

CATHOLIC ARMORY

The Obedience of Faith

An Inductive Study of Paul's Letter to the Romans

Fifteen Sessions · Complete Leader Guide

All Scripture quotations from the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition (RSV2CE)

"To bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations" · Romans 1:5

Using This Guide

The study. Fifteen sessions of 75 to 90 minutes walk a group through the whole Letter to the Romans in the inductive Win-Build-Send format: the group discovers what the text says with their own Bibles before hearing what it means. All Scripture quotations are from the RSV2CE.

Each session has three parts. The Leader Preparation Guide (read it fully before the session): overview, background, Old Testament roots, three Voices of the Church, Catechism Connection, leader-only Thread Watch, goals, and a timed plan with pre-chosen cuts. The Discussion Guide: prayers, Win questions, numbered Build questions each followed by a shaded ANSWER box to share only after the group has discussed, live discovery moments where the group finds source passages themselves, a build-then-press steelman presenting the strongest opposing reading before answering it from the text, Send questions, Live It This Week, and a memory verse. The Leader Reference Card: every passage used, in order.

Take-Home sheets. A two-page Take-Home accompanies each session and is distributed only AFTER the session ends; it recaps discoveries, carries the session's three Voices, practices, memory verse, and next week's reading. There is no participant journal.

The sealed guess. Take-Home 1 carries a write-in box: in one sentence, what must a person do to be saved? Each participant writes, seals, and keeps their own answer. It opens in Session 8, is revised there, and receives its final form in Session 15. Guard the seal; the study depends on it.

Spoilers. Never reveal discovery passages in advance, never distribute ANSWER content, and never share Thread Watch notes; the study's power is in the finding.

Timing. Each timed plan includes pre-chosen cuts for short nights. Discovery moments and steelman answers are never cut.

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Session 1: The Obedience of Faith

Romans 1:1-17 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that Paul frames the entire letter, and the entire Christian life, as "the obedience of faith": the gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, and believing means handing over the whole self, intellect and will, to God.

Catholic Touchstone. Faith is not mere intellectual agreement and not the opposite of obedience. The Catechism defines faith itself as "the obedience of faith," citing this very letter (CCC 143-144). From its first sentence, Romans holds believing and obeying together, a togetherness later controversies would read in sharply different ways.

What You Need to Know

Paul wrote Romans around AD 57-58, most likely from Corinth near the end of his third missionary journey, as he prepared to carry the collection for the poor to Jerusalem and then, he hoped, to travel on to Rome and Spain (Rom 15:24-28). Almost alone among his letters, Romans is written to a church Paul did not found and had never visited. That changes the letter's character: it is his fullest, most careful presentation of the gospel he preaches, offered as an introduction of himself and his message to a community he wants as a partner in mission.

The Roman church was a mixed community of Jewish and Gentile believers, and recent history had strained it. The Roman historian Suetonius records that the emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because of disturbances "at the instigation of Chrestus" (Life of Claudius 25), very likely, as most historians judge though the point is debated, a garbled reference to disputes over Christ; Acts 18:2 mentions the same expulsion. When Claudius died in AD 54 and Jewish Christians returned, on the common scholarly reconstruction they found congregations that had become largely Gentile in their absence. Who belongs, on what terms, and whose customs govern the common table: these questions sit underneath the whole letter, and Paul will address them head on in chapters 9 through 11 and 14 through 15.

Two phrases in tonight's passage carry the letter. The first is "the obedience of faith" (*hypakoe pisteos*, 1:5), the purpose Paul gives for his whole apostleship. Paul repeats the phrase in the letter's final sentence (16:26), so that Romans opens and closes with it, a deliberate frame around everything between. The second is "the righteousness of God" (1:17), which may name both something God possesses (his own justice and covenant faithfulness) and something God gives (the righteousness he works in those who believe): a both-and the rest of the letter will have to earn. What exactly Paul means by it is one of the letter's great questions, and the study will let it unfold rather than settling it tonight.

One more word deserves attention before the group meets: "gospel" (*euangelion*). In Paul's world the word was not private religious vocabulary; it was the language of imperial proclamation, the "good news" of a victory or an emperor's accession. Paul's word carries Isaiah's herald of good tidings (Isa 52:7) in its bones, and it also rang in the vocabulary of Caesar's heralds; he applies it to a crucified and risen Jewish Messiah, "descended from David according to the flesh" (1:3). The claim is public and total from the first line.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Habakkuk 2:4. Paul's thesis statement quotes the prophet: "He who through faith is righteous shall live" (1:17). Habakkuk had demanded to know how God could remain just while judgment loomed and the wicked prospered; God's answer to the prophet was that "the righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab 2:4). Paul hears in that answer the seed of the whole gospel. The group will find this passage themselves in the discovery moment, so do not reveal the reference in advance.

2 Samuel 7:12-16. Paul says the gospel concerns God's Son, "descended from David according to the flesh" (1:3). Behind that phrase stands God's covenant oath to David: an offspring whose kingdom God will establish forever. The resurrection, Paul says, is the moment this Son is "designated Son of God in power" (1:4): not made God's Son at that moment, but, as the tradition has loved to read it, publicly enthroned as the promised Davidic king. This too is a discovery passage; keep the reference back until the group finds it.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Romans is the book God used to break St. Augustine's last resistance. In the garden in Milan, in torment over his inability to change, he heard a child's voice chanting "take and read." He opened the apostle's letters and his eyes fell on Romans 13:13-14, ending in the words "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." He wrote that he needed to read no further; with the end of that sentence, as he tells it, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into his heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled (a faithful rendering of Confessions VIII.12). When Paul calls the gospel "the power of God for salvation," St. Augustine's conversion is what that power looks like in a single human life.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

St. John Chrysostom, who preached a celebrated series of homilies on Romans in the fourth century, teaches in substance that the proof of the gospel's power is in what it actually did: a message about a crucified man, carried by fishermen and tentmakers without armies or wealth, prevailed against the settled religions of the Mediterranean world. For St. John Chrysostom, Paul's "I am not ashamed" (1:16) is the boldness of a man who has watched weakness conquer strength and is no longer impressed by Rome.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote a full commentary on Romans, and in its opening he teaches, in substance, that among all Paul's letters Romans is the one that treats the grace of Christ in itself, in its own nature, where other letters treat grace as it works in the sacraments or in the Church's members. That is why the Church has continually returned to Romans when the question is the deepest one: how is anyone saved? Reading Romans, on St. Thomas's account, is studying grace at the root.

Catechism Connection

CCC 143-144. The Catechism's definition of faith is built on tonight's passage: "By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God." Scripture calls this response "the obedience of faith," and the

Catechism cites Romans 1:5 and 16:26 as its warrant. CCC 144 adds that to obey (*ob-audire*) means to listen to and submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God himself.

CCC 2087. The moral life has its source in faith: "Our moral life has its source in faith in God who reveals his love to us." The paragraph again invokes "the obedience of faith" from Romans as the first obligation the God of love lays on us. Faith grounds and calls forth behavior, which is Paul's point in 1:5 exactly.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

The inclusio. "The obedience of faith" appears at 1:5 and again at 16:26, sounding near the letter's opening and again in its closing doxology. Plant it tonight without announcing the payoff; it resolves in Session 15.

The righteousness of God. Introduced at 1:17 and left deliberately open tonight. It develops through Sessions 3-5 and comes to a head in the justification sessions.

To the Jew first. The phrase in 1:16 quietly opens the Jew and Gentile question that dominates chapters 9-11 (Sessions 10-11). Note it aloud once, then let it lie.

The sealed guess. Take-Home 1 carries the My Guess box: "In one sentence: what must a person do to be saved?" Collect nothing; participants seal their own. It opens in Session 8.

Session Goals

1. The group can explain who Paul is, why he wrote to Rome, and why this letter reads differently from his others.
2. The group discovers the Davidic promise (2 Sam 7) and the Habakkuk quotation (Hab 2:4) behind Paul's opening, finding both passages themselves.
3. The group can state Paul's thesis (1:16-17) in their own words and begin wrestling with "the righteousness of God."
4. The group encounters "the obedience of faith" (1:5) and can say why faith and obedience are not rivals in Paul's opening.
5. Each participant writes and seals a My Guess answer at home this week.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 15 min
- Build questions 1-3 with the first discovery moment: 25 min
- Build questions 4-6 with the Habakkuk discovery and the steelman chain: 30 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box on euangelion, and compress Build question 4 (Paul's travel plans, vv. 8-15) into a single observation you supply. Never cut a discovery moment or the steelman answer.

Session 1: The Obedience of Faith

Romans 1:1-17 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, you have spoken to us in your Son, and your word is power: power to save, power to change what we could not change ourselves. As we open this letter, open our hearts with it. Give us honest questions, patient listening, and the obedience that comes from faith. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. Tell us about a time you got news so good you could not keep it to yourself. What did you do with it?
2. When you hear the word "obedience," what comes up for you: something positive, negative, or complicated? Where did that reaction come from?

Build

Read Romans 1:1-7 aloud.

1. How does Paul introduce himself in verse 1? What three things does he call himself, and what does each one claim?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God" (1:1). Servant (*doulos*, literally slave) puts him wholly at another's disposal; called means the initiative was God's, not his; set apart marks him off for one purpose, the gospel. Before Paul says anything about the Romans or about doctrine, he defines himself entirely by belonging to someone else. A man introducing himself to strangers leads with achievements; Paul leads with belonging: servant, called to be an apostle, set apart (1:1).

2. In verses 3-4, what two things does Paul say about Jesus, and what changed at the resurrection?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Jesus was "descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (1:3-4). Two statements: truly human, born into David's royal line; and truly the Son of God, designated in power by the resurrection, which the royal reading hears as his enthronement. Note carefully what the resurrection did not do: it did not make Jesus God's Son (he already was). It designated him, unveiling him, in the royal-Davidic reading, as the enthroned king God had promised. The next question uncovers where that promise was made.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul says the gospel was 'promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures' (1:2), and he leads with 'descended from David.' Somewhere in the Old Testament, God made David a promise about a descendant and a kingdom. Find it." Give the group Bibles and a few minutes; steer toward 2 Samuel 7 only if they stall (a hint: it happens when David wants to build God a house).

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

2 Samuel 7:12-16. "I will raise up your offspring after you... and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (2 Sam 7:12-13). God swears to David an eternal dynasty. Centuries later, at the Babylonian conquest of 586 BC, the monarchy collapsed and Israel spent centuries holding a promise with no king in sight. Paul's opening claim is that the promise did not fail: the resurrection can be read as the enthronement of David's greater Son. The gospel is not a new idea; it is an old oath kept.

3. Verse 5: Paul says he received grace and apostleship "to bring about the obedience of faith... among all the nations." What could that phrase, the obedience of faith, mean? Is faith something you believe or something you do?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Let the group sit with the phrase before sharing this. The genitive can be read more than one way (the obedience that consists in faith; the obedience that flows from faith), and Paul likely means the whole of it: faith itself is an act of obedience, the handing over of intellect and will to God, and alive in the charity that forms it, it produces a life of obedience, though faith separated from charity can fail to bear that fruit (CCC 1814-1815). What the phrase cannot mean is faith as mere mental agreement with no yield in the will. The Catechism defines faith with exactly this verse: "By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God" (CCC 143). Flag for the group that Paul will end the letter with this same phrase; keep an ear open for it.

Read Romans 1:8-15 aloud.

4. What is Paul's posture toward these Christians he has never met? What does he want from Rome, and what does he expect to give?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He thanks God for them, prays for them unceasingly, and longs to see them (1:8-11). He longs to see them so that he may impart "some spiritual gift" to strengthen them (1:11), then immediately corrects himself: "that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (1:11-12). The apostle to the Gentiles expects to receive from them, not only to give. He also calls himself "under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians" (1:14): the gospel entrusted to him is a debt he owes to Greeks and barbarians alike, believers included (1:14-15).

Read Romans 1:16-17 aloud, twice.

5. This is the thesis of the whole letter. What exactly does Paul claim the gospel is, and for whom?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"It is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (1:16). Not a record of power or an argument about power: the gospel itself is God's power, doing in its hearers what human effort cannot. And its reach is universal with an order: to the Jew first, then the Greek. Note that little phrase aloud and move on; it will matter enormously later in the letter. In it, Paul says, "the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith" (1:17). Leave "the righteousness of God"

as an open question tonight; the letter will teach the group what it means.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul ends the thesis with a quotation: 'as it is written, He who through faith is righteous shall live' (1:17). That line comes from one of the minor prophets, a man who was demanding answers from God about injustice. Find the prophet and the verse." Hint if needed: the book is only three chapters long and its name starts with H.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Habakkuk 2:4: "Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith." Habakkuk had protested that God seemed to be doing nothing about evil, then that God's chosen remedy (Babylon) was worse than the disease. God's answer: judgment is certain and coming, and in the meantime the righteous one lives, survives, holds on, by faith. Paul takes God's answer to a prophet in crisis and hears in it the shape of salvation itself.

Steelman: Is Faith Alone the Thesis?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is how many of our Protestant brothers and sisters read the verses we just studied, and it is a serious reading, so let it land. Paul's thesis says salvation is 'to every one who has faith,' and his proof text says the righteous shall live by faith. Not by works, not by sacraments, not by obedience: by faith. Martin Luther read Romans 1:17 and said the gates of paradise opened to him. If Paul wanted to teach that we are saved by faith alone, apart from anything we do, could he have said it more plainly than this? And hear the position at its most careful: faith is the instrument, never the ground; obedience follows necessarily as its fruit; many who hold this keep the sacraments as real means of grace. The claim is not that obedience is optional, but that it adds nothing to the verdict." Pause. Let the group feel the force of it; someone may agree with it. Then press with the questions below.

6. Press: Stay inside tonight's seventeen verses. Has Paul already told us, before verse 16, what faith is for? Look back at verse 5.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Yes. Before Paul ever says "the righteous shall live by faith," he has defined the purpose of his apostleship as bringing about "the obedience of faith" (1:5). Whatever faith means in the thesis, Paul has already ruled out reading it as the opposite of obedience. The faith that saves is the faith that hands over the will. Be honest with the group about the scope of tonight's answer: these verses do not settle the whole faith-and-works question, and this study will not dodge it. Chapters 3, 4, and 6 are coming, and the strongest Protestant texts will get their full hearing there. Tonight establishes only, but firmly, that Paul's own frame for the letter is faith that obeys. The door Luther walked through is real; the question is what lies on the other side of it, and Paul has sixteen chapters of answer.

DIG DEEPER

Caesar's word, Christ's claim. *Euangelion*, "good news," had deep scriptural roots (Isaiah's herald, Isa 40:9; 52:7) and was also public vocabulary in Paul's world: the proclamation of an imperial victory or an emperor's accession. A surviving calendar inscription from Priene, in Asia Minor, uses the word of the birthday of Augustus as good news for the world. Paul writes to the empire's capital and announces the

euangelion of another king, executed by Rome and raised by God. The word choice is not an accident; it is a claim about who actually rules.

Send

1. Paul says he is "not ashamed of the gospel" (1:16), writing to the most status-conscious city on earth. Where in your world is it costly to be identified with Christ, and what would unashamed look like for you there?
2. If faith means handing God your intellect and your will, which of the two is harder for you to hand over right now, and why?

Live It This Week

- Read Romans 1:16-17 aloud once a day, and each time ask in prayer: Lord, where am I ashamed of you?
- Name one concrete area where faith is asking for your obedience this week, one specific act, and do it.
- Tell one person one piece of genuinely good news about God this week, in your own words.
- On the Take-Home sheet: write your one-sentence answer in the My Guess box, seal or fold it, and bring it back every week. It opens in Session 8.

Memory Verse

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

Romans 1:16 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of God, you kept a promise a thousand years in the making, and you have not stopped keeping promises. We give you what you ask: our minds, our wills, our week. Make us unashamed. Through the obedience of faith, make us yours. Amen.

Session 1: The Obedience of Faith

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 1:1-7 (read aloud: Paul's greeting; servant, called, set apart; vv. 3-4 the Davidic Son designated in power)
- Romans 1:2 (promised beforehand through the prophets; launches the first discovery moment)
- 2 Samuel 7:12-16 (discovery passage: the Davidic covenant; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 1:5 (the obedience of faith; the letter's frame, planted tonight)
- Romans 1:8-15 (read aloud: thanksgiving, mutual encouragement, under obligation)
- Romans 1:16-17 (read aloud twice: the thesis)
- Habakkuk 2:4 (discovery passage: the righteous shall live by his faith; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 13:13-14 (cited in the St. Augustine Voice, Confessions VIII.12; not read in session)
- Romans 16:26 (leader-only: the closing half of the inclusio; not read in session)
- CCC 143-144, 2087 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 1:16

Session 2: Without Excuse

Romans 1:18-32 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that Paul's indictment of the pagan world is not that people could not know God but that they did know him and suppressed it: creation itself makes God's power and deity plain, so idolatry is an exchange, not an accident, and God's judgment takes the form of handing people over to the desires they chose.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church teaches, with this passage as a principal warrant, that God can be known with certainty from created things by the natural light of human reason (CCC 31-32). Grace is necessary for salvation; the knowledge that a Creator exists lies within reason's in-principle reach (CCC 31-32), though fallen man in his concrete condition meets real obstacles and needs revelation even for truths reason could in principle attain (CCC 36-38). Paul and the Church stand together on creation's objective witness; how culpable any individual's unbelief is varies with circumstance, and only God judges hearts.

What You Need to Know

At 1:18 the letter pivots. Paul has announced that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (1:17); now he announces that the wrath of God is also revealed, "against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (1:18). Wrath here is not a divine tantrum; it is the settled opposition of holy love to everything that destroys the beloved. Read the passage closely and notice that its verbs of judgment are strangely quiet. Three times the sentence of judgment is simply "God gave them up" (1:24, 26, 28). The primary punishment of sin, in this passage, is sin: getting, and becoming, what you chose.

The logic runs in a chain worth mastering before you lead it. What can be known about God is plain from what he has made (1:19-20). Knowing him, people neither honored him nor gave thanks (1:21). Refusing the truth did not leave a vacuum; it produced an exchange: the glory of the immortal God traded for images (1:23), the truth of God for a lie, worship of the creature rather than the Creator (1:25). Disordered worship then disorders everything downstream of it: mind, desire, body, society. The vice list at the end (1:29-31) is deliberately unglamorous; it descends from murder to gossip, envy, boasting, and disobeying parents. Paul is drawing a net around every reader, and the trap he is setting does not spring until the first verse of chapter 2. Do not spoil that turn tonight.

A pastoral word before you lead. Verses 26-27 name homosexual acts within this larger argument about exchanged worship, and someone in your group may carry this question personally. Teach what the Church teaches, without flinching and without cruelty: the Church holds that such acts are contrary to the natural law and cannot be approved, and in the same breath insists that persons with these inclinations "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity" and that every sign of unjust discrimination is to be avoided (CCC 2357-2359). Keep the passage in its context: Paul's list runs on to greed, envy, gossip, and pride precisely so that no one in the room is left holding a stone. If the discussion narrows to a single sin, widen it back to Paul's actual target: every human heart that has traded the Creator for something smaller. Be alert to anyone for whom this lands heavily, and follow up personally rather than publicly.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Wisdom 13. Paul's argument in 1:19-23 tracks the Book of Wisdom's critique of idolatry so closely that the echo is audible line by line: from the good things that are seen, their Maker can be known, and those who missed him are without excuse. This is the strongest kind of evidence the study uses, a textual link anyone can verify with the two passages open. The group will find it themselves; do not reveal the reference in advance.

Psalm 106:19-20 and the golden calf. Paul's word "exchanged" (1:23) is Israel's own scar. The psalmist says of Sinai: "They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass" (Ps 106:20). Paul describes pagan idolatry in the vocabulary of Israel's worst hour, which quietly prepares his claim that Jew and Gentile stand in the same dock. A discovery passage; keep it back.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

St. Augustine put Paul's argument to the world itself. "Question the beauty of the earth, question the beauty of the sea, question the beauty of the air... question all these realities. All respond: 'See, we are beautiful.' Their beauty is a profession. These beauties are subject to change. Who made them if not the Beautiful One who is not subject to change?" (Sermon 241, quoted in CCC 32). For St. Augustine the created world is not silent; it testifies, and the honest questioner hears it. That is Romans 1:20 turned into a prayer method.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. ATHANASIUS

St. Athanasius, in his work *Against the Pagans*, teaches in substance that idolatry is a fall in stages: the soul, made to contemplate God, turned its attention to itself and to the things of sense, and having lost the sight of God began to deify what it could see, first the heavens, then men, then images, then its own desires. He wrote it as a diagnosis of the pagan world, but he meant it as anatomy of every soul: worship never disappears, it only migrates. Paul's "exchanged" (1:23, 25) names the same migration.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. BONAVENTURE

St. Bonaventure teaches, in substance, that creation is like a book in which its Maker can be read: every creature a word, the whole world a text whose lines lead the attentive reader upward; recognizing the Writer as Trinity is faith's reading, since unaided reason cannot reach that mystery, but the book's legibility is tonight's point. The image, associated especially with his *Breviloquium* and his *Journey of the Mind to God*, is the constructive face of tonight's passage. Romans 1 says the book is legible and we shut it; St. Bonaventure spent his life teaching people to read it again.

Catechism Connection

CCC 31-32. The Catechism teaches that starting from creation and from the human person, there are converging and convincing "ways" by which man can come to know God with certainty; CCC 32 grounds the way of the physical world in this very passage, citing Rom 1:19-20 alongside Wisdom 13 and St. Augustine's Sermon 241.

