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1-WEEK SAMPLER INSIDE

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A 6-WEEK
BIBLE STUDY OF
Romans 8

IF GOD THE *Everlasting* TRUTH OF OUR GREAT *Salvation* IS FOR US

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ABOUT THIS STUDY

Blessed is the man . . .
[whose] delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 1:1–2

I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.

Psalm 119:11

Are you a pendulum swinger? Most of us are. We get an idea about one thing, the idea is corrected or adjusted, and then we swing all the way in the opposite direction. This happens in many areas of life, including how we approach reading our Bibles.

Perhaps you grew up thinking that the only way to approach the Word of God was to read a verse (or verses, or chapter) every morning. Or maybe you were told that the only way to truly understand the Word is to use a commentary or other study aid along with your Bible reading. Maybe you've adopted the idea that the only way to read the Word is to do an inductive Bible study. Or perhaps you have given up any organized approach altogether—you simply don't know what to do!

I'm here to encourage you that there is freedom in how you approach God's Word. There are, of course, best practices for understanding the Word, ones we will explore further below. But the important thing is to *do* it, to spend some quality time with God's living and active words about Himself and the supremacy of His

Son. My primary goal in this study is to make it a little easier for you to do that. It may challenge you if you are new to Bible study, but it will be well worth it in the end. That is my hope and prayer for you!

My hope is that what we do here will give you some creative ideas for different ways to learn about our awesome God, His glorious Son, and His amazing Spirit while enjoying this gift of God's words for you and me (2 Tim. 3:16–17). I also hope it will give you some new insights into the letter from Paul that many consider his most powerful and, more specifically, the pivotal part of that letter that we know as Romans 8. My hope is that you will learn to and enjoy studying deeply, meditating often, and responding when prompted by the Spirit to what you read.

WHAT THIS STUDY OFFERS

This six-week study is unique in that it is a hybrid—a Bible study and devotional combined. Each week will include the following:

- An introduction to the week's study.
- Daily or weekly “Read” prompts to get you into the Word. Beginning in week two, there will also be some suggestions for enriching your reading by approaching the readings in a variety of ways.
- “Respond” questions to help you dig into what you've read and understand it better.
- Five days' worth of “Explore” devotionals to support you in thinking about the text and applying it to your life.
- Five days' worth of “Reflect” questions to give you more to think and pray about.

Note that the first week of the study is structured a little differently than the ones that follow. It features daily Bible readings and “Respond” questions based on those readings as it takes you through the seven chapters of Romans that lead to chapter 8. There is also a devotional for each day (five days a week) plus a set of “Reflect” questions to help you meditate on what you’ve read.

After that first week, though, as we dive into Romans 8, we’ll shift gears a little. There will be only one reading and one set of “Respond” questions for the entire week, but there will still be daily “Consider” devotionals, daily “Reflect” questions, and daily suggestions for meditating on the weekly reading.

MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU!

I encourage you to take advantage of the flexibility built into this study to make it work for you. It’s designed to be done in a group setting or individually. Here are just a few of the possibilities.

- Do the study entirely on your own at home.
- Meet daily with a few friends in-person (maybe for coffee) or online to share your response to the devotionals and the questions.
- Try a combination—do some of it (like the devotionals) at home and some of it (like selected study or reflection questions) in a weekly group gathering. Or study at home and then come together to discuss your insights and discoveries.

You can follow the suggested pattern of five days of study, two days off, or you can stretch out the material to cover six or even seven days. Personally I like the idea of reading and study on one day, devotionals and reflections on five more days, and then taking a “sabbath” day of rest.

SOME BIBLE STUDY BASICS

Are you new to studying the Bible? Here are a few tips to help you get started.
(These steps apply to studying any part of the Bible.)

Step #1: Read the Passage Straight Through in One Sitting

The Bible is the inspired Word of God (1 Cor. 2:12–13, 2 Tim. 3:16–17), but it is also a book! Therefore, I encourage you to begin your study of any part of the Bible by simply reading it that way—like a book. Feel free to write down certain themes you see, repeated words, and key terms, but don’t get bogged down in the details at first.

