis 17. According to that Genesis passage, what did circumcision mean for the Jewish people? With that in mind, why do you think circumcision was an issue for the early Christians? Why might Paul’s statement in Romans 2:25 be alarming to his Jewish readers? How is he ultimately pointing to the need of an ultimate sacrifice?

8. What do you think this line from 2:29 means: “But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God”?

## EXPLORE

### *Not Ashamed*

*I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”*

#### **ROMANS 1:16–17**

I sat across from my friend, spilling my guts. I couldn’t wait to share with her because I was so desperate for help.

As she sat there listening to me share my sorrows, I could tell she was carrying my burden. Her eyebrows buckled, and her eyes welled up with tears. She really wanted to take away my pain. But she was wise enough to know that I needed more than comfort or sympathy or even her advice. What I needed was a Person—Jesus. My sin separated me from God, and the only remedy for that was the saving work of Jesus on the cross.

My friend had many reasons why she could have finished our conversation that day without sharing the gospel with me. I was older than she was and came from a different background. We were really just friendly acquaintances, not great friends. But none of these reasons mattered to her. Why? Because she was not ashamed of the gospel or afraid to share it.

Paul had even greater reason to worry about sharing the gospel than my friend did. He was well aware of the violent persecution associated with such efforts in those days—after all, he had been a persecutor! But Paul, too, was neither ashamed of the gospel nor afraid to share it.

Perhaps this is because both my friend and Paul knew the power of the gospel to transform lives—their own first and foremost. Their transformation stories are quite different. My friend was saved at a very young age. Paul had perhaps the most dramatic conversion in all of history—a bright light on a dark road, the voice of Jesus, being literally blinded so he could see the truth. Both, however, experienced a radical transformation—literally from death to life. And I did, too, because of my friend’s willingness to share the gospel with me.

You don’t need to have a radical testimony like Paul’s to know the power of the gospel to change lives. What you and I need is the faith to believe. There will come a time, if the time hasn’t already come, when we will have the choice to either proclaim Jesus or shrink back and say nothing. We might feel inadequate or be tempted to second-guess ourselves. Or we might find the thought of rejection too much to bear. But if we believe the gospel to be true—that God sent His only Son, Jesus, who was fully God and fully man; that Jesus lived a perfect life on earth, died on the cross, and then rose and defeated death; that Jesus is the way (the *only* way), the truth, and the life—then isn’t it selfish for us to keep this incredibly good, radically transformational news to ourselves?

You and I can repent of our fear and complacency, knowing that God is rich in grace and mercy, and ask the Lord to give us faith—not in our power or perfect words, but rather in the power of the gospel to save.

## REFLECT

1. Take a moment to reflect on your personal testimony. When and how did you become a Christian?
2. Can you say with confidence, “I’m not ashamed of the gospel”? If so, why? If not, what’s making you ashamed or uncertain?
3. Think of people in your life—maybe friends or family—with whom you’ve been hoping to share the gospel but haven’t yet done so. What has held you back?
4. Take a moment to pray for the opportunities and boldness to share the gospel and for the Lord to work in the lives of those who will hear you share.

## WEEK ONE | DAY TWO

### READ | ROMANS 3-4

### RESPOND

1. Why do you think Paul focuses on the faith of the Jews in chapter 3:1–4?
2. What does it mean to be “under the power of sin” (see 3:9–10)?
3. According to Paul, what does the law do for us in regard to sin (3:20)? What does it *not* do?
4. The words *righteous* and *righteousness* appear multiple times in 3:1–26. (How many times will depend on what version of the Bible you are using.) What do these words mean, and what do they tell us about God? About ourselves?



5. We also see the words *justified*, *just*, and *justifier* in the 3:1–26 passage. What do those words mean? How are they applied to both the Jew and Gentile by faith? What do these words tell us about God?
  
6. Paul writes in 4:1–2 that even Abraham can't boast. Why can't he, and why can't we?
  
7. Read Genesis 17:9–14 again to understand the origin of circumcision and what it meant to the Jews. Read Leviticus 12:2–3 to see how circumcision was also a part of the Mosaic law. According to Paul in Romans 4, what was the purpose of circumcision in regard to justification and faith? How was this explanation significant to his first-century readers? Why is this significant for us today?
  
8. So much good news is contained in the phrase “counted to us” (4:23–25). What does this phrase mean? Why is it such good news?

## EXPLORE

### *Unfaithful*

*What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,*

*“That you may be justified in your words,  
and prevail when you are judged.”*

*But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world?*

**ROMANS 3:3–6**

I remember the first time it happened to one of my friends. Her husband had committed adultery. His betrayal crushed her, and rightly so. Her life was turned upside down by his sin. Unfaithfulness truly has awful consequences.

Tragically, since that day, I’ve seen this happen over and over again in the lives of people around me—and in my own life as well. No, I have not committed adultery, and neither has my husband. But we’ve both been unfaithful more times than we like to admit—unfaithful to the God who has given us so much and who deserves our full allegiance. And so, most likely, have you.

That hurts to admit, doesn’t it? It’s hard to think of ourselves as unfaithful. But who of us can say we are without sin and have obeyed God perfectly—even though we are the bride of Christ? We are not faithful to God—at least not every minute of every day.

Our unfaithfulness looks like bowing to our idols, putting other things in our life ahead of God. It looks like neglecting to commune with Him through prayer. It looks like stubborn unrepentance, refusing to acknowledge our sin and come to Him for forgiveness and reconciliation. If we’re honest with ourselves, we can see we just don’t have it in us. We lack the faithfulness required to keep a relationship with God.

But thankfully—although we should not neglect pursuing a relationship with God—our faithfulness isn’t what keeps us with Him. It’s *His* faithfulness that secures us. And it is Jesus’ righteousness that causes our Lord to see our faithlessness as faithfulness.