CCC 2113. Idolatry is not only pagan statuary: "Man commits idolatry whenever he honors and reveres a creature in place of God." The paragraph names power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, and money among the candidates. This is the bridge from Paul's first century to your group's Tuesday.

CCC 2357-2359 (leader's pastoral reference for vv. 26-27; see the note above). Teach the whole of it or none of it: the moral norm, the call to respect and compassion, and the universal call to chastity belong together.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

The trap. Everything in 1:18-32 is written to draw the reader into agreement just before 2:1 turns the indictment on the one agreeing. Session 3 springs it. Tonight, if someone says "this is about those people," note it, keep the chapter-2 turn sealed, and correct any demeaning or dehumanizing remark on the spot: every person in the passage and in the room keeps full dignity; only the discovery stays hidden, never charity.

Righteousness and wrath. 1:17 and 1:18 are parallel revelations. The righteousness of God thread picks up the wrath material in Session 4, where the same God who judges is the one who justifies.

Exchange language. "Exchanged" (1:23, 25) returns inverted in the gospel: what humanity traded away, God restores in Christ. Let the word lodge in the group's ear now; Session 6 (Adam and Christ) pays it off.

Sealed guess. Confirm quietly that everyone wrote and sealed a My Guess answer. Latecomers seal one this week. No peeking, no discussing contents.

Session Goals

1. The group can trace Paul's chain: creation reveals God, the truth is suppressed, worship is exchanged, and disorder follows worship.
2. The group discovers Wisdom 13 and Psalm 106:19-20 themselves and can say why the golden calf echo matters.
3. The group can explain "God gave them up" as judgment in the form of handed-over desire, not divine absence of mercy.
4. Each participant names one modern exchange, one creature they are tempted to serve in place of the Creator.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 15 min
- Build questions 1-3 with the Wisdom 13 discovery: 30 min
- Build questions 4-5 with the Psalm 106 discovery and the steelman chain: 25 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and deliver the Psalm 106 link yourself in one sentence instead of running the second discovery. Never cut the Wisdom 13 discovery or the steelman answer.

Session 2: Without Excuse

Romans 1:18-32 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, your world is speaking; give us ears. Where we have traded you for smaller things, show us gently and firmly, and lead us home. Let your kindness, not our fear, do the leading. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. Describe a moment when nature stopped you cold: a night sky, a coastline, a storm. What did it make you feel or want?
2. What is something harmless in itself that you have watched take over the center of someone's life?

Build

Read Romans 1:18-23 aloud.

1. Verses 19-20: what does Paul claim every human being can know, and how? What is the verdict in the last four words of verse 20?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (1:20). Not everything about God, but really God: his power and deity, perceived through what he made. The problem Paul diagnoses is therefore not lack of evidence. The verdict, "without excuse," only makes sense if the knowledge was genuinely available and genuinely refused.

2. Verse 21 is precise about the first failure. What two things did people fail to do, and what happened to their thinking as a result?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"Although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened" (1:21). The failure Paul lists first is doxological: no honor, no thanks. Ingratitude comes before idolatry, and the darkness comes after the refusal, not before it. That order matters: unbelief here is not the honest conclusion of a clear mind but the slow consequence of an unthankful one.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul did not invent this argument. There is a book in the Old Testament, one Catholics have and most Protestant Bibles do not, that makes the same case almost line for line: the Maker known from the things made, and those who missed him left without excuse. It is one of the wisdom books. Find the chapter." Steer toward Wisdom 13 if they stall (hint: the book is named for what it is full of).

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Wisdom 13:1-9. "For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists" (Wis 13:1), and "from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator" (Wis 13:5). Wisdom even weighs the excuse and rejects it: if they had power to know so much, how did they fail to find the Lord of all (13:9)? Paul, writing to Rome, closely echoes and may well be drawing on this deuterocanonical text. Let the group notice what that means: a book absent from Protestant Old Testaments is audibly underneath Romans 1.

3. Verse 23 says they "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images." Why exchange rather than, say, lost or forgot? What does the word accuse us of?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

An exchange is a transaction, a picture with a moment, a choice, and a price; and the possession it pictures is stated outright in 1:19-21: they knew God. Paul's word insists that idolatry begins in possession of the truth and trades it away for something manageable: an image resembling man or birds or animals or reptiles (1:23), something that will not make demands, something we can carry. Forgetting is a tragedy; exchanging is a decision.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul chose 'exchanged the glory' for another reason. Israel's own songbook uses almost the same sentence about the worst morning in Israel's history, a morning involving gold and an animal. Find the psalm." Hint if needed: Psalms 105-106 retell Israel's story; look where the story reaches Mount Horeb.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Psalm 106:19-20: "They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a molten image. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass." Paul is describing pagan idolatry in the exact vocabulary of the golden calf. The move is quiet and devastating: the covenant people committed the textbook Gentile sin at the foot of Sinai itself. Paul is already dismantling any reader's confidence that this chapter is about other people. Say no more than that tonight; chapter 2 is coming.

Read Romans 1:24-32 aloud.

4. Three times Paul writes the sentence of judgment: "God gave them up" (1:24, 26, 28). What kind of judgment is that? What does God hand people over to?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God gives them up "to the lusts of their hearts" (1:24), "to dishonorable passions" (1:26), "to a base mind" (1:28): in every case, to what they had already chosen. This is judgment as ratified freedom. God's wrath in this passage does not look like lightning; it looks like getting your own way, all the way down. The Fathers and moderns alike have observed that hell has this same structure. It is worth letting the group feel how frightening "God gave them up" is precisely because it is so quiet. If vv. 26-27 draw questions, answer plainly and pastorally: the Church teaches that these acts, like every act on Paul's longer list, are contrary to God's design, and she requires that the persons involved be received with respect, compassion,

and sensitivity (CCC 2357-2359). Then point to where Paul's own list goes next.

5. Read the vice list in 1:29-31 slowly. Where does it end up? Who is still standing outside this list?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

It ends in gossips, slanderers, the haughty, the boastful, the foolish, the faithless, the heartless, and those who disobey their parents (1:29-31). The list is built to reach past the spectacular sins into the common ones, so the reader who sailed through murder runs aground on envy or gossip, and the distance closes before 2:1. Verse 32 sharpens it: approving evil is itself the final rung. The chapter that began with pagan idols ends with sins that flourish in church pews, and that is not an accident. Do not resolve the tension; carry it into next week.

Steelman: Is Natural Knowledge of God Impossible?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is a serious objection, held by thoughtful Reformed Christians and by many skeptics for opposite reasons. The Reformed version, at its most careful: creation truly reveals God, enough to leave everyone without excuse, but fallen man suppresses and distorts that witness, so natural theology yields no saving knowledge apart from Scripture; and some, following Barth, go further: fallen reason builds only idols out of arguments. The skeptic's version agrees on the conclusion from the other side: nature is ambiguous, religions disagree, so honest reason ends in doubt, and doubt cannot be blamed. Between them, both deny what the Church claims: that unaided reason really can know God from the world. And look around: if creation is so clear, why do sincere people miss it?" Let it land. Then press.

6. Press: Stay inside the passage. Does Paul say fallen people cannot know God from creation, or something stranger? Look at the verbs in verses 18, 21, 25.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Something stranger. They "suppress the truth" (1:18); "they knew God" (1:21); they "exchanged the truth about God for a lie" (1:25). You cannot suppress what never reached you, or exchange what you never possessed. Paul's diagnosis is not incapacity but refusal: the knowledge arrives and is held down. This is exactly the Church's position, defined at the First Vatican Council and taught at CCC 31-32: God can be known with certainty from created things by natural reason. That teaching does not claim everyone reasons their way to God, or that grace is unnecessary for faith and salvation; it claims that when a person does not find God, the world's testimony is not what failed. Be honest about what remains hard: culpability varies enormously with upbringing, wounds, and what a person has actually encountered, and only God judges hearts (the Church affirms invincible ignorance is real). Paul's target here is suppression, not honest struggle, and pastorally you should say so out loud.

DIG DEEPER

Wrath and love are not opposites. The opposite of love is not wrath but indifference. A God who watched his creatures trade themselves to destructive counterfeits and felt nothing would not be more loving; he would be less. A broad theological tradition reads God's wrath as the form his love takes when it meets what harms the beloved, and this passage's quiet triple "gave them up" shows a judgment that may, in providence, serve mercy: God lets the exchange run its course so its bankruptcy can be seen. The

far side of that severity is chapter 5, where the same wrath vocabulary returns with the words "but God shows his love for us."

Send

1. If worship never disappears but only migrates, where has yours migrated lately? Name the creature that gets your best attention, energy, and trust.
2. Verse 21 says the fall began with no honor and no thanks. What would it change to give God deliberate thanks every day this week, before anything is asked?

Live It This Week

- Each day, thank God out loud for three specific created things, and let each one point past itself to its Maker (Wis 13:5).
- Identify your strongest modern idol: a created good treated as ultimate, whose claim outranks God's in practice (your time, money, or anxiety may point to it). Fast from it once this week and give the hour to prayer.
- Reread the vice list (1:29-31) once, prayerfully, and let it read you. Bring what it finds to Confession if it has been a while.

Memory Verse

"Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

Romans 1:20 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord God, Maker of all that is beautiful, we have heard the world's testimony and we believe. Forgive our exchanges. Take back the throne we gave away, and teach us honor and thanks, the two things we owed first. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Session 2: Without Excuse

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 1:18-23 (read aloud: wrath revealed; creation's testimony; the exchange)
- Wisdom 13:1-9 (discovery passage: the Maker known from the things made; do not reveal in advance)
- Psalm 106:19-20 (discovery passage: the golden calf exchange; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 1:24-32 (read aloud: God gave them up; the vice list)
- CCC 31-32, 2113 (Catechism Connection); CCC 2357-2359 (leader's pastoral reference)
- Memory verse: Romans 1:20

Session 3: God Shows No Partiality

Romans 2:1-3:8 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the trap set in chapter 1 springs on the reader: the one who judges does the same things. God's judgment is impartial and according to works; conscience is a real witness written on every heart; and belonging to the covenant outwardly, without the heart, shields no one. A Jew, Paul says, is one inwardly, by the Spirit; what that means for the whole people of God waits for chapters 9-11.

Catholic Touchstone. Two Catholic doctrines stand on tonight's text: that God "will render to every man according to his works" at the judgment (2:6; CCC 682), and that conscience is a real law "written on their hearts" (2:15), the natural moral law the Church has always taught. Judgment by works and salvation by grace are not rivals in Catholic teaching, and Romans 2 is a principal reason why.

What You Need to Know

Chapter 2 opens with the most dangerous word in Romans: "Therefore you" (2:1). The reader who spent chapter 1 nodding along at the pagans suddenly finds the finger turned: "in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things" (2:1). Paul's rhetorical target is the judging moralist, progressively focused on the Jewish interlocutor confident in possessing the law (named openly at 2:17), but the trap is built for anyone who read chapter 1 as a chapter about other people, which is to say, for your group.

The engine of the chapter is God's impartiality: "he will render to every man according to his works" (2:6), "glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality" (2:10-11). Notice that Paul says this about the final judgment without embarrassment, three chapters before he says no one is justified by works of the law (3:20). Hold both; the study will earn their reconciliation rather than forcing it tonight. Notice too the astonishing claim of 2:14-16: Gentiles without the law sometimes do what the law requires, showing it "written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness" (2:15), and God's judgment through Christ will reach "the secrets of men" (2:16).

The last movement (2:17-3:8) presses the insider directly: the name, the law, the confidence of being a guide to the blind, and then the wound, quoting Isaiah: God's name blasphemed among the Gentiles because of his own people (2:24). Circumcision profits if one keeps the law; otherwise it is as if it never happened (2:25). "He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal" (2:29). Then 3:1-8 raises the objection Paul will spend chapters 9-11 answering: if Israel failed, has God's word failed? His first answer is a thesis for the whole Bible: "Let God be true though every man be false" (3:4). Flag it and move on; Sessions 10-11 live there.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalms 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12. "He will render to every man according to his works" (2:6) is not Paul's innovation; he is quoting Israel's songbook and wisdom: "thou dost requite a man according to his work" (Ps 62:12). Judgment by works is the Old Testament's settled teaching, carried into the New without apology (see Mt 16:27). A discovery passage; keep it back.

Deuteronomy 30:6. "Real circumcision is a matter of the heart" (2:29) is Moses' own promise: "the Lord your God will circumcise your heart... so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart" (Deut 30:6; see

also Deut 10:16, Jer 4:4). Paul's most radical-sounding claim develops Moses' own promise. A discovery passage; keep it back.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. MOSES THE BLACK

Among the Desert Fathers the story is told that when a brother sinned, the elders summoned Abba Moses, a onetime brigand become monk, to the council to judge him. He came at last carrying a leaking jug filled with water. Asked what it meant, he said: my sins run out behind me where I cannot see them, and today I come to judge the errors of another. The brothers said nothing more, and forgave (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Abba Moses 2). It is Romans 2:1 performed: the judge, doing the very same things, condemned himself, and mercy broke the court.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

St. John Henry Newman called conscience "the aboriginal Vicar of Christ, a prophet in its informations, a monarch in its peremptoriness, a priest in its blessings and anathemas" (Letter to the Duke of Norfolk, section 5). Before there was a pope, a Bible, or a Church, God had already stationed a representative inside every human being. That is Paul's claim in 2:15 exactly: a law written on the heart, a witness that accuses and excuses. The sobering corollary, the study's application in step with CCC 1783-1785: a vicar can be obeyed, malformed, or shouted down, which is why conscience must be formed and not merely consulted.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JEROME

St. Jerome, in his commentary on Ezekiel, speaks of a "spark of conscience" that was not extinguished even in Cain after his sin: a remnant witness by which the soul knows it sins even while sinning. The later tradition took up his word for it (synderesis) and the later doctrine of synderesis, the soul's habitual grasp of first moral principles (distinct from conscience, which applies them), grew from this ember. St. Jerome's point sits close to Paul's: the witness on the heart is durable. It can be suppressed, as chapter 1 showed, but it does not go out, and at the judgment its testimony is unsealed (2:16).

Catechism Connection

CCC 678 and 682. The Last Judgment articles teach that Christ "will reveal the secret disposition of hearts and will render to each man according to his works" (CCC 682), the Catechism's calm restatement of Romans 2:6 and 2:16. Judgment according to works is explicit biblical and Catholic teaching, affirmed in different frameworks by Protestants as well, and must be integrated carefully with justification by grace.

CCC 1776-1777, 1783-1785. Conscience: CCC 1776 quotes the Council's words that conscience is man's "most secret core and his sanctuary," where he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths, and the paragraph is anchored to Romans 2:14-16. CCC 1783 adds that conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened, its formation traced through CCC 1783-1785: St. John Henry Newman's corollary in magisterial form.

CCC 1954-1956. The natural moral law, in CCC 1956's words "present in the heart of each man," universal and expressing the dignity of the person; 2:14-15 is the classic scriptural warrant the tradition cites for it.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Has God's word failed? 3:1-8 opens the objection that governs chapters 9-11: God's faithfulness versus Israel's unfaithfulness. Tonight only plant "Let God be true though every man be false" (3:4); it resolves in Sessions 10-11.

Works and faith, both held. Do not let the group resolve 2:6-13 against 3:20 tonight in either direction. The tension is the syllabus: Sessions 4-5 (justification) and 9 (life in the Spirit as the how of 2:7) complete it. If someone quotes tonight's text as proof against faith, or next week's against works, congratulate them for reading closely and promise the collision is scheduled.

To the Jew first, again. 2:9-10 repeats the ordering from 1:16, now applied to judgment as well as salvation. Second quiet planting for Sessions 10-11.

Sealed guess check. Tonight's text is designed to unsettle every easy answer sealed in Session 1, in both directions. Say nothing; let it work.

Session Goals

1. The group feels the trap of 2:1 spring on themselves, not on a third party.
2. The group discovers Psalm 62:12 and Deuteronomy 30:6 and can say why judgment by works and heart-circumcision are Old Testament teachings Paul inherits.
3. The group can explain what conscience is (a real witness written on the heart) and what it is not (an infallible oracle needing no formation).
4. The group can state the open tension between 2:6-13 and what is coming in 3:20, and agree to carry it rather than resolve it prematurely.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 15 min
- Build questions 1-3 with the Psalm 62 discovery: 30 min
- Build questions 4-5 with the Deuteronomy 30 discovery and the steelman chain: 25 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and summarize 2:17-24 (the insider's confidence and the Isaiah wound) in two sentences instead of discussing it. Never cut a discovery moment or the steelman answer.

Session 3: God Shows No Partiality

Romans 2:1-3:8 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, you judge without partiality and you see the secrets of hearts. Before we say one word about anyone else tonight, turn your light on us. Give us the mercy we hope to receive, and circumcise our hearts, as you promised, so that we may love you with all of them. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. When has someone called out in you the exact fault you had just criticized in someone else? How did it feel?
2. Where did your sense of right and wrong come from? Can you remember it ever speaking up before anyone taught you the rule?

Build

Read Romans 2:1-11 aloud.

1. Last week ended with a list of pagan sins. Who is 2:1 suddenly addressing, and what is the charge? Be honest: did the trap catch you?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things" (2:1). The addressee is the moral insider, the reader who agreed with chapter 1. Note the echo: chapter 1 ended "without excuse" over idolaters; 2:1 opens "no excuse" over their judges. Same verdict, new defendant. The list of 1:29-31 (envy, gossip, pride, disobedience) was the net that made "the very same things" true of everyone in the room.

2. Verse 4: what is God's kindness for? What does presuming on it look like in practice?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (2:4). God's patience has a purpose and a direction: it is leading somewhere, and the destination is repentance. Presuming on it means reading the delay of judgment as the absence of judgment: I got away with it, so it must be fine. Paul's counter is 2:5: what is being stored up in that delay, for the unrepentant, is wrath. Kindness misread as indulgence becomes evidence against us.

Discovery moment. Say: "Verse 6 says God 'will render to every man according to his works.' Paul is quoting. The line appears in Israel's prayer book, in a psalm about waiting in silence for God alone. Find it." Hint if needed: it is in the first half of the Psalter, and the psalm's refrain is "For God alone my soul waits in silence."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Psalm 62:12: "For thou dost requite a man according to his work" (the same teaching in Proverbs 24:12, and on Jesus' lips at Matthew 16:27). Judgment according to works is not a detour from biblical religion; it is its spine, Old Testament and New. Read 2:7 again slowly: to those who by patience in well-doing seek glory, honor, and immortality, God will give eternal life. Paul means it. How that fits with "not justified by works of the law" (3:20, next session) is a tension we are required to keep, and the study will earn the answer rather than force one tonight.

3. Verses 14-16: what do Gentiles who never received the law of Moses nevertheless have, and what are its two witnesses doing in the courtroom of 2:15-16?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

What the law requires is "written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them" (2:15), all of it unsealed "on that day when... God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (2:16). Every human being carries the law's core and a witness to it: this is what the Church calls the natural moral law and conscience (CCC 1776-1777 with 1783-1785, 1954-1956). Two honest cautions for the group: conscience is real but not autonomous (it can be malformed, which is why it must be formed), and its existence does not make revelation unnecessary, any more than having eyes makes the sun unnecessary.

Read Romans 2:17-29 aloud.

4. Paul turns to the person who relies on the law and boasts of belonging (2:17-24). What is his charge, and what makes verse 24 the most painful sentence in it?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The insider has the name, the law, the confidence of being "a guide to the blind" (2:19), and a gap between teaching and doing: "you then who teach others, will you not teach yourself?" (2:21). Verse 24 lands the wound with Israel's own prophet: "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (quoting Isaiah 52:5). The people meant to make God known made him despised. Before anyone relaxes: read the sentence again with the word "Catholics" in it. Every scandal that has driven someone from the Church is Romans 2:24 continued. The privilege of bearing the name raises the stakes of dishonoring it.

Discovery moment. Say: "Verse 29 says 'real circumcision is a matter of the heart.' That sounds like Paul spiritualizing away the Old Testament, except he learned it from the Old Testament. Moses himself promised that God would one day perform this surgery. Find it, near the end of Deuteronomy." Hint if needed: Deuteronomy 30, as Moses describes what God will do after exile.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Deuteronomy 30:6: "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live" (see also Deut 10:16 and Jeremiah 4:4, where the command form appears). Two things to notice. First, Paul's "radical" teaching is Moses'. Second, the grammar of Deuteronomy 30:6 is promise, not demand: God will do the circumcising. The inward reality the law demanded, God himself must supply, which is the gospel's

shape appearing already in Torah. Where and how he supplies it, chapter 6 will show; say only that much.

Steelman: Is Romans 2 Only a Hypothetical?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is how much of the Reformed tradition reads the chapter we just studied, and it is a careful reading, so give it its full weight. Romans 2 promises eternal life to those who do good (2:7) and justification to doers of the law (2:13). But Paul is about to conclude that no one is righteous, not one (3:10), and that no human being will be justified by works of the law (3:20). So chapter 2 must be describing an empty set: a standard held up precisely to show that nobody meets it. God would justify doers of the law, if there were any; there are none; therefore the chapter's real function is to drive us to grace alone. Doesn't chapter 3 itself force that reading?" Pause; it is a genuinely strong argument. Then press.