For the purposes of this study, in fact, I suggest that you begin by reading the entire book of Romans straight through. This will give you a sweeping overview of this powerful letter, which certainly wasn’t divided into chapters and verses when Paul sent it to the Christians in Rome. Although we will spend the bulk of our time in chapter 8, knowing what is going on elsewhere in Romans will provide a helpful perspective.

Step #2: Clarify the Context

Have you ever walked up to some friends talking or overheard a conversation that seemed off or even inappropriate? I have. Once I walked up to a conversation already in progress and heard a woman say she had thrown a cat out of a window. I was confused and upset. But I quickly discovered that in context her statement made sense. She had thrown a stuffed toy out of a window and down to a little girl.

Knowing the context of that conversation helped me a lot—and clarifying context helps us understand Scripture as well. In this study we will spend a little extra time on the context of Romans 8 because many of us haven’t been taught to think about the context of Scripture. So we often go straight to the application without fully understanding the text itself.

What kind of context are we looking for when it comes to Bible study? For any book or passage, we need to consider:

- Who wrote it?
- When was it written?
- Who was it written for (the audience)?
- Why was it written (its purpose)?
- What was going on with God's people and the world in general when it was written?
- How does it relate to other parts of God's Word?

If you don't know the answers to any of these context questions, the section below on finding help will show you some good places to look.

Step #3: Consider What the Passage Says—and What It Means

Once you have done those early steps, it's time to look for the meaning. What is the actual sense of the text, and what is it saying to you? Often the meaning is clear, but sometimes you may need to reread, ponder, and maybe even look up the words before you have a clear sense of what it is saying. (Many of the "Respond" questions in this book are designed to help you do just that.)

This is a great time for cross-referencing, which is mentioned in our study of Romans 8. Cross-referencing, as the name implies, simply means comparing the passage you are studying to other passages in the Bible that can help you understand the meaning of the text. Looking at the text surrounding the verse you are reading also helps with both context and interpretation.

I always find it helpful to look for the gospel in the text—how it relates to Jesus and His saving work in the world. (Since the whole of God’s story points to Jesus, you can do this even with Old Testament texts.)

Step #4: Apply the Text to Your Life

The Bible’s message is meant to be lived as well as read, so look closely for what God is telling you through His Word. Sometimes the application will practically leap out on the page. Other times, you might have to live with the text, reflect on it, and pray about it. That’s okay. The more time you spend in the Word, relying on the Holy Spirit, the more you’ll find yourself turning to it for guidance.

NEED HELP?

As you read through the book of Romans and attempt to answer the questions in this study, you may find yourself struggling at times, especially if you are new to Romans and to Bible study in general. The apostle Paul’s writing is rich in meaning, but it can also be complex. You might also discover you need a little more background or explanation about Paul’s references, the meaning of certain words, or how the concepts in Romans 8 compare to other parts of Romans or the Bible in general. Or you might simply want to dig deeper into the text, as many of the study questions in this book encourage you to do.

Where do you go for help? Start with your own Bible! Chances are it contains most of what you need to understand what you are reading. Many Bibles include a concordance or cross-references (to direct you to other places in the Bible where a particular idea can be found), background notes, even commentaries.

If your Bible doesn’t have these aids—or if you want more help—a wealth of other resources is readily available, and you don’t have to spend a lot of money and time to make use of them. Here are a few possibilities:

- *Other versions of the Bible.* I primarily use the English Standard Version, which gives a very accurate word-for-word translation of Paul’s original Greek, and I have used this translation as a basis for this study. Many of

the “Respond” questions refer directly to the wording of the ESV, so you may have an easier time with them if you also use it. But you may find some other versions helpful as a supplement, and of course the ESV is not a requirement. Biblegateway.com and biblehub.com are two online sites that put different translations and paraphrases at your fingertips.

- *Study aids.* You don’t have to buy a library of commentaries, Bible dictionaries, lexicons, and such to find some help. If your church has a library, look there for these aids. You can find excellent help at biblegateway.com, biblehub.com (my favorite!), and several other sites.
- *Other resources.* In the back of this book you’ll find a list of books, videos, and other resources I’ve consulted while preparing this study. I recommend them for further exploration.
- *Other Christians!* If you’re doing this study as a group, you’ll be able to compare notes with other group members. But even if you’re doing it on your own, seek out opportunities to ask questions or compare notes with others. You will benefit from the unique perspective of others.