God is faithful. And God's faithfulness means that even though we fail, even though we selfishly pursue our own desires instead of His, He will never forsake us. God's faithfulness means that His love endures forever. He *will* finish the good work He began in us. He is faithful because He has said so.

This passage in Romans 3 is interesting in that Paul is speaking of Jews who have not obeyed God. He is reminding them that God has a covenant relationship with them and God will be faithful to keep that covenant. God's faithfulness to keep His promises is also not dependent on our faithfulness to Him. Though we waver, doubt, and wander, He never has and never will.

For the Christian it is deeply encouraging to remember God's faithfulness as we battle condemnation, fear, regret, and shame. We will mess up. That's just a given. We will be unfaithful to our faithful God.

But God does not let our faithfulness (or lack of it) determine our standing before Him. Instead, God looks to His perfect Son. We could never manage what Jesus has done for us—perfect faithfulness, perfect obedience, perfect trust—but He has accomplished it for us. And one day, Jesus will return to present us, His bride, as pure to a holy God.

## REFLECT

1. List some specific ways you have been unfaithful to God in recent weeks or months. (Try to be honest.) Did you find this exercise difficult? Why or why not?
2. How has Jesus been faithful in those areas where you've been unfaithful? For example, this week I spoke sharply in anger to one of my children. In so doing, I was unfaithful because I sinned against my child and ultimately against God. (Our sin is always ultimately against God.) Jesus, however, is

pure, and His love is pure. Even when He could crush us with His power and might, He doesn't (Isa. 42:2–3). Thankfully, it is this Jesus who is interceding for me. I confessed my sin and received His grace.

3. Why is it so important to reflect on the faithfulness of God?
  
4. Write down some specific ways that you've seen God be faithful in your life.
  
5. For further study, read Romans 9–11, where Paul unpacks how God is faithful to the Jews while also maintaining that not all will believe. In what ways does that passage enrich this one?



## WEEK ONE | DAY THREE

### READ | ROMANS 5

### RESPOND

1. The first word of this chapter in the esv and other translations is *therefore*, which indicates that the first line in chapter 5 follows on what Paul was helping us see in chapter 4. Summarize chapter 4, and then put this first line in your own words.
2. Why is it that we can “rejoice in hope” (5:2)?
3. What does it mean that Christ died for us “while we were still weak” (5:6 esv)? (Hint: Paul is not speaking about our physical ability.)
4. We’ve learned about God as righteous and as the Justifier. In this chapter we see another attribute of God displayed. What attribute do you see described in 5:6–11?

5. At the beginning of verse 12, we see Paul use the word *therefore* again. What is being summed up here?
  
6. In verses 12–17, the phrase “the free gift” (or “gift” in other translations) is repeated several times in contrast to what happened with Adam, “the first man.” What is this free gift, and why is it being contrasted to the work of Adam?
  
7. The final *therefore* in chapter 5 (found in verse 18) significantly sums up the power of the gospel. (Other translations use “So then” or “consequently,” but the idea is the same.) What, according to Paul, has Jesus accomplished?
  
8. What does it mean for grace to abound (or increase) in 5:20?

## EXPLORE

### *For Sinners*

*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

### **ROMANS 5:6–8**

“Helicopter mom” is a term that refers to a mother who hovers over her children, often in a worried way, and never allows them to explore on their own. I would not

consider myself a helicopter mom; I'm more like the shield that Captain America holds. I encourage my kids to explore and play, but I position myself to protect them from danger. If we are walking down the sidewalk, I make sure I'm between them and the road. If we cross the street, I step out into the road first and stop as if to say, "Car, you would have to plow me down before you get to my kids."

The truth is, I would do anything to protect my kids from harm. I wholeheartedly believe that I would die for them if necessary. And I guess that makes sense. After all, I gave birth to them and experienced the rush of hormones that bonded us together. I've invested countless hours of my life in their care and feeding. I've snuggled with them and played with them and taught them. They are part of our family's legacy and the fabric of our daily life. I love them, and they love me back. They even obey me from time to time. (If I were on social media, I would add a big smile emoji here.)

My desire to protect my kids makes sense. But why would Jesus do what He did for us?

The Scriptures describe Jesus as a man who was "despised and rejected" by people, a "man of sorrows" who was "despised" and not "esteemed" (Isa. 53:3). He was not considered a hero by the world's definition and standards. He was nothing—and treated as nothing—to the world He chose to enter and the majority of people He encountered.

And yet Jesus died for them. Jesus went to the cross for people who are and were opposed to Him. He died for people who were not seeking Him and people who accepted Him but then went on to live their lives as if He didn't matter. For all of these—and for you and me—Jesus chose to suffer and die:

**He has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows. . . .  
he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities.  
(Isa. 53:4–6)**

This is the ultimate display of God's love for us. While we were still content in our sin, Jesus died to rescue us from it.

There are a number of reasons why I would die for my kids. There is absolutely no reason why Jesus should have died for you and me except for His great love and mercy. There is nothing that we contribute to the initial relationship with our Savior except our sin.

How can this possibly be good news? Because it tells us that we don't have to clean ourselves up in order to be acceptable to Jesus. He accepts us on His own terms—terms that included death and resurrection. And then He invites each of us to come to Him and submit our lives to Him. He didn't come for the righteous, He came for sinners. That's you and me. This is God's great love to us.

## REFLECT

1. What are some characteristics of a person you might consider risking your life for?
2. Have you ever considered all of Jesus' suffering beyond His death on the cross (man of sorrows, rejected, etc.)? Take some time to meditate on that suffering. How does doing so affect you?
3. How is God's love on display in Romans 5:6–8?



4. How might the knowledge that Jesus died for His enemies and for those who were not seeking Him affect the way you live now?