5. Press: Test the hypothetical reading against the passage itself. Are the Gentiles of 2:14-15 doing something, or failing to do something? And is the judgment scene of 2:16 a thought experiment?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The Gentiles of 2:14-15 "do by nature what the law requires": the verse describes actual doing, not a vacant category, and 2:26-27 goes further, imagining the uncircumcised keeper of the law judging the circumcised breaker of it. And 2:16 anchors the whole passage to the real judgment of the real world by Christ Jesus, not a hypothetical one. So the honest reading holds both truths the text holds: no one, by unaided performance of works, earns standing before God (3:20 is coming, and Catholics affirm it without reserve; Trent teaches that nothing prior to justification merits it), and yet the judgment according to works is real, because grace does not replace doing but creates it. Deuteronomy 30:6, which the group just found, is the hinge: God circumcises the heart so that we will love and do. Be honest about the scope: tonight establishes that Romans 2 cannot be waved off as hypothetical; how doing relates to justifying is exactly the business of the next two sessions, and the sealed guesses stay sealed.

DIG DEEPER

"Let God be true though every man be false" (3:4). The objection of 3:1-8 is the Bible's hardest question wearing first-century clothes: if God's own people can fail, is God's promise any good? Paul's opening answer is not an argument but an axiom: God's faithfulness does not hang on human performance. Israel's story, the Church's scandals, and your own relapses all press the same question, and Paul gives them all the same first word. The full answer takes him three chapters (9-11) and takes this study two sessions. If tonight's discussion of 2:24 stirred real pain about the Church's failures, this axiom is the pastoral place to stand: the treasure's Guarantor is not the treasurers.

Send

1. Where are you presuming on God's kindness right now: reading his patience with some corner of your life as his approval of it?
2. If God's name is honored or blasphemed through the people who bear it (2:24), what did the people who watched you this week learn about God?

Live It This Week

- Once this week, when you catch yourself judging someone, stop and name silently one of your own sins that runs out behind you unseen, and pray for the person instead.
- Pray Deuteronomy 30:6 for yourself each day: Lord, circumcise my heart so that I love you with all of it.
- Do one hidden act of good this week that no one will ever know about, remembering that God "judges the secrets of men" (2:16), the good ones included.

Memory Verse

"Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"

Romans 2:4 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord, you show no partiality, and we have shown little else. Forgive the judge in us; heal the hypocrite in us; form the conscience in us. Let your kindness lead us all the way to repentance, and let your name be honored in what we do this week. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Session 3: God Shows No Partiality

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 2:1-11 (read aloud: the trap springs; kindness meant to lead to repentance; render according to works; no partiality)
- Psalm 62:12 (discovery passage: requite a man according to his work; do not reveal in advance; cf. Prov 24:12, Mt 16:27)
- Romans 2:12-16 (law written on hearts; conscience bearing witness; judgment of secrets)
- Romans 2:17-29 (read aloud: the insider's confidence; Isaiah 52:5 at v. 24; circumcision of the heart)
- Deuteronomy 30:6 (discovery passage: God will circumcise your heart; do not reveal in advance; cf. Deut 10:16, Jer 4:4)
- Romans 3:1-8 (Dig Deeper: Let God be true though every man be false; plants Sessions 10-11)
- CCC 678, 682, 1776-1777, 1783-1785, 1954-1956 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 2:4

Session 4: Justified by His Grace

Romans 3:9-31 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the letter's turning point: every mouth is stopped, Jew and Greek alike under sin, and then the great "But now" (3:21): the righteousness of God manifested apart from law, through faith in Jesus Christ, all justified "by his grace as a gift" (3:24), with Christ himself as the new mercy seat where God and sinners meet. Boasting is excluded; the law is upheld, not overthrown.

Catholic Touchstone. The Catholic Church teaches justification by grace without reservation: it "has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ" and "is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith" (CCC 1992). The Council of Trent teaches that nothing preceding justification, neither faith nor works, merits the grace of justification. Tonight the group learns, many for the first time, that grace alone is not the dividing line between Catholics and Protestants; it is common ground the Church has defended since the first century.

What You Need to Know

The passage has two movements. First the verdict (3:9-20): Paul gathers the evidence of chapters 1-2 and pronounces sentence on the whole race, "all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (3:9), sealed with a chain of Old Testament quotations (3:10-18) drawn mostly from the Psalms, beginning "None is righteous, no, not one." The chain's anatomy is deliberate: throat, tongue, lips, mouth, feet, eyes: sin has colonized the whole body. The conclusion: "no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin" (3:20). The law is a diagnostic instrument; an X-ray cannot heal the fracture it reveals.

Then the great turn, the two words on which the letter and arguably the New Testament pivot: "But now" (3:21). The righteousness of God, the thread running since 1:17, is now manifested apart from law though witnessed by the law and prophets: God's own saving justice, given to all who believe, without distinction, "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (3:23-24). Three word-pictures stack up in one sentence: the law court (justified), the slave market (redemption), and the temple (expiation, 3:25). The third picture holds the session's discovery: Paul's word for "expiation" (*hilasterion*) is the Greek Old Testament's word for a specific physical object (its exact force in 3:25 is debated: the object, the place, or the means of expiation), and finding it will reorganize how your group sees the crucifix.

Know the fault line before you lead it. At 3:28, "a man is justified by faith apart from works of law," Martin Luther famously added the word "alone" (*allein*) in his 1522 German New Testament and defended the addition vigorously in his Open Letter on Translating (1530). The word is not in Paul's Greek; the only place Scripture puts "faith" and "alone" together is James 2:24, which negates it. But do not let the group win a translation dispute and lose the chapter: what Paul does say here is radical, and the Catholic Church agrees with every word of it. The dispute with the Reformation was never over whether grace saves (it does, gratuitously) but over how justification is received and what it does in us: whether righteousness is imputed as a legal status or infused as a real transformation, and how faith relates to hope, love, and the sacraments. Trent's answer arrives over the next two sessions; tonight, secure the common ground honestly.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalm 14:1-3. The catena's opening charge, "None is righteous, no, not one" (3:10), adapts Psalm 14: "They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good, no, not one" (Ps 14:3). The verdict on the race is the Psalter's before it is Paul's. A discovery passage; keep it back.

The mercy seat: Exodus 25:17-22 and Leviticus 16. Paul says God put Christ forward "as an expiation by his blood" (3:25). His word *hilasterion* is the Septuagint's term for the mercy seat: the golden cover of the ark, between the cherubim, where God promised "there I will meet with you" (Ex 25:22), and where the high priest sprinkled sacrificial blood once a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:14-15). Paul's claim, which the passages make vivid: Christ crucified is the true meeting place of God and sinners, the reality every Yom Kippur rehearsed. This is the session's central discovery; guard it carefully.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. CLEMENT OF ROME

Within a generation of Paul's death, the church of Rome itself answered the question of how anyone is justified. St. Clement, writing about AD 96, says that we "are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom or understanding or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart, but by that faith through which Almighty God has justified all men from the beginning" (1 Clement 32). Then, without pausing for breath, he asks: what shall we do then, brethren? Grow slack in doing good and abandon love? "May the Master never allow this to happen," he answers; rather let us hasten with earnestness to every good work (1 Clement 33). Justified by faith, therefore eager in works: the first-century Roman church saw no contradiction, and neither does this letter.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

St. Augustine compressed the mystery of grace and freedom into one sentence the Church still quotes: God who "created us without us" did not will to "save us without us" (Sermon 169, cited at CCC 1847). Justification is entirely God's gift; nothing we did earned it, and nothing we could do would. And it is a gift given to persons, not performed on objects: it awakens the very freedom it saves, so that grace produces consent, repentance, and love rather than replacing them. Both halves of St. Augustine's sentence guard tonight's text: "by his grace as a gift" (3:24), "to be received by faith" (3:25).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. ANSELM OF CANTERBURY

St. Anselm, in his work *Why God Became Man*, teaches in substance that sin is a debt no mere creature could pay: an offense against infinite goodness that, in his argument, cannot simply be waved away without unmaking the moral order, yet a human debt that only humanity owes. Only one who is both God and man could offer, from within our race, a satisfaction of infinite worth. St. Anselm's account is not the whole of the Church's understanding of the Cross, and it is not the caricature sometimes made of it (an angry Father punishing an innocent bystander); it is a meditation on why it was supremely fitting, within God's freely chosen plan, that the mercy seat be a person and the blood upon it his own (3:25).

Catechism Connection

CCC 1992. The Catechism's core paragraph on justification tracks tonight's text explicitly: justification "has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ," is "conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith," and conforms us to the righteousness of God who justifies us; the paragraph then quotes Romans 3:21-26 in full. The sacramental note (Baptism) is the planted seed for Session 7.

CCC 1996. "Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us..." Free and undeserved: the Catechism's definition of grace is Paul's "as a gift" (3:24) restated.

CCC 1847. Carries St. Augustine's sentence (Sermon 169) and locates it: God's free gift, received in a freedom it awakens (CCC 1993: justification establishes cooperation between God's grace and man's freedom); the confession of sin as the doorway (1 John 1:8-9 is quoted alongside).

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Righteousness of God: partially resolved. The thread from 1:17 reaches its first summit tonight: God's righteousness here is best heard as his own saving justice, manifested in Christ and given to believers. Do not declare the thread closed; what this righteousness does inside a person (imputed or infused?) is precisely what Sessions 5-7 develop through Abraham and Baptism.

The sealed guess, under maximum pressure. Tonight's text is the strongest pull toward one kind of answer; Session 3's text was the strongest pull toward another. Both are Paul. If anyone asks to open the envelopes early, decline cheerfully: four sessions to go.

Boasting excluded (3:27). Quietly begins the boasting thread that resurfaces with Abraham (4:2) and in the olive tree warning (11:18-20). Plant, do not announce.

The law upheld (3:31). One verse, deliberately unresolved tonight; it is the bridge to chapters 6-8 (how faith establishes what the law intended). If the group notices the puzzle, affirm the noticing and promise chapter 8.

Session Goals

1. The group can state the universal verdict of 3:9-20 and explain the law's diagnostic role (knowledge of sin, not cure).
2. The group discovers Psalm 14 behind the catena and the mercy seat (Ex 25, Lev 16) behind "expiation," and can explain Christ as the true meeting place of God and sinners.
3. The group can articulate what Catholics and Protestants hold in common here (justification by grace, gratuitous, through the redemption in Christ) and name honestly where the real dispute lies.
4. The group can explain why boasting is excluded and why Paul insists this faith upholds rather than overthrows the law.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 min
- Build questions 1-2 with the Psalm 14 discovery: 22 min
- Build questions 3-4 with the mercy seat discovery: 25 min

- Steelman chain with the James 2 discovery: 16 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress Build question 1 by reading the catena without discussing its head-to-feet anatomy. Never cut the mercy seat discovery or the steelman answer; they are the session.

Session 4: Justified by His Grace

Romans 3:9-31 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, every mouth is stopped before you, and ours first. We bring you no payment, no leverage, no case: only need. Meet us tonight at the mercy seat you provided, your Son, our Lord, in whose blood we are redeemed and by whose grace we stand. Amen.

Win

1. Tell us about a gift you received that you could not possibly repay. How did it feel to accept it, honestly: wonderful, uncomfortable, both?
2. Where in life do you most feel the pull to earn your place: work, family, friendships, faith?

Build

Read Romans 3:9-20 aloud.

1. What is the verdict of 3:9, and whom does it cover? Then read the quotation chain in 3:10-18 slowly: what parts of the body does it walk through, and what is that anatomy saying?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"All men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (3:9): the chapters of evidence close with a universal verdict, and "under the power of" is stronger than "guilty of"; sin in Romans is not only deeds but a dominion. The chain then walks the body: throat, tongue, lips, mouth (3:13-14), feet (3:15), eyes (3:18). Sin has colonized the whole instrument. Result: "every mouth may be stopped" (3:19). The first honest posture before God is silence.

Discovery moment. Say: "The chain opens: 'None is righteous, no, not one' (3:10). Paul is adapting a psalm, one that begins with what the fool says in his heart. Find it; it is early in the Psalter." Hint if needed: single digits.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Psalm 14:1-3: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'... They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good, no, not one." The verdict Paul pronounces is the Psalter's own, and in the psalm it covers "the children of men" as such, not some especially wicked subset. Notice what this does to 3:20: if none is righteous, then the law, which is good, can only function as diagnosis in this courtroom (its pedagogy, promise, and moral light are other chapters): "through the law comes knowledge of sin." An X-ray is a mercy; it is not a cure. The question the whole Bible has been building is: where is the cure? Read the next two words of the chapter.

Read Romans 3:21-26 aloud, twice; it may be the densest paragraph Paul ever wrote.

2. "But now" (3:21): what changed? Walk through 3:21-24 phrase by phrase: what is manifested, to whom is it given, on what basis, and at what price to us?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

What changed is not God's mood but the hour: the righteousness of God, the thread we have carried since 1:17, "has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it" (3:21): God's own saving justice, stepping out of promise into history. It is "through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction" (3:22): the impartiality that condemned everyone (2:11) now saves anyone. Basis and price: "justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (3:24). Three pictures in one verse: the courtroom (justified: declared and set right), the slave market (redemption: bought out of sin's dominion, the "under the power" of 3:9), and, in the next verse, the temple. Free to us; costly to him.

Discovery moment. Say: "Verse 25 says God put Christ forward 'as an expiation by his blood.' Paul's Greek word here, *hilasterion*, is the Septuagint's word for a physical object: a specific golden thing, in a specific room, involved in one day of the year. Scholars debate its exact force here (the object, the place, or the means of expiation), but the resonance is unmistakable. Two passages will crack it open: one describes the object being built and what God promised to do there; the other describes what the high priest did to it once a year. Find them." Hints if needed: the object sits on top of the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25); the day is the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Exodus 25:17-22: the mercy seat, the golden cover of the ark between the cherubim, of which God says "There I will meet with you" (Ex 25:22). Leviticus 16:14-15: on the Day of Atonement, the high priest sprinkles sacrificial blood on and before the mercy seat for the sins of the people. Now reread 3:25: God put Christ forward as the *hilasterion*, the mercy seat, by his blood. Everything the object was, he is: the one place where the holy God and sinful people truly meet, the place where blood covers sin, no longer hidden behind a veil in a room one man entered one day a year, but "put forward" publicly, on a hill, with the meeting open to "all who believe." This is why 3:26 can say God is both "just and the justifier": at the cross, sin is dealt with, not ignored, and the sinner is received, not destroyed. When your group next looks at a crucifix, they are looking at the mercy seat.

3. Verses 27-31: what happens to boasting, and why? And what is startling about Paul's last sentence in the chapter?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded" (3:27): a gift leaves nothing to brag about, and since justification comes through faith, Jew and Gentile enter by the same door, for "God is one" (3:29-30): the Shema itself, Israel's daily creed, becomes Paul's argument that the one God must be God of all. The startling ending: "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (3:31). Whatever Paul means by faith apart from works of law, he insists it establishes the law rather than voiding it. Leave the puzzle standing tonight; it is a deliberate loose thread, and the letter will pull it.

Steelman: Faith Alone, the Central Case

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Tonight we take the strongest Protestant argument in the New Testament head on, and we owe it its full force. Paul says: 'For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law' (3:28). Not helped by faith, justified by faith, and works of law are explicitly set aside. Boasting is excluded (3:27), which only makes sense if human doing contributes nothing. When Luther translated this verse 'by faith alone,' he argued he was only making Paul's plain sense unmistakable in German: if works are excluded and faith is what remains, what does 'alone' add except clarity? Half of Western Christianity stands on this verse read this way. If the Reformers are wrong, it must be shown from Paul, not against him." Let it stand at full height. Then press, in three steps.

4. Press one: In the flow of chapters 2-3, what are "works of law" doing for the person Paul is arguing with? What were they being used to claim (look back at 2:17-20, 3:27-29)?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

They were the insider's badge and boast: possession of the law, circumcision, the confidence of being guide to the blind (2:17-20), grounds for boasting (3:27) and for keeping God Jewish-only (3:29, which Paul immediately refutes). "Works of law" in this argument are at minimum the law of Moses functioning as a claim on God and a wall between peoples. Honest scholarly note for the group: interpreters genuinely debate how much of the phrase's weight falls on boundary markers like circumcision versus human performance in general, and the Catholic reading does not need to win that debate: on either reading, no human doing prior to grace establishes standing before God. Trent says so as firmly as Luther: nothing that precedes justification, "whether faith or works," merits the grace of justification. If someone in the group has always believed Catholics teach salvation by earning, tonight is the night that caricature dies.

5. Press two, a discovery inside the steelman: Paul never writes the phrase "faith alone." One verse in the New Testament does. It is in a letter by another apostle, in its second chapter. Find it and read it aloud, with the verse before and after.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

James 2:24: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone," in a passage arguing that faith without works is dead (Jas 2:26) and citing the same Abraham Paul will cite in Romans 4. The one time Scripture joins "faith" and "alone," it negates the pairing. Do not weaponize this cheaply: James and Paul are not enemies, and next session puts them at the same table over Abraham. Hear the classical Protestant harmonization at full strength first: Paul, it says, treats justification before God, James the vindication of a living faith, so works evidence faith without entering the verdict. Press it gently: James's own test case is Abraham before God at Moriah, and he calls that event the fulfillment of the very verse Paul builds on (Gen 15:6; Jas 2:23). So the structural point stands: whatever 3:28 means, it cannot mean what James denies, unless Scripture contradicts itself. The faith that justifies is never alone in the person it justifies: in the adult it comes with repentance, hope, and love, and it works; the infant at the font receives the gift within the Church's faith. Which is, note well, exactly where this study began: the obedience of faith (1:5).

6. Press three: after all of this, what do Catholics actually affirm in 3:28? Say it positively, so the group hears the common ground and the real difference clearly.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Catholics affirm 3:28 as it stands: justification comes through faith, not through works of law; it is God's gift, unearned and unearnable; the redemption is Christ's work, not ours; boasting is dead. Where the Reformation dispute genuinely lies is downstream: is the righteousness given in justification a legal status credited while inner renewal is located elsewhere, in regeneration and sanctification (imputation), or God's own life really infused into justification itself, making us actually just, working through love, normally through the sacraments? The Church teaches the second, and the next three sessions (Abraham, Adam and Christ, Baptism) are Paul's own case for it. Name the hopeful note honestly too: in 1999 the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation signed a Joint Declaration affirming together that we are accepted by God "by grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part." In 1999 the two communions reached a differentiated consensus and judged the old condemnations inapplicable to the teaching as there expressed; treat it with respect, and do not pretend it resolved everything.

DIG DEEPER

Just and the justifier (3:26). The deepest problem in the Bible is not whether God can forgive but how he can forgive without lying about evil. A judge who acquits the guilty is corrupt (Prov 17:15 says God detests it); a judge who only condemns saves no one. The cross is Paul's answer to a dilemma most religions never even pose: at the mercy seat, God "proves" his righteousness precisely in the act of justifying the ungodly, because sin is truly borne, not waved off. Mercy that costs the giver everything is the only mercy that takes justice seriously.

Send

1. "Every mouth stopped" (3:19): what defense of yourself are you still conducting before God? What would it be like to rest your case and accept the gift?
2. If a Protestant friend asked you tomorrow, "So do Catholics believe you earn your salvation?", what would you say now, in two sentences?

Live It This Week

- Once this week, kneel before a crucifix for five silent minutes with Exodus 25:22 in mind: "There I will meet with you."
- Practice receiving: let someone do something for you this week without repaying, deflecting, or evening the score, and let it teach you about grace.
- Write out Romans 3:23-24 by hand and put it where you will see it daily; say it as a prayer of thanks each morning.

Memory Verse

"Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

Romans 3:23-24 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, mercy seat of God, our case is closed and our mouths are stopped, and still you meet us. Thank you for a redemption we could never buy and a righteousness we could never build. Keep us from boasting, keep us from despair, and keep us near your cross. Amen.

Session 4: Justified by His Grace

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 3:9-20 (read aloud: all under the power of sin; the catena; every mouth stopped; law as knowledge of sin)
- Psalm 14:1-3 (discovery passage: none that does good; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 3:21-26 (read aloud twice: But now; grace as gift; expiation; just and justifier)
- Exodus 25:17-22 (discovery passage: the mercy seat, "There I will meet with you"; do not reveal in advance)
- Leviticus 16:14-15 (discovery passage: blood on the mercy seat, Day of Atonement; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 3:27-31 (boasting excluded; God is one; the law upheld)
- James 2:24 with 2:26 (steelman discovery: not by faith alone; do not reveal in advance)
- CCC 1992, 1996, 1847 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 3:23-24

Session 5: Abraham Believed God

Romans 4 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers, by building Abraham's timeline themselves, that Scripture's model of justifying faith is a whole obedient life: believed and reckoned righteous before circumcision and before the law, a faith that set out when called, hoped against hope, grew strong, and was completed decades later on Moriah. Faith is not a moment of assent filed away; it is a life handed over.

Catholic Touchstone. The Catechism presents Abraham as the model of the obedience of faith (CCC 144-146), and the Abraham chapters, read whole, carry the Catholic account of justification: utterly free at its beginning (nothing Abraham did earned the call or the reckoning), and truly alive in its course (his faith obeyed, was tested, grew, and worked). Paul and James read the same Abraham, and tonight the group watches them agree.