However you choose to approach this study, I hope you will find it enriching and inspiring—six weeks that draw you closer to Christ and give you a deeper and more grateful appreciation for His gospel.



INTRODUCTION

A CHERISHED BOOK, A FAVORITE CHAPTER

If someone had come up to me on the morning of my wedding day and asked me if I knew my husband-to-be well, I would have said yes without hesitation. Now, fifteen years later, I realize that while I did know him before I married him, I know so much more about him now. Our relationship has deepened, and my knowledge of him has exponentially increased since our wedding.

Why? Because we've spent hours upon hours together. We know each other's history. We know our backgrounds. When one of us reacts to something, the other knows the context from which the reaction comes. We know each other because we have studied, learned, enjoyed, and listened to each other over the course of these many years. And I'm looking forward to learning even more in the years to come!

It takes time to really know a person—and the same thing is true about getting to know the Bible. After nearly twenty years of "living with" the Bible and many, many hours of study, I'm only beginning to scratch the surface of its rich depths. And even with all my studying, I realize I will never exhaust the potential depths of learning about the Lord.

Does that sound a little daunting? It does to some people. As a matter of fact, some may avoid coming to the Word because they fear misinterpreting it. Others may only pick out a few of their favorite verses and never learn anything else. But

I don't want that for you. I encourage you to just dive in, because every step in developing a relationship has value, even the simplest "getting to know you" ones.

Before we dive into Romans 8, therefore, let's get to know the book a little. We will only scratch the surface, but that surface knowledge will help us as we study Romans 8. Just as in a marriage, our understanding and love for the Word will only grow as we learn more about it. I imagine that as we spend time in God's Word together, learning more about the writers, intent, context, and background, we will only desire to learn more about the next biblical book we read. So let's dive in.

The book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul to the churches in Rome. Most scholars agree that he likely wrote the letter while spending three months in the city of Corinth (see Acts 20:2–3). Although Paul was a Jew, he wrote the letter in Greek, a language understood in those days by Jews and Gentiles alike. And, as with most of his letters to churches, this letter addresses issues that would concern the particular church it was addressed to.

Although the exact or main purpose of Romans has been debated,¹ most scholars agree that the gospel and the glory of God are central themes. Paul proclaimed, "For 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" (Rom. 1:16). And he had a desire to "preach the gospel" to those in Rome (Rom. 1:15).

This is easy to see when you actually get into the text because the gospel practically pours out of its pages—so much so that Christians have often used the book as a tool for evangelism. Perhaps you've heard of the "Romans Road," for instance. It's a method of using certain verses in Romans (3:23, 3:10–18, 5:8, 6:23, 10:8, and so forth) as a guide for sharing the gospel with someone who needs to hear it.²

1. Some believe that there was conflict between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in the Roman church. And it is true that throughout the book of Romans we see Paul addressing Jew-and-Gentile issues—from explaining the function of the law (Rom. 1–3, 5:20, and 7:1–25) to Abraham's relationship to the Gentile Christians (4:1–25). The likelihood of conflict between these two groups in Rome would also be consistent with what we read in other New Testament books such as Acts, Galatians, and Ephesians.

2. For a simple explanation of this tool, see "What Is the Romans Road to Salvation?" Got Questions, <https://www.gotquestions.org/Romans-road-salvation.html>.

We should pause here to recognize something important, however. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome, which means he was not speaking of preaching the gospel to unbelievers, but rather to his fellow Christians. From this we can deduce that the truth and implications of the gospel apply to all of the Christian life. In other words, you and I need to hear the gospel too—daily.

Also, keep in mind that the Christians at this time would have experienced persecution for their faith. So verses like Romans 8:36—which speaks of being killed for Jesus’ sake—would not only have been meaningful, but literally true! To not be ashamed of the gospel in those days could have been a death sentence. But as Paul reminded the Christians in Rome—and you and me as well—our suffering doesn’t compare to the glory that will eventually be revealed to us (Rom. 8:18).