What You Need to Know

Paul calls his star witness. If justification is by faith apart from works of law (3:28), the obvious objection is Abraham: the father of the covenant, the man of the great deeds. "If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God" (4:2). Then the exhibit: "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (4:3, quoting Gen 15:6). Everything in tonight's session hangs on chronology, so master the timeline: Genesis 12, Abram called at seventy-five, and by faith he obeyed and went (Heb 11:8). Genesis 15, the stars and the reckoning. Genesis 16-17, Ishmael born when Abram is eighty-six; circumcision commanded when he is ninety-nine. Genesis 22, Moriah, decades after the reckoning. Paul's argument in 4:9-12 is pure inductive Bible study: Gen 15 precedes Gen 17, therefore the reckoning preceded circumcision by more than thirteen years, therefore circumcision was "a sign or seal of the righteousness which he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (4:11), therefore Abraham fathers all believers, Gentile and Jew alike.

Two more movements. In 4:13-17, the promise runs through faith, not law, "that it may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants" (4:16), grounded in the kind of God Abraham believed: one "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (4:17). In 4:18-25, Paul paints the anatomy of that faith: "in hope he believed against hope" (4:18), facing the deadness of his own body and Sarah's womb without weakening, and here is the line to underline twice: "he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God" (4:20). Faith that grows is faith that is alive, and a righteousness that can grow is not a static legal entry. The chapter lands on us: the reckoning "will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (4:24-25).

Tonight also stages the meeting your group has been promised since Session 4: Paul and James at the same table. James asks, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar?" and says that in Genesis 22 "the scripture was fulfilled" which says Abraham believed and it was reckoned (Jas 2:21-23). Notice what James did: he took Genesis 15:6, Paul's proof text, and declared it fulfilled years later at Moriah, after Isaac had grown. The two apostles are not contradicting; they are dating (and using "justified" with different accents: Paul for the gracious reckoning, James for faith's demonstrated completion). Paul dates the reckoning to prove works of law did not earn it; James dates its fulfillment to prove the faith that was reckoned was the kind that obeys. One Abraham, one faith, portrayed as tested and matured the whole way through.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Genesis 15:1-6. The night of the stars: "Look toward heaven, and number the stars... So shall your descendants be. And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:5-6). The session's foundation stone and first discovery; keep it back.

Genesis 16:16 and 17:24. The two ages that win Paul's argument: Abram eighty-six at Ishmael's birth (after Gen 15), ninety-nine at circumcision. The group does this arithmetic themselves in the second discovery; do not do it for them.

Genesis 22 with James 2:21-23. Moriah, where James says Genesis 15:6 was fulfilled. Reserved for the steelman press; guard it.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. CLEMENT OF ROME

The first-century Roman church read Abraham exactly as tonight's session does. St. Clement holds up "Abraham, who was called 'the friend,'" as one "found faithful in that he rendered obedience unto the words of God," who "through obedience went forth from his land" (1 Clement 10). And when Clement asks why Abraham was blessed, he answers with both hands: was it not because he wrought righteousness and truth through faith? (1 Clement 31). Obedience, righteousness, faith, in one breath, about one man, from the church Paul addressed: an exceptionally early Roman witness to the same union of faith and obedience.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS

St. Irenaeus teaches in substance, in *Against Heresies*, that Abraham was the Word's follower before the Word was made flesh: his faith was not a private opinion about God but a setting out after God, leaving land and kin at a command, which is why all who follow Christ in faith are Abraham's true children. For St. Irenaeus the continuity runs one direction: it is not that Christians resemble Abraham, but that Abraham, believing the God who raises the dead (4:17), was already walking toward Christ.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX

St. Thérèse of Lisieux teaches, in substance, that nothing so honors God as bold confidence in him (her emphasis, not a ranking of virtues): the soul that expects everything from God, like a child from its father, receives everything, while the soul that calculates its own merits receives what merits can buy. Her little way, drawn from her *Story of a Soul* and reported sayings, is (in this study's application) Romans 4:20-21 turned into a spirituality: no distrust, full conviction that God can do what he promised, and glory given to God precisely by daring to expect much from him. Abraham hoping against hope is the first walker on the little way.

Catechism Connection

CCC 144-146. The obedience-of-faith definition from Session 1 now gets its face: CCC 145 points to Hebrews' eulogy, "By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called," and CCC 146 names him the model who "fulfills the

definition of faith" and quotes tonight's key verse, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." The study's title thread and its central character officially meet.

CCC 2572. On Moriah as the final purification of Abraham's faith: his faith "does not weaken," for he considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead (quoting Heb 11:19). The Catechism reads Genesis 22 as the final purification of Abraham's faith, consonant with James's completion language (Jas 2:22).

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Title thread, major deposit. Abraham is the obedience of faith walking. Do not announce the inclusion; simply use the phrase once, naturally, and move on. It resolves in Session 15.

Boasting thread. 4:2 picks up 3:27 (boasting excluded). Next surfacing: the grafted branches warned against boasting, 11:18-20, Session 11.

Resurrection faith. 4:17 (God who gives life to the dead) and 4:24-25 hand the baton to chapters 5-6: our justification is tied to his rising. Sessions 6-7 run with it.

Sealed guess: three weeks out. Tonight's session is the strongest single input most guesses will need to be measured against. Say nothing; it opens in Session 8, and Take-Home 7 will carry the reminder to bring sealed sheets.

Session Goals

1. The group can retell Abraham's timeline (Gen 12, 15, 16-17, 22) from memory and locate the reckoning within it.
2. The group discovers Genesis 15:6 and computes the circumcision gap themselves from Genesis 16:16 and 17:24.
3. The group can explain how Paul and James use the same Abraham without contradiction, and why "faith was completed by works" (Jas 2:22) is good Pauline theology.
4. The group can say what 4:20 ("he grew strong in his faith") implies about the nature of justifying righteousness.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 min
- Build questions 1-2 with the Genesis 15 discovery: 22 min
- Build question 3 with the timeline discovery (Gen 16-17 arithmetic): 18 min
- Build question 4 and the steelman chain with the James discovery: 23 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress Build question 4 (4:13-17) into a one-sentence bridge you supply. Never cut the timeline arithmetic or the James discovery; they are the session.

Session 5: Abraham Believed God

Romans 4 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father of Abraham and our Father, you call, and faith is the going; you promise, and faith is the trusting; you test, and faith is the holding on. Give us tonight the faith you reckon as righteousness: the kind that believes you against the evidence and obeys you past the comfortable point. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. Who is the most trusting person you know? What has their trust cost them, and what has it built?
2. Have you ever had to act on a promise long before you could see any evidence it would be kept? What was that like?

Build

Read Romans 4:1-8 aloud.

1. Why does Paul reach for Abraham, of all people, right after 3:28? What would it prove if even Abraham was not justified by works?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Abraham is the strongest possible test case: father of the covenant, the man of legendary deeds, the one figure a Jewish objector would play as a trump card. "If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God" (4:2). If the argument holds for Abraham, it holds for everyone; if it fails for Abraham, it fails, period. Paul is not dodging the hard case; he is leading with it.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul's whole case rests on one Old Testament sentence: 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness' (4:3). Find the original scene. It happens at night, outdoors, and it involves counting something." Hint if needed: Genesis, before Isaac is even conceived.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 15:1-6. God brings the childless old man outside: "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them... So shall your descendants be. And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:5-6). Have the group notice what Abraham is doing in the scene: nothing. No rite yet, no law (Sinai is four centuries away); and nothing done had earned this: even his obedient setting-out in Genesis 12 was already grace-led faith, not a wage. A man stands under a night sky and takes God at his word about an impossible future, and God counts that trust as righteousness. Whatever else justification involves, its foundation is laid here, and it is laid on grace.

Read Romans 4:9-12 aloud.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul now argues from chronology: was Abraham reckoned righteous before or after his circumcision? Prove it from Genesis yourselves. Two verses give you ages: find how old Abram was when Ishmael was born, which happens after the night of the stars (end of Genesis 16), and how old Abraham was when he was circumcised (end of Genesis 17). Do the math."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 16:16: Abram was eighty-six when Hagar bore Ishmael. Genesis 17:24: Abraham was ninety-nine when he was circumcised. The reckoning of Genesis 15 precedes the circumcision of Genesis 17 by more than thirteen years. Paul's conclusion (4:11): circumcision was "a sign or seal of the righteousness which he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised." Here the seal certified something already true of Abraham; Paul's point concerns this case, not a rule for every sacred sign. And the payoff (4:11-12): Abraham is father of all who believe, uncircumcised Gentiles included, and of the circumcised who also walk in his footsteps of faith. Your group just reproduced, with open Bibles and subtraction, the argument that opened the covenant to the nations.

2. Read 4:13-17. What does the promise "rest on" and why (4:16)? And what two things does 4:17 say about the God Abraham believed, and why do both matter to a man in his situation?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

It rests on grace, "in order that the promise may be guaranteed to all his descendants" (4:16): base the promise on law-keeping and it becomes as fragile as we are; base it on grace and it is as reliable as God. And Abraham's God "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (4:17): resurrection and creation from nothing. A man with a dead womb in the family tent needs precisely that God, and no lesser one. Flag quietly for the group: keep 4:17 in your pocket; the letter is about to connect our justification to a specific act of giving life to the dead (4:24-25).

3. Read 4:18-22 slowly. What did Abraham's faith have to stare down, and what happened to the faith itself across those years (4:20)? What does that tell us about the righteousness God reckons?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He stared down the facts: "his own body, which was as good as dead... or... the barrenness of Sarah's womb" (4:19), and "in hope he believed against hope" (4:18). And across the years the faith itself changed: "he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God" (4:20). Growth is the property of living things. If faith can grow, and righteousness is reckoned to faith, then what God works in the believer is not a static ledger entry but a life, and lives develop, are tested, and can be "completed" (hold that word two minutes). The doctrine of growth in righteousness rests on the Church's teaching (Trent; CCC 2010) with these texts as its scriptural soil, not on this verse alone. This is the seam along which the Catholic understanding of justification runs: free at the root, alive in the branch.

Steelman: Reckoned, Not Earned, and Nothing Else?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "The Reformed reading of this chapter deserves its full voice, because this is its favorite chapter. Paul could not be clearer: 'to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness' (4:5). To one who does not work. Wages are earned; righteousness is credited, gratis, to the believing ungodly. And the timeline you just built cuts both

ways: nothing Abraham did, no rite, no law, no work, preceded the reckoning. Justification is God crediting righteousness to faith, full stop. And be precise about what we claim: faith is the instrument, never the ground (the ground is Christ), and obedience follows necessarily as fruit; it just contributes nothing to the crediting. If obedience were any part of the package, Paul chose his words very badly." Let it stand tall. Then press with a discovery.

Discovery moment (inside the steelman). Say: "Another apostle wrote about Abraham's justification, quoted Genesis 15:6, and dated things differently. Find James chapter 2, verses 21 to 23, and read them aloud slowly, noting which event of Abraham's life James attaches to our verse."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

James asks, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar?", says "faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works," and declares that at Moriah "the scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'" (Jas 2:21-23). Now assemble what the whole group has seen tonight. Paul dates the reckoning to Genesis 15 to prove no work earned it: true, and Catholics confess it without reserve; nothing before justification merits it. James dates the fulfillment of the same verse to Genesis 22, decades later, to prove the faith God reckoned was the obeying, working kind: also true, and Genesis itself agrees, since the faith of chapter 15 had already set out from Haran in chapter 12 (Heb 11:8: "By faith Abraham obeyed"). The two apostles are dating one living faith at two points on its arc. The Reformation reading is right about the free beginning and must strain against James on the living rest; the Catholic reading needs both apostles at full strength and no strain. And notice: your sealed guesses asked what a person must do to be saved. Say nothing yet; three weeks.

DIG DEEPER

"It will be reckoned to us" (4:24). The chapter ends by handing Abraham's night sky to your group: the words were written "for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (4:24-25). Abraham believed the God who gives life to the dead as a promise about the future; we believe him as a report about the past and a person in the present. Same faith, same God, one empty tomb between us. Verse 25 is worth memorizing beyond tonight's verse: the Resurrection is not an epilogue to our justification but its engine.

Send

1. Where is God asking you to believe against hope right now: to trust a promise while the visible evidence says otherwise?
2. Abraham's faith grew strong over decades of walking. What is one practice you could commit to that would let yours grow rather than idle?

Live It This Week

- One clear night this week, go outside, look up, and pray Genesis 15 from the inside: thank God, by name, for a promise of his given in Scripture that you are still waiting to see fulfilled.

- Do one prudent act of obedience this week that leans on God's promises being true, and note what it does to your faith.
- Pray daily: Lord, I believe you are able to do what you have promised (4:21); help my unbelief.

Memory Verse

"No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."

Romans 4:20-21 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

God of Abraham, you justify the ungodly, and so you can justify us. Reckon to us the faith we place in your Son, put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Make our faith like our father's: quick to set out, stubborn in hope, growing strong, giving you glory. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Session 5: Abraham Believed God

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 4:1-8 (read aloud: Abraham's case opened; Gen 15:6 quoted; David's blessedness)
- Genesis 15:1-6 (discovery passage: the stars and the reckoning; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 4:9-12 (read aloud: the chronology argument; sign and seal)
- Genesis 16:16 and 17:24 (discovery passages: the two ages for the timeline arithmetic; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 4:13-17 (promise resting on grace; the God who gives life to the dead)
- Romans 4:18-25 (read slowly: hope against hope; faith grew strong; raised for our justification)
- James 2:21-23 (steelman discovery: Gen 15:6 fulfilled at Moriah; do not reveal in advance; cf. Gen 22, Heb 11:8)
- CCC 144-146, 2572 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 4:20-21

Session 6: Peace with God

Romans 5 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers what justification opens onto: peace with God, standing grace, and a hope that suffering builds rather than breaks, because God's love is already poured into our hearts and proven at the cross, where Christ died for the ungodly. Then the widest lens in the letter: Adam and Christ, the disobedience that made many sinners and the obedience that makes many righteous, with grace outweighing sin at every point.

Catholic Touchstone. Two Catholic doctrines live in this chapter. Original sin: through one man sin and death entered and spread to all, a sin "contracted and not committed, a state and not an act" (CCC 404), a distinction the Church's reading of Romans 5:12-19 grounds and illuminates. And its glorious asymmetry: by one man's obedience "many will be made righteous" (5:19), made, not merely counted: a verse that powerfully supports the Catholic understanding of justification as real transformation, which itself rests on the Church's full teaching (Trent; CCC 1987-1995).

What You Need to Know

Chapter 5 exhales. Four chapters of courtroom argument resolve into: "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1). Peace here is not a feeling but a state: the war is over, and through Christ "we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand" (5:2). Then Paul builds the chain your group will walk link by link: suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope, "and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (5:3-5). Note the ground of the hope: not optimism about circumstances but a love already poured in, and proven in public: "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (5:8). Verses 9-11 then argue from the greater to the lesser: if God did the hard thing (reconciling enemies by the death of his Son), the remaining thing (saving reconciled friends) is, Paul says twice, "much more" certain.

At 5:12 the lens pulls back as far as it will go: two men, two acts, two humanities. "As sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (5:12). Adam's trespass brought condemnation and death's reign to all; Christ's "act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men" (5:18), "for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (5:19). Two things to hold precisely. First, the parallel is real: what we inherit from Adam is not a bad example but a condition; what we receive from Christ is not a good example but a new condition. Second, the parallel is deliberately broken in grace's favor: "the free gift is not like the trespass" (5:15); where the trespass brought death, grace "abounded all the more" (5:20), superabundance, not mere repair. Notice the word Paul chose for Christ's saving act: obedience (5:19). The study's title just found its deepest root: the obedience of faith is possible because of the obedience of the Son.

A pastoral note for the suffering chain (5:3-5). Someone in your group may be inside a suffering right now that no tidy chain describes. Paul is not saying suffering is good, or that God delights in it; he is saying that for those standing in grace, suffering is not wasted, and hope is anchored below the waterline of circumstance. Leave room for silence when you discuss it; do not force anyone to testify to growth they cannot yet see; and if grief surfaces, receive it, point gently to prayer and the sacraments, and follow up personally.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Genesis 2:17 and 3:19. Paul's claim that death entered through sin (5:12) is Genesis read plainly: "in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2:17), and after the fall, "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). The group grounds the Adam half of the typology here; a discovery passage, keep it back.

Isaiah 53:11. Paul's stunning phrase "many will be made righteous" (5:19) has a prophetic pedigree: the Suffering Servant, of whom Isaiah says "by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities" (Isa 53:11). The "many" of Romans 5 is the Servant's "many." A discovery passage; guard it.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS

St. Irenaeus built the Church's first great theology on this chapter's frame. Christ, he wrote, "did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself" (Against Heresies, Book V, preface). His name for Paul's Adam-and-Christ logic is recapitulation: the Son retraces the human story from inside it, standing where Adam stood and, at each station where Adam said no to God, saying yes, obedience unwinding disobedience knot by knot (his knot image is the Eve-and-Mary picture, which waits for this study's last night) until the whole race is offered a new head and a new heredity. Romans 5:19 in one word.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. TERESA OF ÁVILA

By long Teresian tradition, a bookmark found in her breviary after her death carried the lines she had lived by: "Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you. All things are passing away; God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices." It is the suffering chain of Romans 5:3-5 compressed into a prayer: a hope anchored not in circumstances, which pass, but in the unchanging God whose love has already been poured into the heart, and which therefore does not disappoint.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH'S EASTER PROCLAMATION

Once a year, in the dark of the Easter Vigil, the Church sings over the paschal candle words that only tonight's chapter makes thinkable: "O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!" (the Exsultet, Roman Missal). The liturgy dares to call Adam's sin happy, not because sin is good, but because "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (5:20): what God gave in answer to the fall so exceeds what the fall destroyed that the Church, on her most solemn night, sings about the wound through which the greater glory came.

Catechism Connection

CCC 402-404. The doctrine of original sin, stated from tonight's text: all men implicated in Adam's sin, as Paul affirms (Rom 5:12, 19 are the cited verses), transmitted as a fallen state, a sin "contracted and not committed, a

state and not an act" (404). Human nature is wounded and deprived of original holiness, not totally corrupted: a precision that matters next session.

CCC 411. Christ as the New Adam, "who, because he 'became obedient unto death, even death on a cross,' makes amends superabundantly for the disobedience of Adam." Superabundantly is the Catechism receiving 5:15-20 exactly.

CCC 1817. Hope defined: desiring the kingdom and eternal life as our happiness, "placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit." The anchor of 5:5 in catechetical form.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Title thread, deepest root. 5:19 grounds the whole study: the obedience of faith (1:5) is possible because of the obedience of the Son. Use the observation once, without pointing at the inclusio; Session 15 harvests it.

Exchange reversed. Session 2 planted the exchange (1:23, 25); tonight quietly pays it: what Adam traded away, the New Adam restores with interest. One sentence, no fanfare.

Reign language. Death "reigned" (5:14, 17); grace will "reign" (5:21). Chapter 6 asks who reigns in your body; Session 7 runs the thread. Plant the verb tonight.

Sealed guess: two weeks out. Take-Home 7 carries the bring-your-sheet reminder. Say nothing tonight.

Session Goals

1. The group can name what justification opens onto (peace, standing grace, hope) and explain why the hope of 5:3-5 does not disappoint.
2. The group discovers Genesis 2-3 behind death's entry and Isaiah 53:11 behind "many will be made righteous."
3. The group can state the doctrine of original sin precisely (contracted, not committed; wounded, not totally corrupt) and why 5:19 teaches made righteous, really.
4. The group can explain the asymmetry: how the free gift is not like the trespass, and what "superabundance" means.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 min
- Build questions 1-2 (peace and the suffering chain, with pastoral care): 25 min
- Build questions 3-4 with the Genesis and Isaiah discoveries: 25 min
- Steelman chain: 13 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and deliver the Genesis 2-3 grounding yourself in one sentence, keeping the Isaiah 53 discovery live. Never cut the suffering-chain discussion or the steelman answer.

Session 6: Peace with God

Romans 5 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, you reconciled us while we were enemies; you loved us while we were still sinners. Give us tonight the peace that is not a mood but a fact, the hope that does not disappoint, and hearts open to the love you have already poured in. Through Christ our Lord, the obedient one. Amen.

Win

1. What is the difference between a truce and real peace? Have you experienced both, with a person or with God?
2. Tell us about something difficult that, looking back, built something in you that ease never could have.

Build

Read Romans 5:1-5 aloud.

1. "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God" (5:1). What kind of peace is this: a feeling, or something else? And what do we "stand" in (5:2)?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

A state of affairs, not a state of mind: the hostility described since 1:18 is ended; the war is over. Feelings will lag and wobble; the fact does not. And we stand in "this grace" (5:2): grace is not only the door we entered but the ground under our feet now, a standing relationship. For the group's pastoral benefit: assurance in this passage is anchored in what God did and does, not in the quality of today's emotions. On days you cannot feel peace with God, if you remain in his grace you still have it; and if grave sin has ruptured it, Reconciliation restores it.

2. Walk the chain of 5:3-4 link by link: suffering, endurance, character, hope. Does each link actually follow? And what makes the hope at the end of the chain safe (5:5)? Take this one slowly and gently.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The chain is real but not automatic: suffering produces endurance in those standing in grace (5:2 governs the sentence); outside grace, suffering can just as easily produce bitterness. Endurance, tested over time, becomes character: a self that has been proven. And a proven self dares to hope. The anchor: "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (5:5). The hope is safe because its ground is already possessed, not still pending. Leader: hold this discussion with care. If someone is inside a suffering right now, do not make them find the silver lining tonight; Paul is promising that nothing suffered in grace is wasted, not that it stops hurting. Silence is an acceptable contribution to this question.

3. Verses 6-11: how does God prove his love, and what is Paul's "much more" logic in 9-10?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (5:8): the proof is not a feeling reported but an event performed, dated, and public, and its timing is the point: while we were helpless, ungodly, sinners, enemies (Paul's four descriptions in 6-10). The logic: if God reconciled us at maximum cost while we were enemies, "much more" will he save us now that we are friends (5:9-10). The hard part is finished. No one anxious about whether God will finally reject them should be allowed to leave tonight without hearing 5:10.

Read Romans 5:12-21 aloud, slowly; it is the widest-angle paragraph in the letter.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul says sin came into the world through one man, 'and death through sin' (5:12). He is reading the opening of the Bible. Find the two verses in Genesis 2 and 3 where death is first threatened and then pronounced." Hint if needed: one is about eating; one is about dust.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 2:17, "in the day that you eat of it you shall die," and Genesis 3:19, "you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Death is not part of the furniture of creation as God intended it; it is an intruder that entered through sin and then "spread to all men" (5:12). This is the doctrine of original sin, and precision matters: what we inherit from Adam is a condition, not a personal crime; "contracted and not committed, a state and not an act" (CCC 404). We are born exiled from a garden we never personally left, with a nature wounded, darkened, and mortal, but not destroyed, a precision that will matter next week. If original sin offends modern ears, invite the group to weigh the universal brokenness the doctrine names and ask whether any rival account explains its universality better.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul's boldest line is 5:19: by one man's obedience 'many will be made righteous.' A prophet saw this coming: one figure, called my servant, whose suffering would make 'many' righteous. Find him; he is in the most famous chapter of Israel's greatest prophet." Hint if needed: the chapter begins 'Who has believed what we have heard?'

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Isaiah 53:11: "by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities." The "many" of Romans 5:15-19 is the Servant's "many": Paul has been reading Isaiah 53, and Jesus quoted the same song of himself ("a ransom for many," Mk 10:45). Notice what the Servant does: he bears iniquities, and the many are made righteous; the two halves of Romans (3:25 and 5:19) were already joined in the prophet. And underline Paul's chosen word for Christ's saving act: obedience (5:19), "obedient unto death" as Philippians sings. The obedience of faith we have traced since the first night has its source here: his obedience makes ours possible.

Steelman: Made Righteous, or Only Counted Righteous?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is the Reformed reading of the parallel, and it is elegant, so give it full weight. How did Adam's sin make you a sinner? Not by your committing it: you were not in the garden. His guilt was imputed to you as your covenant head; you were counted a sinner in him. Very well: the parallel then interprets 5:19 for us. Christ's righteousness makes you righteous the same way, by imputation: counted righteous in him, your legal standing perfect while you yourself remain, in Luther's phrase, at once

justified and a sinner. The symmetry is the argument: if 'made sinners' means imputation, 'made righteous' means imputation. Doesn't the parallel demand it?" Let it stand. Then press.

4. Press: Test the premise against 5:12. Did Adam's sin only change our legal standing, or did something actually happen to us? What actually spread?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Something happened: "death spread to all men" (5:12); death "reigned" (5:14, 17). Adam's sin did not merely put a mark by our names in a ledger; it changed the human condition itself: mortality, darkened intellect, disordered desire: the inheritance your group traced from Genesis 3, as the Church's doctrine synthesizes it (CCC 405). The premise of the imputation reading is too small: "made sinners" names a real condition, contracted and lived in. So the symmetry, honestly followed, proves the Catholic point: if Adam's disobedience really constituted us sinners, Christ's obedience really constitutes the justified righteous: "made righteous" (5:19), grace poured in (5:5), a new condition, which is why Trent teaches that justification truly makes us just, not merely declares us so. And the parallel is not even symmetrical: Paul breaks it in grace's favor three times, "the free gift is not like the trespass" (5:15), "much more" (5:15, 17), grace superabounding (5:20). Grace does not restore us to Adam's starting line; it takes us further up than the fall took us down. Honest scope note: how this real righteousness arrives in an individual life is next session's chapter, and it will name a specific moment most of your group has already lived through.

DIG DEEPER

The happy fault. At the Easter Vigil the Church sings, "O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!" (Exsultet). The line scandalizes until 5:20 explains it: "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." God's answer to the fall was not a patch but an elevation: union with God in Christ exceeds anything Eden held. This is also the deep logic of providence in a wounded life: God does not merely repair what sin ruins; he makes even the ruin serve a greater good, which is why a forgiven sinner can honestly thank God not for the sin, but from inside its aftermath. St. Augustine's converted heart and the thief's cross both hang in that gallery.

Send

1. Which do you actually live from day to day: peace with God as a fact, or a low-grade suspicion that the truce could break? What would change if 5:10 were the ground you stood on?
2. Where in your life right now is the chain of 5:3-4 mid-forged: suffering that God may be working into endurance and character? What would it mean to cooperate rather than just endure?

Live It This Week

- Memorize 5:8 and pray it once each morning, putting your own name in it: while I was yet a sinner, Christ died for me.
- Write down one suffering, past or present, and ask God to show you what he has built or is building through it. If the answer is not visible yet, tell him that too.
- Once this week, offer a specific small hardship (an inconvenience, a pain, a frustration) in union with Christ's obedience, out loud or in writing.

Memory Verse

"But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Romans 5:8 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, New Adam, where we said no, you said yes, all the way to a cross. Reign in us as death once reigned over us. Pour your love into every heart here until hope crowds out fear, and teach us the obedience that unwinds our knots. Glory to you, so great, so glorious a Redeemer. Amen.

Session 6: Peace with God

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 5:1-5 (read aloud: peace, standing grace, the suffering chain, love poured in)
- Romans 5:6-11 (read aloud: Christ died for the ungodly; much-more logic; reconciled enemies)
- Romans 5:12-21 (read aloud slowly: Adam and Christ; the free gift not like the trespass; grace superabounding)
- Genesis 2:17 and 3:19 (discovery passages: death threatened and pronounced; do not reveal in advance)
- Isaiah 53:11 (discovery passage: the Servant makes many righteous; do not reveal in advance; cf. Mk 10:45)
- CCC 402-404, 411, 1817 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 5:8

Session 7: Buried with Him in Baptism

Romans 6 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers where the real righteousness of chapter 5 arrives in an individual life: Baptism, in which we were buried with Christ into his death and raised to walk in newness of life. Because that union is real, sin's dominion is broken, the old self is crucified, and the Christian life is living out a death and resurrection that have already happened to us.

Catholic Touchstone. Baptismal regeneration is not a Catholic addition to the gospel; it is Romans 6 read at face value. The Catechism's teaching that Baptism buries us into Christ's death and raises us as a new creation (CCC 1214, 1227, 1265) is this chapter restated. Tonight also pays off a thread three sessions old: the circumcision of the heart God promised (Deut 30:6) can be given an address, and Colossians 2 supplies it.

What You Need to Know

Chapter 6 opens with the objection grace always attracts: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" (6:1). If where sin increased grace superabounded (5:20), why not sin boldly and let grace shine? Paul's answer is not a rule but a fact about the audience: "By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (6:2). You died. When? His proof assumes the Romans already know: "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, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (6:3-4). Weigh the grammar with your group: buried with him by baptism, the grammar most naturally making baptism the instrument, not a bare illustration. And weigh the argument's structure: Paul settles a moral controversy by appealing to what baptism did. A ceremony that merely pictured an inner event could not carry that load; only an event can.

The chapter then runs on two rails your group should learn to name: the indicative and the imperative, what is already true and what must therefore be done. Indicative: united with him in a death like his (6:5), our old self crucified (6:6), death no longer has dominion over Christ (6:9), and "sin will have no dominion over you" (6:14). Imperative: "consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God" (6:11), "let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies" (6:12), "yield yourselves to God" (6:13). The order is everything and it is the gospel's order: become what you are. Not "behave so that God will accept you" but "you have been buried and raised; now live like it." The reign vocabulary planted last session pays off here: someone will reign in your body, sin or grace; the baptized have changed kingdoms, and 6:16-23 presses the slavery image to its stark conclusion: everyone serves somebody; the only question is which master, and the wage scales differ infinitely: "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (6:23).

One sentence in the chapter belongs to this study's spine. Paul thanks God that the Romans "have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed" (6:17). Obedient from the heart: the obedience of faith (1:5) and the circumcised heart (2:29; Deut 30:6) meet in a single phrase, and tonight's second discovery will show the group where God performs that surgery. Let them find it; it is one of the study's best moments.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Ezekiel 36:25-27. The prophetic blueprint behind the font: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean... A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you... And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." Water, new heart, indwelling Spirit, resulting obedience: Romans 6 (and 8) in prophetic form. A discovery passage; keep it back.

Colossians 2:11-12. The thread payoff. Paul elsewhere names Baptism as the place of the heart's circumcision: "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands... and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God" (Col 2:11-12). Deuteronomy promised God would circumcise hearts (Deut 30:6, found in Session 3); Colossians gives the where and when. Guard this discovery jealously; it is the session's summit.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM

Catechizing the newly baptized in the fourth century, steps from the empty tomb itself, St. Cyril told them what had just happened in the font: in the same moment you were dying and being born, and that saving water was at once your grave and your mother, in image the dying and in truth the salvation (Mystagogical Catecheses 2). He learned the pairing from tonight's chapter, which he expounds in that very lecture: buried with Christ, raised with Christ, the font a tomb with an exit. Few Fathers state the realism of Romans 6 more vividly: a true dying-with, given through the likeness.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. GREGORY NAZIANZEN

"Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift... We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift" (Oration 40, quoted at CCC 1216). St. Gregory piles up the names because no single one holds it: each title names a real effect. A gift can be forgotten in a drawer; part of tonight's aim is that everyone leave wanting to find the date of their own Baptism and keep it like a birthday, because by this chapter's logic it is one.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. AMBROSE OF MILAN

St. Ambrose, instructing the newly baptized of Milan (the catecheses handed down as *On the Sacraments* and *On the Mysteries*), teaches in substance that what the eyes saw at the font, water, oil, white garments, was the least of what happened there: the visible washing was the instrument of an invisible work of the whole Trinity, forgiving sin, killing the old self, and raising a new one. He insists the newly baptized not judge the mystery by what they saw, since the things unseen are greater than the things seen. It is the exact answer to the modern shrug that baptism is "just a symbol": St. Ambrose agrees the water of itself is ordinary; the power was never in the element but in the word and work of Christ.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1214. The name itself teaches: to baptize (*baptizein*) means to plunge or immerse; the plunge into the water symbolizes the catechumen's burial into Christ's death, from which he rises by resurrection with him as

"a new creature." The Catechism's first definition of Baptism is simply Romans 6:4 with a Greek lesson attached.

CCC 1227. Through Baptism the Christian is sacramentally assimilated to Christ: baptized into his death, buried with him, raised with him. The paragraph builds directly on Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12, tonight's two central texts.

CCC 1265. What the font effects: Baptism "not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte 'a new creation,' an adopted son of God," partaker of the divine nature, member of Christ, co-heir, temple of the Holy Spirit. Read the list aloud slowly; most cradle Catholics have never heard what happened to them.

CCC 1257 (leader's reference for the honest edge): "God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments." If the question of the unbaptized arises, this is the Church's own careful answer: the sacrament is the covenanted way, and God's mercy is not caged by it.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Heart-circumcision thread: RESOLVES tonight. Deut 30:6 (planted Session 3) finds its address in Col 2:11-12. When the group makes the connection, let them say it, not you; then confirm it plainly. This is the study's first full thread payoff and a preview of how Session 15 will feel.

Reign and dominion: resolves. "Under the power of sin" (3:9) and death's reign (5:14, 17) meet their end at 6:14, "sin will have no dominion over you." Name the arc once.

Title thread. 6:17, "obedient from the heart," is the closest the letter has yet come to saying its first phrase again. Do not point at the inclusio; underline the phrase and move on.

SEALED GUESS OPENS NEXT SESSION. Take-Home 7 carries the reminder in print: everyone brings their sealed My Guess sheet to Session 8. Message anyone absent tonight. The opening ritual comes first thing next session, before any new material.

Session Goals

1. The group can answer 6:1 the way Paul does: from the fact of a death that has already happened to the baptized.
2. The group discovers Ezekiel 36:25-27 and Colossians 2:11-12, and connects the font to the promised circumcision of the heart from Session 3.
3. The group can distinguish indicative from imperative in the chapter and explain "become what you are."
4. Each participant leaves intending to find and mark the date of their own Baptism.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 min
- Build questions 1-2 with the Ezekiel discovery: 25 min
- Build question 3 with the Colossians discovery (thread payoff): 20 min
- Steelman chain: 15 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress the slavery discussion (6:15-23) to the single contrast of 6:23. Never cut the Colossians discovery or the steelman answer.

Session 7: Buried with Him in Baptism

Romans 6 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, in the waters of Baptism you buried us with your Son and raised us with him. What you did there, we barely understand and mostly forget. Tonight, give us back the memory of our own graves and the shock of our own rising, and teach us to walk in the newness you already gave. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. Do you know the date of your own Baptism? Has anyone ever celebrated it? What do you actually know about that day?
2. Tell us about a time a change of status changed your behavior: a new job, marriage, becoming a parent, citizenship. What did the new identity make unthinkable?

Build

Read Romans 6:1-4 aloud, twice.

1. What objection is Paul answering in 6:1, and why is it a compliment to everything he has taught so far? Then look hard at his answer in 6:2-4: what fact does he appeal to, and what does the phrase "by baptism" (6:4) make baptism, grammatically?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The objection, "continue in sin that grace may abound?", only arises if grace has been preached at full, scandalous strength; a gospel that never provokes this question has been domesticated. Paul's answer is not a warning but a biography: "How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (6:2). The death he means has a date and a place: "baptized into his death... buried therefore with him by baptism into death" (6:3-4). Grammatically, baptism is the instrument, the means by which the burial happened, not a later illustration of it. And notice "Do you not know": Paul treats this as baseline Christian knowledge he can build a moral argument on, in a church he has never visited. Baptism doing something real was the common faith of the apostolic churches, not one region's opinion.

Discovery moment. Say: "Water that cleanses, a new heart, God's own Spirit put inside, and a life that finally walks in his ways: centuries before the first Christian font, a prophet in exile heard God promise exactly that sequence. Find it; he is the prophet of the dry bones, and the promise comes one chapter before that vision."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Ezekiel 36:25-27: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean... A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." Lay the sequence beside Romans 6: water, cleansing, new interior life, resulting obedience ("walk" in both texts: Ezek 36:27, Rom 6:4). The font did not appear from nowhere; as the Church has always read these prophecies, it is a promise being kept. And note where the obedience comes in the sequence: last, caused,

flowing from the Spirit put within. God does not demand a new life and then wash us if we manage it; he washes, implants, and the walking follows.

2. Read 6:5-14. Sort the sentences into two piles: things that are already true of the baptized, and things we are told to do. Which pile comes first, and why does the order matter? What changes at 6:11 from knowing to doing?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Already true: united with him in a death like his (6:5); our old self was crucified (6:6); death has no more dominion over Christ (6:9); sin will have no dominion over you (6:14). Commanded: consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God (6:11); let not sin reign in your mortal bodies (6:12); yield your members to God as instruments of righteousness (6:13). The indicative funds the imperative: become what you are. Get the order backwards and you get exhausting religion (perform so as to be accepted); get it right and you get the Christian life (you were buried and raised; now live like it). And 6:11's "consider" is not pretending: it is accounting, reckoning with a fact, the same bookkeeping word as 4:3. Faith's daily work is believing your own baptism.

Discovery moment: the thread payoff. Say: "In Session 3 we found Moses' promise that God himself would one day circumcise hearts (Deut 30:6), and we asked: where and when does God perform that surgery? Paul answers in another letter, in one sentence that contains both a circumcision 'made without hands' and tonight's exact phrase, 'buried with him.' Find it in Colossians 2."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Colossians 2:11-12: "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." There it is: the circumcision of the heart, performed by no human hand, located at Baptism. The promise chain your group has assembled across five weeks now closes: Deuteronomy 30:6 (God will circumcise your heart) through Romans 2:29 (real circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit) to Colossians 2:11-12 (it happened to you, at the font). Let the group say it before you do. And point out the last clause: "through faith in the working of God." Baptism and faith are not competitors; the sacrament is God's embrace of faith, which is why the Church calls Baptism the sacrament of faith: adults bring personal faith, and infants are baptized within the faith of the Church.

Steelman: Just a Symbol?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is the believer's-baptism reading, held by devout Baptist and evangelical friends, and it deserves its best form. Baptism is an ordinance, not a sacrament: an outward, public testimony of an inward salvation already complete through faith alone. Romans 6 describes what baptism pictures, burial and resurrection, not what it performs; the drama is real, the water is scenery. And this reading has a real concern behind it: nothing must compete with Christ's finished work, and history is full of people trusting rituals instead of the Redeemer. Doesn't attributing power to water risk exactly the mechanical religion Paul spent three chapters demolishing?" Honor the concern out loud; it is a godly one. And give the position its strongest form: ordinances obey Christ without mediating grace precisely to keep faith's object God alone and grace unmixed with rites. Then press.

3. Press: Test the symbol reading against three details the group has already seen tonight: the grammar of 6:3-4, the structure of Paul's argument against sin, and the last clause of Colossians 2:12. Then hear one more witness: find 1 Peter 3:21 and read it aloud.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The grammar: "buried with him by baptism" (6:4) most naturally makes baptism the means, and "baptized into his death" (6:3) the destination; symbols point at things, they do not put you into them. The argument: Paul refutes "shall we sin?" by appealing to what baptism did to the Romans; if it only pictured a private prior event, the argument collapses, since a picture forbids nothing. Colossians 2:12 answers the worthy concern directly: raised "through faith in the working of God": the working is God's, received through faith; no one is trusting water, and the Church has never taught magic (an adult who withholds faith places an obstacle: the water is received without its fruit until faith opens it). And 1 Peter 3:21 says the sentence a pure symbolist cannot: "Baptism... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Peter even anticipates the objection: not the dirt-washing, the resurrection working through it. Honest edges, stated plainly: God's grace is not caged by his sacraments (CCC 1257), and the baptized can still gravely sin, which is why 6:12-13 gives commands and why the chapter ends at 6:23 with two masters still recruiting. The font is a beginning, not an exemption; what it begins, the rest of the letter trains.

DIG DEEPER

Whose slave, then? Modern people believe in a third option: serving no one. Paul denies it exists: "you are slaves of the one whom you obey" (6:16), sin unto death or obedience unto righteousness. Everyone's life is organized around some master; the deepest liberty available to creatures is choosing the good Master whose service is freedom (the Church calls this filial freedom). And the economics differ at the root: sin pays wages (6:23), earned, owed, exact; God gives a free gift. One master pays you what you deserve; the other gives you what he deserves. "Obedient from the heart" (6:17) names the sweet spot the whole study has circled: service that is freedom because the heart itself has been remade to love what it obeys.

Send

1. Most of us were baptized long ago and live as if it were a certificate, not a grave and a birth. What would this week look like if you believed your baptism the way you believe your birthday?
2. Where is sin still reigning in your mortal body (6:12): the habit, screen, substance, or resentment that still gives orders? What would "yielding your members to God" (6:13) mean there, concretely?

Live It This Week

- Find the date of your Baptism this week (ask family or call the parish of record). Write it down, and plan to mark it yearly.
- Each time you bless yourself with holy water this week, pause two seconds and say: I am baptized; I died and rose with Christ.
- Pick the one place sin still reigns that you named tonight, and take one concrete step of "yielding" there this week: remove the occasion, tell a trusted friend, or bring it to Confession.

- BRING YOUR SEALED MY GUESS SHEET NEXT WEEK. It opens at the start of Session 8.

Memory Verse

"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

Romans 6:4 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, we were buried with you, and we forgot; we were raised with you, and we walked back toward our graves. Tonight we remember. Reign where sin reigned; take the members we yield; finish in us what the font began. We are baptized: teach us to live like it. Amen.

Session 7: Buried with Him in Baptism

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 6:1-4 (read aloud twice: continue in sin?; buried with him by baptism; newness of life)
- Ezekiel 36:25-27 (discovery passage: water, new heart, Spirit within, walking in his statutes; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 6:5-14 (indicative and imperative; consider yourselves dead to sin; no dominion)
- Colossians 2:11-12 (discovery passage, thread payoff: circumcision made without hands, buried in baptism; do not reveal in advance; cf. Deut 30:6, Rom 2:29)
- Romans 6:15-23 (slavery to sin or to obedience; obedient from the heart; wages versus free gift)
- 1 Peter 3:21 (steelman discovery: Baptism now saves you; do not reveal in advance)
- CCC 1214, 1227, 1265 (Catechism Connection); CCC 1257 (leader's reference)
- Memory verse: Romans 6:4

Session 8: The Law Is Holy

Romans 7 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Tonight has two summits. First, the sealed guesses open: the group measures their Session 1 answers to "what must a person do to be saved?" against seven weeks of text. Second, chapter 7: the law is holy, and yet the self that meets it is divided, willing the good and doing the evil, until the only exit from the war is a cry answered by a Person. The chapter names the problem that makes chapter 8 the best news in the Bible.

Catholic Touchstone. Two Catholic precisions govern the night. The law is good: Scripture's own verdict (7:12) rules out every version of faith that despises the commandments. And the struggle is real without being sin: the inclination that remains in the baptized, which Tradition calls concupiscence, "is left for us to wrestle with" and "cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ" (CCC 1264). Feeling the war of Romans 7 is not losing it.