This message is one that has resonated with Christians throughout the centuries and has changed many lives. Even today, if you ask believers for their favorite book of the Bible, many would place Romans at the top of the list. And if you were to take a survey and ask what specific chapter in the Bible has had the most impact on their lives, a number would name the eighth chapter of Romans—and for good reason.

Tim Keller has written that “the book of Romans is the most sustained explanation of the heart of the gospel, and the most thrilling exploration of how that gospel goes to work in our hearts.”³ I agree wholeheartedly. And to me, Romans 8 is the heart of that great letter. It provides the assurance of this great salvation, summed up in its first compelling sentence, which proclaims to its reader that there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus (8:1).

That amazing declaration would be enough, but there’s more, so much more. We learn throughout Romans 8 that:

- The Spirit is actively at work in us (8:4–11);

3. Tim Keller, *Romans 8–16 for You*, God’s Word for You Romans Series, Book 2 (London, UK: Good Book Company, 2014), 7.

- We are heirs with Christ, the adopted children of God (8:12–17);
- Our suffering is for a great purpose and doesn't compare to the glory we will experience (8:18–25);
- Even in our weakness, the Spirit is at work (8:26–27);
- God is working all things for our good (8:28);
- And absolutely nothing can ever separate us from the love of Christ (8:31–39).

Need I go on? Oh, I can, and I want to! I haven't even gotten to the five life-changing questions that solidify our conviction that God is absolutely, undeniably for us (8:31–38).

So in case you've been concerned whether a single chapter in a single book can sustain an entire six-week study, don't worry. We could probably spend another six weeks—or a lifetime—and still find more.

If God Is For Us will take us on a journey into Romans 8, reminding us of our great salvation, our inheritance, and ultimately the love of our good Father. Romans 8 can be easily quoted—and often is—but through *If God Is For Us* I hope that we might meditate deeply on it, soaking in the goodness of this truth and rejoicing in the mind-boggling reality that God intends nothing but good for us. My prayer is that, together, we'll gain a greater understanding of the significance of this passage of Scripture and why these verses mean so much to so many.

We will accomplish this through reading the text, through studying God's Word, through daily reflection on the passages, and ultimately through prayer. But God must do the work in our hearts for us to understand. Let's ask God to help us as we seek to know the God of our salvation in ever-deepening ways.



WEEK ONE

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.