Opening the Sealed Guesses: How to Run It

Run the ritual first, before any new material; it needs fresh minds and unhurried time (20 minutes). Everyone takes back their own sealed sheet, opens it privately, and rereads their one-sentence answer in silence. No one is required to read theirs aloud, ever; invite volunteers only. Then ask the two ritual questions printed in the Discussion Guide, and after the sharing, present the study's composite answer, built entirely from passages the group has already discovered. Keep your summary to what has been found; do not preview chapters 8-16.

The composite answer, for your own preparation: Salvation begins entirely in God's grace; nothing done before it earns it (3:24; Gen 15). It is received through faith in Jesus Christ, put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification (3:25; 4:24-25), and that faith is met and sealed by God's own act in Baptism, the sacrament of faith, where we die and rise with Christ and the heart is circumcised (6:3-4; Col 2:11-12). And the faith that receives it is the obedient, living, growing kind: the obedience of faith (1:5), faith completed by works (Jas 2:22), walking in newness of life (6:4). If a guess said only "be a good person," chapters 1-3 have answered it; if a guess said only "just believe," Abraham and the font have filled it out. Expect some guesses to be surprisingly close and some to sting; both are the exercise working. Close the ritual by noticing aloud that the question said do, and part of the answer turned out to be receive, and then pivot: tonight's chapter is about what happens when we know the good and still cannot do it, which means the answer is not finished yet.

What You Need to Know

Chapter 7 answers a hanging question. Chapter 6 said the baptized died to sin; 7:1-6 adds: and died to the law. The marriage analogy makes the point legally: death dissolves the bond, and the one who has died with Christ "may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God" (7:4), serving "not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit" (7:6). File that phrase; the Spirit then disappears from the chapter, and the disappearance is the key to reading what follows.

Then the defense of the law (7:7-13). If the law stirs sin up, is the law sin? "By no means!" The law is light, not disease: "if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin" (7:7), and Paul's example is the tenth commandment, the one that targets desire itself. Sin, personified, "finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me" (7:11): language your group should hear as an echo of a garden (the discovery

will take them there). Verdict: "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (7:12). The problem was never the diagnosis; the problem is the patient.

Then the famous war (7:14-25): "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (7:15); delight in God's law in the inmost self, and another law in the members waging war (7:22-23); the cry, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" and its answer, not a technique but a Person: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (7:24-25). Who is the "I"? Be honest with your group that the Church has never defined it and her greatest readers divided: many Fathers, St. John Chrysostom among them, read it as humanity under the law without grace, dramatized in the present tense; St. Augustine read it that way too at first, then changed his mind in his *Retractations* and heard in it the spiritual man still wrestling. Both readings guard something true. The chapter's own strongest clue: the Spirit, named in 7:6 and then absent for nineteen verses, floods chapter 8. Whatever else the "I" is, it is the self described without the Spirit's power, and every believer knows the experience whenever they fight in their own strength.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Exodus 20:17. Paul's chosen example is "You shall not covet" (7:7), the only commandment of the ten that legislates desire rather than deed. The choice is surgical: any commandment about actions can be outwardly kept while the heart rebels; the tenth exposes the interior, which is exactly where the war is. A discovery passage; keep it back.

Genesis 3:13. "Sin... deceived me and by it killed me" (7:11) is widely heard replaying Eden in the first person: "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate" (Gen 3:13), and death followed. Read so, the "I" of Romans 7 is, at its widest, Adam's story told from inside every descendant. A discovery passage; keep it back.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

No one has written the divided will more honestly than St. Augustine, because he lived it: on the edge of conversion he found himself praying, "Give me chastity and continence, but not yet" (*Confessions* VIII.7): one man, two wills, each undermining the other. And his relationship to tonight's chapter has its own history: he tells us in his *Retractations* that he had once understood the "I" of Romans 7 as man under the law without grace, and came later to hear in it the spiritual man still at war with concupiscence. The Church has kept both of St. Augustine's readings on the shelf, which is itself instruction: the chapter is a mirror, and more than one face appears in it.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

St. John Chrysostom, in his homilies on Romans, teaches in substance that the wretched "I" of this chapter is humanity before grace: Paul, he holds, is dramatizing in the present tense the helplessness of man under the law, precisely so that the rescue of chapter 8 lands with full force. On this reading the chapter is a before picture, painted by a man who remembers. St. John Chrysostom's instinct guards something the text supports: the contrast between "sold under sin" here (7:14) and "set free from sin" three chapters earlier (6:18) is too loud to be an accident.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

St. Francis de Sales, in his Introduction to the Devout Life (Part III, chapter 9, on gentleness toward ourselves), teaches in substance that the soul that falls should be lifted up quietly and set back on the road without rage or drama, because bitterness toward our own weakness is pride wearing a hair shirt: it despairs at imperfection because it expected better of itself than of grace. His counsel is the pastoral application of tonight's chapter: the war is long, the falls are real, and the fighter who learns to lose without despair and rise without delay has understood both Romans 7 and Romans 8.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1963. The Catechism's verdict on the law of Moses tracks 7:12 and 7:14 explicitly: "According to Christian tradition, the Law is holy, spiritual, and good, yet still imperfect," a tutor that shows what must be done without giving the strength to do it. Paul's whole chapter in one sentence.

CCC 1264 with 405. The precise teaching on the war that remains: an inclination to sin, concupiscence, remains in the baptized; it "is left for us to wrestle with" and "cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ" (1264, quoting Trent); it "is not itself sin" but inclines to it (cf. 405). This distinction rescues half your group from a scruple: temptation and inclination, even violent ones, are the war, not the defeat.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Sealed guess: RESOLVED tonight. The ritual comes first. After it, one quiet seed for the rest of the study: the group's composite answer still lacks the power to live it, which is tonight's cliffhanger and next week's chapter.

The Spirit's absence. Named at 7:6, then gone until 8:2. Do not point it out until the steelman press; then let it do its work. Chapter 8 mentions the Spirit more than any chapter in the letter, and the contrast is the sermon.

The law upheld (3:31): developing. 7:12 vindicates the law's goodness; 8:4 (next week) will show faith fulfilling what the law intended. Hold the thread one more week.

Eden replayed. 7:11's echo of Gen 3:13 quietly links tonight to Session 6's Adam. One sentence in session; no more.

Session Goals

1. Every participant opens and privately evaluates their own sealed guess against the study so far, and hears the composite answer assembled from discovered texts.
2. The group can defend the law's goodness (7:7, 12) and explain why Paul chose the coveting commandment.
3. The group discovers Exodus 20:17 and Genesis 3:13 and can say how Eden echoes in the chapter.
4. The group can state the two classic readings of the "I" honestly, and the Catholic teaching on concupiscence that pastors both.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and the sealed guess ritual: 20 min
- Win question (one only tonight): 5 min
- Build questions 1-2 with the Exodus discovery: 22 min
- Build question 3 with the Genesis discovery, and the steelman chain: 23 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress 7:1-6 (the marriage analogy) into a two-sentence bridge you supply. Never cut the ritual, a discovery, or the steelman answer; if the ritual runs long, borrow from Send.

Session 8: The Law Is Holy

Romans 7 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, seven weeks ago we wrote what we thought we knew. Tonight we open our own handwriting in your presence. Thank you for every inch of ground your word has moved us. Be gentle with what we got wrong, confirm what we got right, and finish the answer in us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Opening of the Sealed Guesses

Hand back the sealed sheets. Each person opens their own, alone, and rereads their one-sentence answer in silence: In one sentence: what must a person do to be saved? **Allow a full quiet minute. Then ask the two questions below. No one is required to read their sentence aloud.**

Ritual question 1. Without necessarily reading your sentence, tell us: what would you keep from your answer, and what would you change after seven weeks in this letter?

Ritual question 2. Which single passage we have discovered together did the most work on your answer?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

After the sharing, offer the study's composite answer, assembled only from what the group has found. Salvation begins in God's grace, free and unearned: "justified by his grace as a gift" (3:24), reckoned to a man under the stars apart from circumcision, law, or wage (Gen 15:6 with 4:4-5), whose earlier setting-out was itself grace-led faith. It is received through faith in Jesus Christ, "put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (4:25), at the place of expiation God himself provided (3:25), the mercy-seat resonance the group explored. That faith is met and sealed by God's own act in Baptism, the sacrament of faith, where we were buried with Christ (6:4) and raised with him (Col 2:12), and the heart was circumcised without hands (Col 2:11-12; Deut 30:6). And the faith that receives all this is the living kind: the obedience of faith (1:5), completed by works (Jas 2:22), walking in newness of life (6:4), judged real at a judgment according to works (2:6). Then say plainly: our question asked what we must do, and half the answer turned out to be receive. But notice what our answer still lacks. Knowing the good, even receiving the gift, is not yet the daily power to live it. Tonight's chapter is about exactly that gap, and it ends on a cliffhanger the size of heaven.

Win

1. Tell us about a resolution you truly meant and still broke. What did it feel like from the inside?

Build

Read Romans 7:1-6 aloud.

1. In the marriage analogy, what does death do to a legal bond, and who died in our case? What are we released for (7:4, 6)?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Death dissolves the bond: a widow is free to belong to another. In our case, we died: "you have died to the law through the body of Christ" (7:4), in the baptism-death of chapter 6. And the release has a purpose on each end: to "belong to another," the risen Christ, to "bear fruit for God" (7:4), serving "not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit" (7:6). Freedom from the law is not freedom from goodness; it is a change of husbands, from a code that commands to a Person who empowers. Underline "the new life of the Spirit" and ask the group to keep count of how often the Spirit appears in the rest of tonight's chapter. (The count matters next week.)

Read Romans 7:7-13 aloud.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul defends the law by quoting one commandment: 'You shall not covet' (7:7). Find it among the ten, and as you look, ask why he picked this one and not murder, theft, or adultery. What is different about it?"

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Exodus 20:17, the tenth: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife..." It is the only one of the ten aimed at desire itself rather than an outward deed. You can refrain from stealing with clenched teeth and a covetous heart, and the seventh commandment's court could not touch you; the commandments against coveting (the ninth and tenth, in the Church's numbering) reach inside. Paul chose the commandment that exposes what outward compliance hides, the one that proves the law's business was always the heart (2:29 again). And that is why the law, though holy, cannot save: it can name the disease at its interior root; it cannot cure it. "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (7:12): the light is good; the light is not the healing.

Read Romans 7:14-25 aloud, slowly. Let the repetitions land.

- Put 7:15-23 in your own words. What are the two laws at war, and where does each operate? Has Paul described your Tuesday?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (7:19): the will endorses one thing and the members execute another. The two laws: "the law of God, in my inmost self" (7:22), delighted in; and "another law at war" in the members, "making me captive to the law of sin" (7:23). Every honest person recognizes the description; that is the passage's power and its trap. Let the group sit in the recognition, then ask them to hold it against 6:14-18 ("sin will have no dominion over you... having been set free from sin") and admit the tension out loud. The steelman is about to make that tension an argument.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul says sin 'deceived me and by it killed me' (7:11). He is quoting, almost, the oldest excuse in the world: someone in Genesis 3, asked what happened, says nearly the same sentence. Find it."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 3:13: "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." Deceived, then death: the sequence of Eden is the sequence of 7:11. Paul has been telling Adam's story in the first person singular, which is one reason the "I" fits every mouth that reads it: it is the species' autobiography (Session 6's chapter said so: one man, and death spread to all). The commandment came, sin seized it, I died: Eden, Sinai, and your own history, laid on top of each other in one grammar.

Steelman: Is Defeat the Normal Christian Life?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is the Reformed reading of this chapter; hear it at full strength, and note that it carries a sober pastoral realism, not complacency: the regenerate really fight sin and really grow, yet remain simul justus et peccator. Paul writes in the present tense, as an apostle: 'I am carnal, sold under sin' (7:14). Not 'I was.' If the greatest Christian who ever lived remained sold under sin, then real inner transformation in this life is a fantasy; the divided, defeated self of Romans 7 is simply what a Christian is. And that, the argument runs, is why justification must be a legal standing outside us, credited, not worked in: Luther's simul iustus et peccator, at once righteous and a sinner. The chapter, on this reading, is the strongest proof in Scripture that God counts us righteous while we remain as we are. Doesn't the present tense demand it?" Let it settle; many will feel its comfort. Then press.

3. Press: Two tests, both from inside the letter. First: set 7:14 ("sold under sin") beside 6:17-18 ("set free from sin"). Can both describe the same baptized person in the same sense at the same time? Second: how many times did you count the Holy Spirit in 7:7-25? Now scan the first four verses of chapter 8.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

First test: they collide head-on. Paul cannot mean that the baptized are simultaneously "set free from sin" (6:18) and "sold under sin" (7:14) in the same sense; one of the two descriptions is of life somewhere else. Second test: the Spirit's count in 7:7-25 is zero. Named at 7:6 as the new way of serving, he then vanishes for the whole war, and chapter 8 opens with him: "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (8:2). The war of chapter 7 is the self fighting sin without the Spirit's power: as history, life under the law; as experience, every believer's condition whenever we fight in our own strength, which is why the present tense rings so true. So the honest verdict on the steelman: it is right that the war is real and lifelong, and the Church says so, concupiscence remains in the baptized, "left for us to wrestle with" (CCC 1264), and St. Augustine himself came to hear the regenerate in these verses. But it is wrong to make defeat the definition: the inclination "cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ" (CCC 1264), and the letter's own answer to "who will deliver me?" is not a ledger adjustment but a rescue: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (7:25). Whether transformation is real is exactly what chapter 8 announces, and it is next week. End the argument on the cliffhanger, not the resolution.

DIG DEEPER

Scruples and the war. Some in every group suffer the opposite error from presumption: they read every temptation as proof of damnation and every recurring struggle as unforgiven sin. The Church's distinction is medicine: involuntary temptation and inclination are not sin; deliberate consent is, in the measure of knowledge and freedom. A violent temptation resisted is a victory, not a stain, and a grave fall repented belongs in Confession before Communion, and venial falls are welcome matter there too: peace, not despair. St. Francis de Sales commended rising quickly and gently. If tonight's chapter has described

someone's interior life to the point of pain, the takeaway is not "you are losing" but "you are in the fight everyone baptized is in, and the power you are missing has a chapter."

Send

1. Where in your life is 7:19 most true right now: the good you want and do not do, or the thing you hate and do anyway? (Name it to yourself even if not to us.)
2. Your sealed guess has been opened. What is one sentence you would write now, and what would it cost you to live it?

Live It This Week

- Rewrite your one-sentence answer on tonight's Take-Home, dated, as your Session 8 answer; keep both versions to the end of the study.
- Each time the war of 7:19 flares this week, pray the chapter's own prayer, all of it: Who will deliver me? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- If a recurring fall has been carrying shame, take it to Confession this week, and receive the sacrament as chapter 6 taught you to receive water: as God acting.

Memory Verse

"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Romans 7:24-25 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord, your law is holy and our hearts are divided; you have heard tonight what we could not do. We do not ask you for a better code; we ask you for yourself. Deliver us from this body of death, and next week, Lord, show us the life. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Session 8: The Law Is Holy

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- The sealed guess ritual (uses: Rom 3:24-25, 4:25, 6:3-4, 1:5, 2:6; Gen 15:6; Col 2:11-12; Deut 30:6; Jas 2:22, all previously discovered)
- Romans 7:1-6 (read aloud: the marriage analogy; new life of the Spirit)
- Romans 7:7-13 (read aloud: is the law sin?; the commandment that kills)
- Exodus 20:17 (discovery passage: the tenth commandment; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 7:14-25 (read aloud slowly: the war; wretched man; thanks be to God)
- Genesis 3:13 (discovery passage: the serpent beguiled me; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 6:14, 6:17-18 and 8:2 (steelman press: dominion contrast and the Spirit's return; 8:2 preview only within the press)
- CCC 1963, 1264, 405 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 7:24-25

Session 9: No Condemnation

Romans 8 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the answer to chapter 7's cry: the indwelling Spirit, who sets free from the law of sin and death, fulfills the law's just requirement in us, makes us sons who cry Abba, prays in our weakness, and guarantees that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Chapter 8 is the war of chapter 7 with the missing Person present.

Catholic Touchstone. Divine adoption is the heart of Catholic teaching on grace: "Grace is a participation in the life of God" that makes us sons in the Son (CCC 1997). And the chapter's assurance is Catholic assurance: unshakable confidence in God (nothing can separate us) held together with the chapter's own conditions ("if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body," 8:13), which is the virtue of hope standing between the two sins against it, despair and presumption (CCC 2091-2092).

What You Need to Know

Structure the chapter in four movements before you lead it. Movement one, the Spirit of life (8:1-13): "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1), because "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (8:2): chapter 7's captivity, answered. Watch verse 4 closely; it resolves a thread five weeks old: God condemned sin in the flesh "in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Fulfilled in us, not merely credited to us: 3:31's promise that faith upholds the law finds its strongest landing here. And the count your group kept last week pays off: the Spirit, absent through the whole war of 7:7-25, is named in this chapter more than in any other chapter Paul wrote.

Movement two, adoption (8:14-17): led by the Spirit, we are sons; we "received the spirit of sonship" and cry "Abba! Father!", the Spirit himself bearing witness that we are children, "and if children, then heirs... fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him" (8:15-17). Do not soften the proviso; it is load-bearing. Movement three, groaning and glory (8:18-30): creation groans, we groan, and "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (8:26): prayer for the days prayer fails. Then the promise that "in everything God works for good with those who love him" (8:28) and the golden chain: foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified (8:29-30). On predestination, give your group the Church's actual position, which is calmer than either anxiety or the internet: God truly predestines the elect to glory, and his eternal plan "includes in it each person's free response to his grace" (CCC 600); how sovereignty and freedom mesh beneath that line, the Church has deliberately left open, and her greatest schools disagree in peace. Movement four, the triumph (8:31-39): "If God is for us, who is against us?" (8:31), the Father who "did not spare his own Son" (8:32, an Old Testament echo the group will find), and the list of powers that cannot separate us from the love of God (8:38-39).

Pastoral note: this chapter contains both the Bible's strongest comfort and, in the groaning section, its most honest account of unresolved suffering. Someone in your room is in 8:23, not 8:37. The Spirit "helps us in our weakness" and prays when we cannot (8:26): offer that as present-tense mercy, not future consolation, and leave silence where silence belongs.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Genesis 22:12, 16. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (8:32) deliberately echoes the angel's words on Moriah: "you have not withheld your son, your only son" (Gen 22:12, 16). What God stopped Abraham from giving, God himself gave. Session 5's mountain returns at the letter's summit; a discovery passage, guard it.

Exodus 4:22. "Israel is my first-born son": sonship is covenant vocabulary before it is private experience. What Israel was corporately, the Spirit now works in the baptized who live in his grace, crying Abba from inside the adopted. A discovery passage; keep it back.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. BASIL THE GREAT

St. Basil, in his treatise On the Holy Spirit, teaches that through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascent to the kingdom of heaven, our return to the adoption of sons, our confidence to call God Father, and our becoming partakers of the grace of Christ. He wrote it to defend the Spirit's divinity, and his argument is tonight's chapter turned into a ladder: only God can give a share in God, and what Romans 8 shows the Spirit doing from within, adoption, indwelling, life-giving, is work no creature could do in that divine mode (creatures too intercede, but not as the heart's own life).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, a young Carmelite who died at twenty-six, wrote in her letters that she had found her heaven on earth, since heaven is God, and God was dwelling in her soul. Her whole spirituality is Romans 8:9-11 taken with complete seriousness: if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus really dwells in you, then the interior life is not self-improvement but hospitality, learning to live with the Guest already in residence. She teaches, in substance, that recollection is simply attending to who is there.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

St. John Chrysostom, preaching on the end of this chapter, teaches in substance that Paul's list of things that cannot separate us (8:38-39) is the anatomy of a lover's defiance: Paul names every terror, death, life, angels, powers, and dismisses each not because they are small but because the love of Christ is fixed, and a soul fixed on that love, says St. John Chrysostom, would choose it over heaven itself if the choice were forced. Assurance, for St. John Chrysostom, is not a doctrine about ourselves; it is a fact about Christ's grip.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1997 with 2777. "Grace is a participation in the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life": by Baptism the Christian shares in the grace of Christ and "can call God 'Father'" (1997). The Our Father catechesis (2777) marvels at the boldness (Abba) this adoption licenses: the liturgy itself says "we dare to say."

CCC 600. The predestination sentence to memorize for your group's peace: to God all moments are present, and when he establishes his eternal plan of predestination, "he includes in it each person's free response to his grace." The golden chain and human freedom, held in one clause.

CCC 2091-2092. The two sins against hope: despair (giving up on God's mercy) and presumption (counting on it without conversion). Tonight's steelman lives exactly between these paragraphs.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

The law upheld: RESOLVES tonight. 3:31 planted it, 7:12 defended the law, 8:4 lands it: the just requirement fulfilled in us by the Spirit. Name the five-week arc once, plainly; it is a rehearsal for Session 15.

Moriah returns. 8:32 pays off Session 5's Genesis 22. Let the group make the connection in the discovery; do not front-run it.

Suffering chain deepens. 5:3-5 (hope through suffering) matures into 8:17-30 (heirs provided we suffer; groaning; all things worked for good). One connecting sentence, no lecture.

Assurance tension: OPENS tonight. The steelman raises eternal security; the full answer needs 11:22 (Session 11). Answer honestly tonight from chapter 8's own conditions, and explicitly promise the olive tree.

Session Goals

1. The group can connect 8:1-4 to chapter 7 as answer to cry, and to 3:31 as fulfillment of the law-upheld promise.
2. The group discovers Genesis 22 behind 8:32 and Exodus 4:22 behind sonship, and can explain adoption as participation, not metaphor.
3. The group can state the Church's teaching on predestination in one sentence (CCC 600) and name the two sins against hope.
4. The group can hold 8:38-39 (nothing separates) and 8:13 (if you live according to the flesh you will die) in one faith without dissolving either.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 min
- Build questions 1-2 (Spirit of life; the Exodus discovery): 25 min
- Build questions 3-4 (groaning, golden chain; the Genesis 22 discovery): 23 min
- Steelman chain: 15 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress the creation-groaning discussion (8:19-22) to one sentence of your own. Never cut the discoveries, the predestination clarity, or the steelman answer.

Session 9: No Condemnation

Romans 8 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Abba, Father: we can say that word because your Spirit says it in us. Tonight, open the chapter your children run to in the dark. Convince us of what cannot be lost, warn us of what must not be presumed, and pray in us, Spirit of God, deeper than our words can go. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. What is the safest you have ever felt, and what made the safety real rather than imagined?
2. When words fail you in prayer, what do you do? Be honest: give up, push through, sit silent?

Build

Read Romans 8:1-13 aloud.

1. Last week the Spirit was absent from the whole war. Count his appearances in these thirteen verses. Then look at 8:2-4: what has the Spirit done about chapter 7's captivity, and where is the law's just requirement now fulfilled?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The Spirit saturates the passage (most counts find him in nearly every verse from 8:2 onward; the chapter names him more than any other in the letter). And the reversal is total: chapter 7 ended "captive to the law of sin" (7:23); chapter 8 opens "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (8:2). Then the thread five weeks old resolves: God condemned sin in the flesh "in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk... according to the Spirit" (8:4). In us. Paul promised in 3:31 that this faith would uphold the law, and here is how: not by lowering the standard, and not by a standing credited while we remain unchanged, but by the Spirit producing in us what the written code could only demand. The law was an X-ray (3:20); the Spirit is the healing.

2. Verses 12-13 issue tonight's sober sentence: "if you live according to the flesh you will die." Who is Paul warning, and how do the warned "live" instead? Hold this verse; the steelman will need it.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He is warning "brethren" (8:12): baptized, Spirit-indwelt Christians, the same people who have no condemnation (8:1). The warning is therefore real and the danger is real: grace can be abandoned. And the alternative is not white-knuckled willpower, which chapter 7 buried, but Spirit-powered warfare: "if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live" (8:13). Note the grammar of cooperation: you put to death, by the Spirit. Grace does not replace our agency; it powers it. This one verse is the Catholic doctrine of perseverance in miniature: confidence, condition, and cooperation in a single sentence.

Read Romans 8:14-17 aloud.

Discovery moment. Say: "'Sonship' was not invented for private religious feelings; it is covenant language with a history. At the burning bush's aftermath, God gives Moses a message for Pharaoh containing the Old Testament's first great sonship claim. Find it in Exodus 4."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Exodus 4:22: "Israel is my first-born son." Sonship was Israel's corporate identity and vocation. Now watch what the Spirit does with it: "you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (8:15-16). What Israel was by covenant declaration, the baptized are by indwelling: the Son's own cry (Abba, Mark 14:36) placed in our mouths by the Son's own Spirit. This is why the Church insists adoption is participation, not metaphor: "Grace is a participation in the life of God" (CCC 1997). And read the inheritance clause honestly: "heirs... fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (8:17). The family resemblance includes the cross.

Read Romans 8:18-30 aloud, gently; this is the groaning section.

3. Three groanings: creation's (8:22), ours (8:23), and the Spirit's (8:26). What is each waiting for, and what does 8:26 offer the person who cannot pray right now? Then read the golden chain (8:29-30): what is it for, comfort or calculation?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Creation groans for its own liberation, subjected to futility, traditionally connected with Adam's fall, and promised freedom in our glory (8:20-21); we groan for "the redemption of our bodies" (8:23), resurrection, not escape; and "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (8:26): on the days prayer fails, the Spirit is still sustaining prayer in you, at a depth below language, however the mystery works, and it is heard (8:27). Then 8:28-30: "in everything God works for good with those who love him," grounded in the unbroken chain: foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified. Read the chain as Paul wrote it: comfort for sufferers, proof that the God who began this intends to finish it, glorification stated with such certainty it appears in the past tense. What the chain is not: a tool for calculating who is in or out, ours or anyone's. The Church's one-sentence rule holds sovereignty and freedom together: God's eternal plan of predestination "includes in it each person's free response to his grace" (CCC 600). How, precisely, the Church has left open, and her greatest theologians disagree in peace; anyone who claims to have the mechanism has claimed more than the Church does.

Read Romans 8:31-39 aloud, and read it like the victory hymn it is.

Discovery moment. Say: "'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' (8:32). That phrase, not spared, his own son, is an echo. We stood on this mountain in Session 5. Find the angel's words to Abraham in Genesis 22."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 22:12 and 16: "you have not withheld your son, your only son." On Moriah, God stopped the knife and provided the ram; at Calvary, no voice called stop, and God provided himself. What he spared Abraham, the Father did not spare his own Son, who freely gave himself (Gal 2:20). Paul's a-fortiori lands with all its weight: the Father who gave that will not withhold any lesser grace ordered to our salvation

(8:32). Then the courtroom empties: who shall bring a charge, when God justifies? Who condemns, when Christ died, rose, and intercedes (8:33-34)? And the list (8:38-39): death, life, angels, principalities, present, future, powers, height, depth, "nor anything else in all creation." Have someone note what every item shares: they are all external. Nothing outside you can pry you from this love. Whether one's own will can walk away (8:13) is the question the list does not settle, which is exactly where the steelman begins.

Steelman: Once Saved, Always Saved?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is the eternal-security reading, and tonight's chapter is its fortress, so build it strong. The golden chain has no leaks: all whom he justified he also glorified (8:30); if one justified person were finally lost, the chain lies. Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God (8:39), and you, being a creature, are part of creation. Add John 10:28, 'no one shall snatch them out of my hand,' and the case seems closed: a truly saved person cannot be finally lost, and to deny it is to doubt either God's grip or Christ's finished work. What could be more secure than 'nothing can separate us'?" Let its comfort fill the room; it is meant to. Then press, with one discovery.

Discovery moment (inside the steelman). Say: "Before we answer from Romans, hear Paul on Paul. Find 1 Corinthians 9:26-27, where the apostle describes how he treats his own body and why, and read it aloud."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 9:27: "I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." The apostle of assurance did not consider himself beyond disqualification on the plain sense, though Reformed readers hear a hypothetical spur; and hear their strongest frame too: warnings as God's appointed means of preserving the elect. Grant its elegance, and it still concedes what matters pastorally: a preserving warning must warn of something real for its hearer (1 Cor 10:12). Now answer from tonight's chapter itself, which carries its own conditions: "if you live according to the flesh you will die" spoken to brethren (8:12-13); heirs "provided we suffer with him" (8:17). And examine the great list again: every item is external to you; your own will is not on it, because the love of God is not a cage. The Catholic reading takes every comfort at full strength: God will never leave, nothing can snatch, the chain is God's unbreakable intention, and the baptized may live in real confidence, not anxiety. What it refuses is the inversion that turns God's faithfulness into my unconditional guarantee regardless of persisting in grave sin: that is presumption, one of the two sins against hope (CCC 2092), as despair is the other (2091). Hope walks between them: sure of God, watchful of self, "by the Spirit" putting to death what kills (8:13). Promise the group honestly: Paul himself will say the sharp version in two weeks, to Gentile believers, in an image involving branches; hold the question open until the olive tree.

DIG DEEPER

Abba. Paul keeps the Aramaic (8:15) because the sound itself is the doctrine: it is Jesus' own address to his Father in Gethsemane (Mk 14:36), the intimate family word, preserved untranslated in Greek-speaking churches because the first Christians understood that the Spirit was not teaching them a concept but placing them inside a relationship. When the liturgy says "we dare to say" before the Our Father, it is guarding the shock (CCC 2777): creatures addressing the Creator with the Son's own word, and being right to.

Send

1. Which do you actually need tonight: the chapter's comfort (nothing can separate you) or its charge (by the Spirit, put it to death)? Why that one?
2. Where in your life is groaning the honest prayer right now, and what would it mean to trust the Spirit's sighs to carry it?

Live It This Week

- Pray one Our Father each day slowly, stopping at the first word: let the Spirit's Abba (8:15) be the whole prayer if it needs to be.
- Name the one "deed of the body" most needing death right now, and each day this week ask the Spirit, explicitly, for the power of 8:13; take one concrete step alongside the asking.
- Write Romans 8:38-39 somewhere you will meet it on a hard day, and give a copy to one person who needs it this week.

Memory Verse

"For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 8:38-39 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Spirit of the living God, you have made your home in us: cry Abba where our words fail, put to death what we cannot kill, and hold us past our own grip. Father, you did not spare your own Son; we believe you will withhold nothing. Keep us in the love from which nothing can separate, until groaning turns to glory. Amen.

Session 9: No Condemnation

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 8:1-13 (read aloud: no condemnation; the Spirit of life; 8:4 fulfills the 3:31 thread; the 8:13 condition)
- Romans 8:14-17 (read aloud: sonship, Abba, heirs provided we suffer)
- Exodus 4:22 (discovery passage: Israel my first-born son; do not reveal in advance; cf. Mk 14:36)
- Romans 8:18-30 (read gently: three groanings; Spirit's intercession; 8:28; the golden chain)
- Romans 8:31-39 (read as victory hymn: not spared his own Son; the unseparable love)
- Genesis 22:12, 16 (discovery passage: not withheld your son; do not reveal in advance)
- 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 (steelman discovery: lest I myself be disqualified; do not reveal in advance)
- CCC 1997, 2777, 600, 2091-2092 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 8:38-39

Session 10: Vessels of Mercy

Romans 9 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group meets the letter's hardest chapter without flinching: Paul's anguish for Israel, God's freedom in election from Isaac to Pharaoh, the potter and the clay, and the vessels of wrath and mercy. By tracing the potter image to its source and the hardening to its Exodus sequence, the group discovers that God's sovereignty in this chapter is the sovereignty of persistent mercy, not arbitrary doom, and that chapter 9 is a sentence that does not end until chapter 11.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church's fixed points hold the chapter's live wires: God truly and freely elects, and his initiative is prior to all merit; Christ died for all without exception (CCC 605); and "God predestines no one to go to hell" (CCC 1037). Within those walls, the Church permits her theologians room the internet does not: tonight the group learns to read the hardest texts inside the walls.

What You Need to Know

First, insist on the unit: chapters 9, 10, and 11 are one argument, answering the objection planted in 3:1-8: if Israel, the covenant people, has largely not believed, has the word of God failed (9:6)? Any reading of chapter 9 that could not survive 11:32 ("that he may have mercy upon all") has broken the argument in half. Second, insist on the tone: the chapter opens not with a decree but a lament: "great sorrow and unceasing anguish," Paul wishing himself "accursed and cut off from Christ" for his kinsmen's sake (9:2-3), a Moses-like offer (Ex 32:32). Whatever election means here, the elect apostle responds to it by offering to trade places with the lost. Hold that posture all night; it is the interpretive key the loudest readings skip.

The argument then runs: not all descended from Israel are Israel (9:6); the promise ran through Isaac, not Ishmael, and Jacob, not Esau, "though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call" (9:11). God tells Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy" (9:15, quoting Ex 33:19), "so it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy" (9:16); he hardened Pharaoh (9:17-18); and to the protester: "who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Has the potter no right over the clay?" (9:20-21). Then the carefully weighted sentence your group must read with a jeweler's loupe: God "endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory" (9:22-23). Note three things the sentence actually says: the wrath-vessels are endured with much patience (and the group learned in 2:4 what God's patience is for: repentance); the mercy-vessels God "prepared beforehand," with God as the stated preparer; and of the wrath-vessels Paul writes only that they are "made for destruction," conspicuously not saying God made them so. Many careful readers, ancient and modern, have heard that asymmetry as deliberate. Do not overclaim it as a proof; present it as what the text does and does not say.

Know the map of positions before the steelman. The Calvinist reading (unconditional election to glory and reprobation, individual and eternal, decided apart from anything foreseen in the person) takes the chapter's strongest verbs at face value and deserves its full day in court. The Catholic walls: God's electing initiative is real, prior, and unmerited (the chapter and Trent agree); God wills all to be saved and Christ died for all without exception (1 Tim 2:4; CCC 605, quoting the Council of Quiercy: there is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer); no one is predestined to hell (CCC 1037); and hardening in Scripture is judicial, a handing-over that ratifies refusal (the group will trace Pharaoh's own

sequence). Within the walls, how election works is a question the Church has declined to settle between her schools (the *de auxiliis* controversy closed without a verdict); CCC 600 fixes the frame: God's eternal plan embraces each person's free response. Also keep election's biblical texture in view: Isaac, Jacob, and Pharaoh are elected or hardened for roles in salvation history, and the chapter's horizon is peoples and mission as much as individual destinies, though it cannot be reduced to that alone. Honesty in both directions is tonight's discipline.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Jeremiah 18:1-11. Paul's potter is borrowed, and the source passage is the session's depth charge: at the potter's house, the vessel is spoiled and reworked, and God explains the image himself: if a nation against which he has spoken "turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended" (Jer 18:8). In its own context, the potter image teaches responsive sovereignty: the clay's turning changes the outcome. A discovery passage; guard it with your life.

Exodus 8-9: the hardening sequence. Before Scripture says God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex 9:12), it says, repeatedly, that Pharaoh hardened his own (Ex 8:15, 8:32). The order is the theology: hardening is God's judicial confirmation of a refusal already chosen, the Exodus cousin of "God gave them up" (1:24). A discovery passage; the group traces the order themselves.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

St. John Chrysostom, in his homilies on Romans, teaches in substance that this chapter must be read from its first verses: Paul weeps before he argues, and the argument defends God's wisdom in mercy, not caprice. On the hard sayings, St. John Chrysostom holds that God's foreknowledge and human freedom do not compete: God's choices are neither arbitrary nor blind, and Pharaoh was not made wicked by God but, persisting in wickedness, was used and confirmed in the path he chose. St. John Chrysostom's reading is one honored school, not a definition; but his instinct, that the chapter vindicates God's justice rather than suspending it, is the Church's.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

St. Thomas Aquinas, treating predestination in the *Summa Theologiae*, teaches in substance a set of fixed points the Church has made her own: God's love does not find goodness, it creates it, so whatever good is in Jacob, or in anyone, God's choice put there, and no one may boast; predestination to glory is real and utterly gratuitous; and the loss of the lost is never God's doing in the way glory is his doing: God permits defection and punishes sin, but the fault originates wholly in the creature. Grace and glory trace to God as their cause; sin traces to us. Thomas's precise system is one permitted school; these asymmetries are the faith.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

His biographers recount that as a student in Paris, St. Francis de Sales fell into months of black despair, convinced he was predestined to damnation; the crisis broke when he knelt before an image of Our Lady, prayed the Memorare, and surrendered the question, and the fear lifted, his early biographers recount, after weeks of darkness. The man who came out of that darkness became a Doctor of the Church who

taught God's universal saving will with special force, teaching in substance that God's desire for each soul's salvation is more certain than our fears, and that the practical answer to the abyss of predestination is not calculation but trust. He is the patron of everyone this chapter has ever kept awake.

Catechism Connection

CCC 605. The wall against every limited-atonement reading, quoting the Council of Quiercy: "There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer." Whatever election means, it cannot mean some were never died for.

CCC 1037. "God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end." Any predestination to hell is outside the walls (CCC 1037): God predestines no one there, and final loss requires the creature's persevering no.

CCC 600 (carried over from last session, because it governs this one): God's eternal plan of predestination "includes in it each person's free response to his grace." One sentence; keep it in the room all night.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Has God's word failed? The 3:1-8 objection, planted in Session 3 with "Let God be true," now gets its three-chapter answer. Tonight opens it (9:6); Session 11 resolves it (11:29, 32). Do not resolve it early.

Patience vocabulary. "Endured with much patience" (9:22) verbally recalls 2:4 (kindness meant to lead to repentance) and conceptually parallels 1:24 (gave them up). Let the group make the connection in Build; it reframes the vessels sentence.

To the Jew first: cresting. The ordering planted in 1:16 and 2:9-10 becomes the whole subject for three sessions. Name the arc once.

Assurance tension: still open. Last week promised the olive tree; it comes next session (11:20-22). If tonight's material stirs the eternal-security question again, hold the line: one more week.

Session Goals

1. The group can state why chapters 9-11 are one argument and what question they answer (9:6; 3:1-8).
2. The group discovers Jeremiah 18 and the Exodus hardening sequence, and can explain judicial hardening and responsive sovereignty from the sources.
3. The group can read 9:22-23 precisely: the patience, the asymmetry, and what the text does and does not say.
4. The group can recite the Church's three walls (election real and unmerited; Christ died for all; no one predestined to hell) and knows the space inside them is legitimately open.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 min
- Build questions 1-2 (the lament; election from Isaac to Moses): 22 min

- Build questions 3-4 with the Exodus and Jeremiah discoveries: 26 min
- Steelman chain: 15 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress 9:30-33 (the stumbling stone) to a two-sentence bridge into next session. Never cut the discoveries or the steelman answer; without them the chapter is a wound.

Session 10: Vessels of Mercy

Romans 9 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, tonight we open the chapter we would have skipped. Give us Paul's tears before Paul's arguments, reverence before your freedom, and honesty before your word. Where you have spoken, let us hear; where you have not, keep us from inventing; and in everything show us the mercy this chapter is actually about. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. Is there someone whose salvation you ache over? (No names needed.) What does that ache do to your prayers?
2. What is a question about God you have been afraid to ask out loud? Tonight is a good night for it.

Build

Read Romans 9:1-5 aloud.

1. Before a single hard doctrine, what do we get from Paul? Weigh 9:3 word by word: what is he willing to trade, and for whom? What does this opening demand of every reading of the rest of the chapter?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

We get grief: "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" (9:2), and an offer that should stop the room: "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren" (9:3): the man who just wrote that nothing can separate him from Christ's love (8:39) volunteering for separation if it would save his kinsmen. It is Moses' offer at Sinai ("blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book," Ex 32:32). The demand this makes on interpretation: whatever election means in the verses ahead, it produced in the elect not smugness but self-sacrificial anguish for the non-elect. Any reading of Romans 9 that makes a Christian shrug at the lost has failed the chapter's first test, administered by its own author in its first breath.

2. Read 9:6-16. Trace Paul's cases: Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob not Esau "though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad" (9:11). What is Paul proving with the before-birth timing, and what does 9:16 conclude? Concede what must be conceded.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The before-birth timing proves the choice owed nothing to the chosen: "not because of works but because of his call" (9:11), "not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy" (9:16). Concede it fully, because it is Catholic doctrine: God's initiative is first, free, and unmerited; nobody's story with God begins with their own resume, a truth this study has confessed since Genesis 15. Note also what the cases are: Isaac, Jacob, and Pharaoh are chosen or bypassed for roles in the unfolding plan ("the elder will serve the younger," 9:12, quoting Gen 25:23 about two nations), and Esau the man is never said to be damned. Election in these verses is God's sovereign right to route salvation history as he wills. Whether it also settles individual eternal destinies apart from any response is exactly the question the steelman will

press, so do not resolve it here; establish only what all Catholics affirm: grace is first, and God owes no one his plan's leading roles.

Read Romans 9:17-18 aloud.

Discovery moment. Say: "'He hardens the heart of whomever he wills' (9:18), and the case is Pharaoh. But Exodus tells the hardening as a sequence, and the order matters. Split up and find three verses: Exodus 8:15, Exodus 8:32, and Exodus 9:12. Read them in order and report who hardens what, when."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Exodus 8:15: "But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart." Exodus 8:32: "But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also." Only then Exodus 9:12: "But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh." In the narrative's unfolding, Pharaoh hardens first, repeatedly, against plague after relented plague, and God's hardening arrives as judicial confirmation of a refusal already entrenched. Be accurate about the whole data: God announces in advance that he will harden (Ex 4:21; 7:3), and some notices leave the agency unstated; the traditional reading holds announcement and sequence together: God's foretold hardening works through, and ratifies, Pharaoh's own. Your group has seen this divine judgment before: it is "God gave them up" (1:24, 26, 28) wearing Egyptian dress. Scripture's hardening, so read, is not the manufacture of a fresh evil in an innocent heart but the terrible ratification of a chosen one; God is never the author of sin, and how his causality and creaturely freedom mesh remains a mystery her schools dispute. Even so, keep Paul's edge: God remains free to use the hardened Pharaoh for the Exodus and his name's glory (9:17). Sovereignty is not diminished by being just.

Read Romans 9:19-24 aloud, slowly.

Discovery moment. Say: "The potter and the clay (9:20-21) is not Paul's invention; a prophet was sent to a potter's house to learn it, and God himself explains the image there. Find the potter's house at the start of Jeremiah 18, and read through verse 11. What can the clay do in the original?"

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Jeremiah 18:1-11. The vessel is spoiled; the potter reworks it into another vessel; and God interprets: "can I not do with you as this potter has done?... If at any time I declare concerning a nation... that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation... turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it" (18:6-8), and the reverse for a blessed nation that turns to evil. In its source, the potter image teaches sovereign responsiveness: the potter's absolute right over the clay is exercised through engagement with the clay's turning. Now reread 9:22-23 with the loupe: the vessels of wrath God "endured with much patience," and your group knows from 2:4 what God's patience is meant to produce: repentance; the vessels of mercy God "prepared beforehand for glory," with God named as preparer; and of the wrath-vessels the text says only "made for destruction," without naming God as their maker in that state. Many careful readers hear the sentence giving glory its author and destruction its silence. Present that as a reading the grammar invites, not more: Paul asserts God's absolute right and God's actual patience in the same breath, and patience is not the behavior of a potter who wanted the vessel broken.