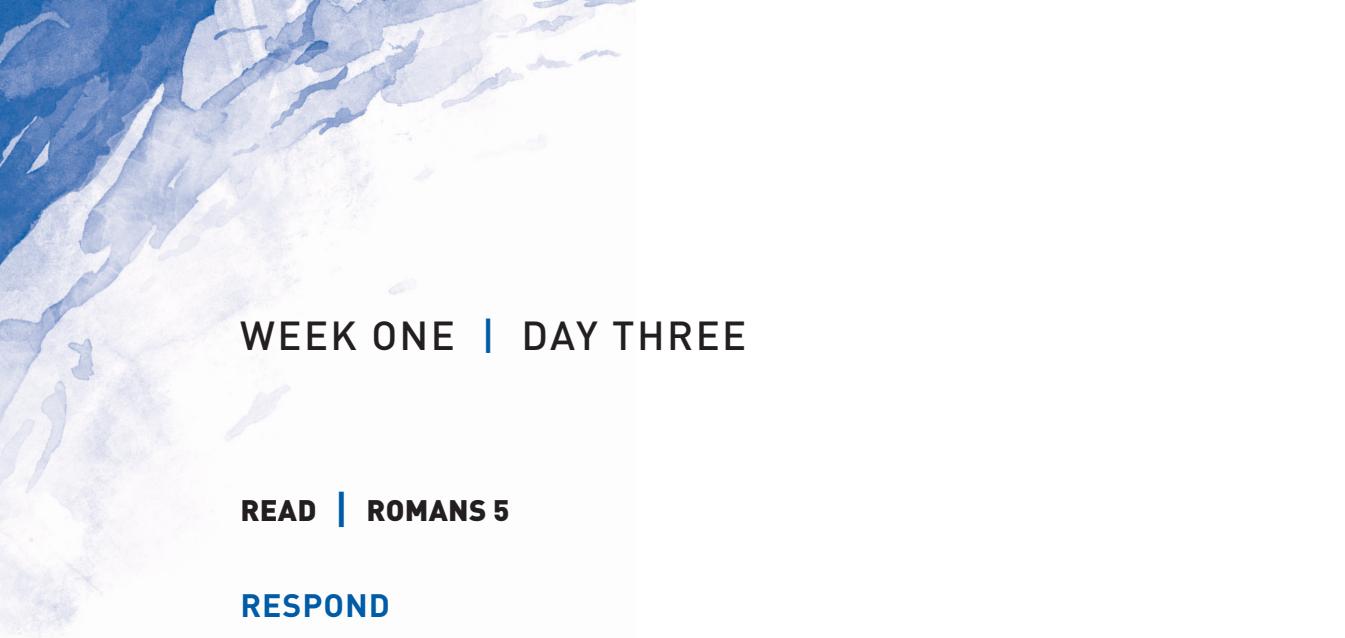
REFLECT

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?

WEEK ONE | DAY FOUR

READ | ROMANS 6

RESPOND

1. Paul is emphatic with his rhetorical question found in 6:1 (and repeated in 6:15). Why should we take sin seriously? Why should we take grace seriously?
2. What does the symbolism of baptism represent in 6:2–4?
3. According to Paul, what are some of the ways that knowledge of the resurrection affects how we live?
4. What is the significance of the word *death*, which is found in 6:1–4? Why are the words *death*, *dying*, and *died* repeated in this passage?

5. How is it that you were once a slave to sin?
6. What is sanctification (6:19)? Paul uses the word *leading* to reference sanctification. Why would it be good to remember that this verse suggests a pursuit or a path and *not* an arrival?

EXPLORE

Sin No More

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

ROMANS 6:1-4

It's a popular, oft-quoted Bible story, told in John 8:1–11. Scribes and Pharisees bring to Jesus a woman who has been caught in the very act of adultery. They want to stone her and are evidently testing Jesus to see if He, too, will join in their condemnation. Confronted with their testing, Jesus throws it back to them: “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” Of course, no one can throw a stone because they are aware of the law, and they know they have sin in their lives. To execute judgment on the woman would be to declare their own perfection. As a result, no one condemns the woman, and neither does Jesus. Instead, He says to her, “Go, and from now on sin no more.”

There is some debate as to whether this story was a part of John’s writing and the

original manuscript.⁴ Nevertheless, there is much we can glean from this passage that relates to Romans 6.

The Jews were afraid that Paul's teaching on grace would lead people to continue in their sin. If it is true that we are saved by grace and by faith and that salvation is not based on our good works, then what's the point of saying no to sin? Paul emphatically argues that it is precisely the grace and mercy of Christ that leads us to say no to sin.

As we see in the John 8 story, Jesus does not forgive the woman and then say, "Go live as you wish" or "Keep on living as you have been." He does forgive her sin. He does not condemn her or hold her sin against her. He pours out abundant grace. And He then tells her to "go, and from now on sin no more."

Similarly, once we taste the goodness and grace of God, we are motivated to say no to sin and empowered by the Spirit to do it. Yes, our sin is forgiven. Yes, it is not held against us. But we have died with Christ and been raised to life. We are a new creation—we are in Christ. This leads to newness of life, not greater death in sin. Like the woman caught in adultery, when we turn from our old self and are born again, we are motivated and empowered to go and sin no more.

Ah, but there's a catch, right? We still sin!

The reality is, even in our newness of life, we still battle temptation every day, and sometimes we give in to it. But there's a difference between sometimes losing a skirmish and just giving up the battle—excusing our sin because of the grace of God.

Because we are Christ's, we keep on fighting sin, knowing that grace is available when we fail. Grace truly is amazing; it covers every sinful thought and deed. But at the same time, we never want to take advantage of God's grace.

4. Some of the original Greek manuscripts do not include John 7:53–8:11. If you look in both the NIV and ESV translations, you'll see that these verses are bracketed off, with an explanation that some manuscripts do not include these texts. For more information on the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture, I suggest reading Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word: Why the Bible is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What That Means for You and Me* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014). For a helpful historical analysis of the New Testament, I recommend *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

When we take God's amazing grace seriously, when we understand what it cost, we have to take sin seriously too. By God's grace, and only by His grace, you and I can fight temptation. And *because* of that grace, compelled by God's love, we'll keep trying our hardest to "go and sin no more."

That's my charge to you today. Keep fighting, not because you earn God's favor, but because you already have it.

REFLECT

1. How would you define grace? How have you experienced it in your life?

2. What are some of the struggles you have faced as you have walked in newness of life? What kinds of temptations tend to pull at you? Have these changed over the years?

3. What are some practical strategies that might help you take both grace and sin seriously as you walk out your faith? What has helped you in the past to move closer to "sinning no more"?

WEEK ONE | DAY FIVE

READ | ROMANS 7

RESPOND

1. According to this passage, what does it mean to belong to Jesus (7:1–6)?
2. What is the “law” that Paul refers to in Romans 7?
3. Why does Paul emphasize that the law is not sin (7:7)? What, according to Paul, is the purpose of the law?
4. In this chapter we again see the seriousness of sin. It also seems that Paul is careful about how we judge the law (7:13). Why might that be?
5. What battle does Paul describe in 7:13–23?

6. What does Paul mean when he writes that he serves the law of God with his mind, but serves the law of sin with his flesh (7:25)? What does he mean by “flesh”? (Hint: it is not just our physical bodies or the part of us that craves something like food or sexual intimacy.)

EXPLORE

I Want to Do Right!

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

ROMANS 7:21–25

We've all been there. We've all tried *really* hard to do the right thing and then . . . failed.

Consider these different scenarios:

- You and your spouse begin a discussion, and you say to yourself, *I am going to listen. I will not get angry.* Then, the next thing you know, you are in a full-on, heated conflict because you yelled in anger.
- You are serving in your church because you genuinely love the people who make up the congregation, but you also secretly hope for recognition.

- You have tried hard to practice self-control, but just a slight glance at that man takes you down a road of fantasy and lustful imagination.
- You are hanging with a group of friends who are gossiping, and you know in your heart that it's wrong, but you just can't resist knowing that secret too.

What's going on in each of these instances? Paul lays it out for us in Romans 7—when we want to do good, sin is close by.

I know this all too well in my own life. For those of us who have the Spirit inside of us, there is a real internal struggle, a battle that we go through on a daily (and often even hourly) basis. Paul rightly describes this battle as a war between the truth we know in our hearts and minds and the desires of our flesh. These two aspects of our being are waging war against one another.

Acknowledging that there *is* a war is an initial safeguard against our sin. When we rightly understand that we struggle with what is sometimes called indwelling sin—the presence (and temptation) of sin in our lives that continues even after we are saved—then we can fight it with the power of the Spirit.

The danger in concentrating on our sin, however, is that we can be drawn into becoming too introspective, focusing so much on our sin that this focus paralyzes us from doing good. Don't let the fear of sin overpower you; do and pursue good anyway.

We will have this internal battle to fight for the rest of our lives, but we have a God who has given us His Spirit as a weapon. And just as Paul reminds us at the end of this section of Scripture, we too must remind ourselves that Jesus covers our sin.

Who will deliver us from our struggle with sin? Jesus, that's who. And He not only delivers us, but also stands in our place. Although we will battle sin for the remainder of our earthly lives, the cosmic battle has been won. Jesus has defeated sin and death. We are seen as righteous and don't stand condemned by our sin.

Remember all those scenarios describing the waging war within us? In Christ, it is as if you and I have pure motives, good intentions, perfect self-control. This is a miracle that we ourselves have experienced—and Jesus has accomplished it for us through His death and resurrection. Yes, thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

REFLECT

1. Do you remember a time when you experienced this war between the flesh and the redeemed heart and mind that knows what's true, right, and good? What were the circumstances? How was the struggle resolved? In what ways do you still struggle?

2. Have you ever been hesitant to do or say something good because you were afraid of doing or saying it for the wrong reasons? Did you manage to overcome that fear? How?

3. Why is it important to guard against too much introspection about sin? What could happen? Do you think we should also guard against not being introspective enough? Why or why not?

4. If you have time, read back through the first seven chapters of Romans. What concepts stand out most for you in these chapters? Which have the most relevance to you in your daily life? Keep these thoughts in mind as we move on into Romans 8, which is the real focus of this book.

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