Steelman: Unconditional Election, All the Way Down

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is the Calvinist reading, and it is the most serious steelman this study will ever build, because it is built from tonight's verses at face value. Before the twins were born, without regard to anything done good or bad, God loved Jacob and hated Esau; the apostle's own conclusion is that salvation depends not on human will or exertion but on God's mercy alone; God hardens whom he wills; and when human fairness objects, Paul does not soothe it, he silences it: who are you, O man? The potter makes from one lump vessels for honor and vessels for destruction, and the clay has no appeal. On this reading, God unconditionally elects some to glory and passes over the rest, for his own glory, and our part is to tremble and adore. And be honest," say to the group, "doesn't Paul sound more like this than like our softer paraphrases of him?" Let it stand at its full, terrible height. Then press.

3. Press: You have four instruments from tonight and seven weeks of the letter. Apply them: the lament (9:1-3), the Exodus order, the potter's own house, and the patience of 9:22 read with 2:4. Then set the walls: what has the Church fixed, and what has she left open?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Apply the instruments. The lament: the reading must produce Paul's tears and trade-places love, not serenity about the lost; a decree-and-done theology struggles to weep like 9:3. The Exodus order: Scripture's own hardening sequence shows judicial confirmation of chosen refusal, not fresh evil planted in the innocent. The potter's house: Jeremiah 18, the image's fullest prophetic home (Isaiah's potter texts, 29:16 and 45:9, stand nearby), is Scripture's great proof that when the nation the clay figures turns, the vessel's fate changes. The patience: God endures wrath-vessels "with much patience," and this letter has already defined God's patience as the space made for repentance (2:4); patience is unintelligible if the outcome was fixed with no door. Add the argument's own ending, two chapters ahead: branches broken for unbelief can be grafted back in (11:23), and the conclusion of the whole unit is mercy upon all (11:32). Then the walls, honestly stated: the Church affirms with Paul that election is real, prior, and unmerited, and that the predestination of the elect to glory is God's free grace (concede the steelman its true core); and she fixes what the steelman's full system breaks: Christ suffered for every human being without exception (CCC 605), and "God predestines no one to go to hell" (CCC 1037): final loss requires the creature's own persevering refusal. Inside those walls, how grace and freedom interlock, the Church's schools have argued for centuries with her blessing (CCC 600), and tonight's group is not required to finish that argument. What no one may do is read chapter 9 without chapters 10 and 11, and those are the next two weeks.

DIG DEEPER

The stumbling stone (9:30-33). The chapter's last movement quietly changes registers: why did Israel not attain? Not, in the end, a decree, but a stumble: "they did not pursue it through faith, but as if it were based on works" (9:32), tripping over the stone God laid in Zion. Paul fuses two Isaiah oracles (28:16 and 8:14): the same stone is sanctuary or stumbling block depending on how it is met, and "he who believes in him will not be put to shame" (9:33). After forty verses of God's freedom, the chapter's final word is an open door with a human hinge: believes. Chapter 10 walks through it.

Send

1. Paul's election produced anguish and intercession for the lost. What does yours produce? Who needs your 9:3 kind of praying this week?
2. Where do you need to let God be the potter right now: a plan, a timeline, a role you would not have chosen? What would surrendered clay do this week?

Live It This Week

- Choose one person far from God and pray for them by name every day this week, with something of Paul's 9:3 seriousness; consider fasting once for them.
- Pray the Memorare once this day this week that predestination or scrupulosity troubles you, and hand St. Francis de Sales's question to Our Lady as he did.
- Reread Jeremiah 18:1-11 once, and answer the potter's question in writing: what is God currently reworking in you, and are you turning?

Memory Verse

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall; and he who believes in him will not be put to shame."

Romans 9:33 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Sovereign Lord, potter of nations and of us, we do not answer back; we hand you the clay. Thank you that your patience means a door, that your Son suffered for every soul without exception, and that no one is lost but by refusing you to the end. Give us tears for the lost like Paul's, and keep the ones we love from stumbling over the Stone. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Session 10: Vessels of Mercy

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 9:1-5 (read aloud: the lament; accursed for my brethren; cf. Ex 32:32)
- Romans 9:6-16 (read: Isaac, Jacob and Esau before birth; Ex 33:19 quoted; not of man's will but God's mercy; cf. Gen 25:23, Mal 1:2-3)
- Romans 9:17-18 (Pharaoh; hardens whom he wills)
- Exodus 8:15, 8:32, 9:12 (discovery passages: the hardening order; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 9:19-24 (read slowly: who are you, O man; potter and clay; vessels of wrath endured with patience, vessels of mercy prepared for glory)
- Jeremiah 18:1-11 (discovery passage: the potter's house and the turning clay; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 9:30-33 (Dig Deeper: the stumbling stone, Isa 28:16 + 8:14; bridge to ch. 10)
- CCC 605, 1037, 600 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 9:33

Session 11: The Olive Tree

Romans 10-11 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group watches Paul finish the argument chapter 9 began: salvation is as near as a confessing mouth and a believing heart, offered to "every one who calls upon the name of the Lord"; faith comes by hearing, and hearing needs someone sent; God has not rejected his people, whose gifts and call are irrevocable; and the olive tree gives the whole letter its final picture of grace: branches broken for unbelief, wild shoots grafted by faith, warned against boasting, standing only by continuing, with mercy upon all as the destination.

Catholic Touchstone. Three Catholic teachings stand on tonight's chapters: the Church's irrevocable bond with the Jewish people (CCC 839, quoting 11:29); the necessity of sent preachers, which is the logic of apostolic mission (10:14-15); and the true resolution of the assurance question: real confidence and real conditions in one tree, "provided you continue in his kindness" (11:22), which is why the Church teaches that faith is a priceless gift that can be lost (CCC 162) while anchoring hope in God who never revokes his call.

What You Need to Know

Chapter 10 opens where chapter 9 opened, in Paul's heart: "my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved" (10:1). Israel's zeal is real but unenlightened, seeking to establish its own righteousness rather than submit to God's (10:2-3). Then the hinge: "Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified" (10:4). Be precise with your group: the Greek telos can mean goal and fulfillment as well as termination, and most Catholic interpreters hear the former here: Christ as what the law was always driving toward. And righteousness by faith is near, not up in heaven or across the sea (10:6-8, reworking Deut 30, the same chapter that gave this study heart-circumcision): as near as this: "if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9). Lips and heart, creed and faith, the whole person: your group has heard this anthropology since 1:5.

Then the chain of sending (10:13-17): calling requires believing, believing requires hearing, hearing requires preaching, preaching requires being sent, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!" (10:15, quoting Isa 52:7). Faith comes by hearing (10:17): the faith necessarily includes a proclaimed message, and a message needs messengers with a mission. Notice the ecclesiology hiding in the logic: no one sends himself; and the logic points toward what the Church calls apostolicity, a structure of sending the rest of the New Testament fills out. And notice whom "every one" includes: the quotation under 10:13 is tonight's first discovery, and what the group finds there about the word "Lord" is one of the New Testament's quietest, largest claims about who Jesus is.

Chapter 11 answers the question all this raises: "has God rejected his people? By no means!" (11:1). Paul's proofs: himself, an Israelite; the remnant principle, discovered tonight in Elijah's cave (11:2-5); and the remnant is "chosen by grace... otherwise grace would no longer be grace" (11:5-6). Israel's stumble is neither total nor final: it has opened the door to the Gentiles, and their inclusion is designed to make Israel jealous unto salvation (11:11-14). Then the tree (11:16-24): natural branches broken off "because of their unbelief"; wild olive shoots grafted in, standing "only through faith"; the double command, "do not become proud, but stand in awe"; the double-edged verse your group has waited two weeks for: "Note then the kindness and the severity of God... God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut

off" (11:22); and the door that never shuts: the broken branches, "if they do not persist in their unbelief, will be grafted in" (11:23). The mystery: hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles, "and so all Israel will be saved" (11:25-26): tell your group honestly that the Church has not defined what that clause means and interpreters differ (the mass of Israel at the end; the full remnant through history; the completed people of God); what is fixed is the Catechism's own teaching of an eschatological "full inclusion" (CCC 674) and 11:29, "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable," the sentence the Catechism itself quotes for the Church's bond with the Jewish people (CCC 839). The unit that began with anguish ends with the largest sentence in the letter, "that he may have mercy upon all" (11:32), and dissolves into doxology (11:33-36). Anti-Jewish readings of Romans die in this chapter; make sure they die in your room too.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Joel 2:32. "Every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (10:13) quotes Joel, where the name called upon is the LORD, the divine name itself. Paul applies the verse to calling on Jesus. The group finds the source and draws the conclusion themselves; guard it, it is the session's quiet thunderclap.

1 Kings 19:10-18. Paul's remnant argument (11:2-5) retells Elijah's despair in the cave and God's answer: "I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal" (1 Kgs 19:18). When the prophet counted one faithful Israelite, God counted seven thousand. A discovery passage; keep it back.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN PAUL II

In 1986, St. John Paul II crossed the Tiber to the Great Synagogue of Rome, the first pope in memory to enter it, and said to the Jewish community: "You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers." The sentence is Romans 11 spoken with a living voice: the root carries the branches, not the branches the root (11:18), and the gifts and call of God are irrevocable (11:29). What Paul argued in the first century against Gentile boasting, a pope enacted in the twentieth against centuries of it.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

When crusade fervor in the twelfth century turned murderous toward Jewish communities along the Rhine, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the most influential churchman of his age, wrote and rode against it, insisting in his letters that the Jews are not to be persecuted or killed, and insisting that their preservation belongs to God's plan and the promises are not revoked. Where the mob read the Gospel with a sword, St. Bernard stood in the road with Romans 11's whole spirit. The olive tree has, at times, needed defending with more than exegesis.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

From India in 1544, St. Francis Xavier wrote the letter the Church still reads in her Office on his feast: multitudes there fail to become Christians, he says, for one reason only, that there is no one to make them Christians; and he confesses the urge to go through the universities of Europe crying out like a madman to the learned, telling them how many souls are missing glory for want of someone sent. It is Romans 10:14-15 turned into a vocation crisis on paper: how are they to hear without a preacher, and how can men preach unless they are sent? Every missionary impulse in the Church's history is that paragraph catching

fire.

Catechism Connection

CCC 839. The Church's teaching on the Jewish people, built from tonight's text: theirs remain "the sonship, the glory, the covenants" (Rom 9:4-5 is quoted), and "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (11:29, quoted). The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant.

CCC 674. The Catechism reads 11:20-26 eschatologically: the glorious Messiah's coming is joined to his recognition by "all Israel," whose "full inclusion" will follow the full number of the Gentiles. The end of the story runs through the natural branches.

CCC 162. The olive tree's warning in catechetical form: "Faith is an entirely free gift... We can lose this priceless gift," which is why we must persevere, nourish faith, and ask for its increase. Kindness and severity, gift and vigilance, exactly as 11:22 holds them.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Has God's word failed: RESOLVES tonight. Planted at 3:1-8 ("Let God be true"), reopened at 9:6, answered at 11:1-2, 11:29, and 11:32. Name the eight-week arc once, plainly.

Assurance tension: RESOLVES tonight. Promised in Sessions 9 and 10; 11:20-23 is the payoff. Run it inside the steelman so the group feels it answer the question they have carried.

Boasting thread: RESOLVES tonight. 3:27 excluded it, 4:2 tested it, 11:18-20 buries it: "do not boast over the branches... stand in awe." One sentence.

To the Jew first: RESOLVES tonight. The ordering of 1:16 finishes as irrevocable gifts and full inclusion. After tonight, only the title inclusio remains unresolved; Session 15 harvests it. Do not mention the inclusio.

Session Goals

1. The group can recite 10:9 and explain nearness: confession and faith, lips and heart.
2. The group discovers Joel 2:32 and can state what 10:13 quietly claims about Jesus, and discovers Elijah's seven thousand behind the remnant.
3. The group can walk the olive tree: why branches were broken, how wild shoots stand, what "provided you continue" requires, and that regrafting is always possible.
4. The group can state the Church's teaching on the Jewish people in one sentence (11:29; CCC 839) and reject every anti-Jewish reading of Romans explicitly.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 min
- Build questions 1-2 with the Joel discovery: 24 min

- Build questions 3-4 with the Elijah discovery and the olive tree: 24 min
- Steelman chain: 15 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress 10:1-8 to a two-sentence bridge (zeal without knowledge; the word is near). Never cut the Joel discovery, the olive tree, or the steelman answer.

Session 11: The Olive Tree

Romans 10-11 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, your word is near us, on our lips and in our hearts. Tonight, teach us the tree we grew on: the root that carries us, the kindness that holds us, the awe that keeps us. Give us Paul's ache for those outside, and let your mercy have the last word here, as it has in your letter. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. Who first told you the gospel, and who sent or formed them? Trace the chain back as far as you can.
2. Have you ever been welcomed into something you had no claim on: a family, a team, a country, a table? What did the welcome make you feel toward those who belonged first?

Build

Read Romans 10:1-13 aloud.

1. How near is salvation, according to 10:8-10, and what two organs does it involve? Why both, and not just one?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (10:8): "if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9). Heart and lips together: Paul will not let faith stay a private opinion, nor confession become mere performance. Paul requires the whole person, interior conviction becoming public confession, which is this study's oldest theme wearing its simplest clothes: faith that engages the will and shows itself. Note also what the confession is: Jesus is Lord, the primal Christian creed; when the aged Polycarp was ordered to say "Caesar is Lord," he went to the fire rather than transfer the title (Martyrdom of Polycarp 8). The next discovery weighs the middle word.

Discovery moment. Say: "Verse 13 seals the promise with a quotation: 'every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.' Paul is quoting a prophet, a short book, in a passage about the great day of the Lord. Find it, and when you do, look carefully at which name is being called upon in the original." Hint if needed: the prophet's book comes right after Hosea.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Joel 2:32: "all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered," where "the Lord" renders the divine name itself, the name of the God of Israel. Paul takes Joel's promise about calling on the LORD and applies it, without a flicker of hesitation, to calling on Jesus (the whole context of 10:9-13 is confessing Jesus as Lord). Let the group say what that means: a first-century Pharisee, trained his whole life in the difference between God and everything else, has placed Jesus on the divine side of that line as the natural reading of Scripture. The divinity of Christ is not a fourth-century invention; it is sitting quietly inside a quotation in

Romans 10, and your group just found it with their own hands.

2. Walk the chain of 10:14-17 backwards: saved, calling, believing, hearing, preaching, sent. Which link does the modern world assume away, and what does the chain imply about how God has chosen to save?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The last one: sent. Calling needs faith, faith needs hearing, hearing needs a preacher, "and how can men preach unless they are sent?" (10:15). No one commissions himself; behind every hearer stands a speaker, and behind every legitimate speaker, a sending, which is why the Church is apostolic (from apostolos, one sent) in her very structure and why "faith comes from what is heard" (10:17). Two implications for your group: first, gratitude with a genealogy: everyone's faith arrived through a chain of sent people reaching back to an upper room; second, obligation: the chain does not end at us unless we end it. Somewhere, someone's hearing is waiting on someone's going, which was unbearable to at least one saint your Take-Home will introduce.

Read Romans 11:1-10 aloud.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul answers 'has God rejected his people?' with a story about a prophet hiding in a cave, certain he was the only faithful one left. Find God's answer to Elijah, near the end of 1 Kings 19, and note the number."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

1 Kings 19:18: "Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal." Elijah counted one; God counted seven thousand. "So too at the present time," Paul concludes, "there is a remnant, chosen by grace" (11:5), and he closes the loophole immediately: "if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace" (11:6). Two comforts here. God's fidelity does not require majorities; it never has. And the remnant is not the self-selected spiritual elite; it is grace's roll call, which no one on it earned. Beware the Elijah temptation in your own parish life: the certainty that you are the last faithful one is usually despair doing arithmetic, and God's count is always higher.

3. Read Romans 11:16-24 aloud, and someone sketch the tree as we go: root, natural branches, broken branches, wild shoots. Then answer from the text: why were branches broken? How do the grafted stand? And what do verses 22-23 say can still happen, in both directions?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The root is best read as the patriarchs and the promises (11:16, 28), ultimately grounded in God's own covenant fidelity; the natural branches, Israel; the broken ones, broken "because of their unbelief" (11:20), the reason Paul names; the wild shoots, believing Gentiles, grafted "contrary to nature" (11:24) into a tree they did not plant, nourished by a root they did not grow (11:17-18). How the grafted stand: "you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe" (11:20). And both directions remain live: "God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off" (11:22), and the broken, "if they do not persist in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again" (11:23). Grafted-in is real union, and it is union sustained by continuing

faith, not by tenure. Hold the tree in view; the steelman is about to climb it.

Steelman: Were the Broken Branches Ever Really Attached?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Two weeks ago the eternal-security case stood on chapter 8, and we promised it an answer at the olive tree. Tonight, hear its best response to the tree itself, and it is a serious one. The Reformed reading says: the warnings are real, but they are the means by which God preserves his elect, who always heed them; and those finally cut off were never truly, savingly attached, branches by profession and appearance only. And in its strongest, covenantal form: the wild shoot is corporate, the visible Gentile community as a body, so genuine covenant attachment need not equal each individual's saving union. Scripture itself seems to say so elsewhere: 'they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us' (1 Jn 2:19). So the tree threatens, the elect tremble and persevere, the merely nominal fall away, and no one truly justified is ever lost. Doesn't that harmonize the warnings with the golden chain?" Give it its full due; it is the strongest form of the position. Then press, from the tree itself.

4. Press: Stay inside the passage. Were the natural branches genuinely attached to the root? (Check 9:4-5.) Are the wild shoots addressed as true believers or as possible fakes? (Check 11:20.) And what does 11:23 do to the claim that cut off proves never attached?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The natural branches genuinely belonged to the tree, corporately and covenantally: "to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises" (9:4-5); real branches, really broken, "because of their unbelief" (11:20), a cause located in them, not a status revealed about them. (And renaming the union corporate does not make the severing unreal: real covenant membership cut off for unbelief is exactly the Catholic claim.) The wild shoots are addressed precisely as standing believers: "you stand fast only through faith" (11:20): Paul warns people whose present faith he affirms that continuing is required ("provided you continue," 11:22). A warning addressed to real believers about a real possibility cannot be reclassified as a warning about fakes without rewriting the sentence. And 11:23 dismantles the last plank: the cut-off can be grafted in again, so being cut off does not prove one was never attached; the tree runs on living faith, and the Church teaches plainly that this priceless gift can be lost and recovered (CCC 162). Now give the Catholic synthesis at full strength, because it keeps everything: chapter 8 stands untouched, nothing external can sever us, God's call is irrevocable on his side (11:29), and confidence is right; chapter 11 stands untouched, the branch can withdraw by unbelief, so presumption is wrong; and the two chapters were never enemies, because hope, the virtue between despair and presumption, is exactly the posture of a branch: resting its whole weight on the root, and continuing. (As Jesus put the same picture: every branch in him that bears no fruit is taken away, Jn 15:2.) On 1 John 2:19: it truly describes some departures, especially the antichrist-teachers John meant; it is a description of one kind of falling, not a law covering every branch. And take the means-of-perseverance account seriously on its own terms: warnings preserve only by warning of something real for the one warned; a danger no branch could ever meet moves no one, and Paul aims this one at believers he says are standing. Trent adds the honest last note: absent a special revelation, none of us has absolute certainty of our own perseverance, which is why the Church prays for it daily and why 11:20's "stand in awe" is permanent posture, not a phase.

DIG DEEPER

Mercy upon all (11:32) and the doxology. The three hardest chapters in Paul end with his largest sentence: "God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all," and then argument gives way to worship: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!... For from him and through him and to him are all things" (11:33, 36). Notice the order of operations: Paul does not explain the mystery and then praise; he praises because the mystery exceeded him. "How unsearchable are his judgments" is the apostle's own verdict on the material your group has wrestled for three weeks, which means finishing with unanswered questions is not failure; it is fidelity to the text's own ending. The chapter teaches a posture: argue honestly as far as the light goes, then sing.

Send

1. You are a wild branch on borrowed root. Where has Christian belonging made you proud rather than awed, and what would "stand in awe" look like this week?
2. The chain of 10:14-15 does not end at you unless you end it. Whose hearing might be waiting on your going or your words?

Live It This Week

- Thank, in person or in writing, one living link in your chain of hearing: the person who preached, taught, or handed the faith to you.
- Pray daily for the Jewish people, the natural branches, with Paul's own words: that they may be saved (10:1), and with his reverence: the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable (11:29).
- Take one deliberate step of "continuing in his kindness" (11:22) this week: return to Confession, restart a dropped prayer habit, or reconcile with someone, and name it to yourself as remaining in the tree.

Memory Verse

"Because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Romans 10:9 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, gardener of the olive tree, thank you for grafting us in, contrary to nature, by sheer kindness. Keep us from boasting over the branches; keep us standing in awe; keep us continuing. Bring home the natural branches, and make of one tree one people, until your mercy is upon all. From him and through him and to him are all things: to him be glory for ever. Amen.

Session 11: The Olive Tree

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 10:1-13 (read aloud: zeal without knowledge; Christ the telos of the law; near word; confess and believe; every one who calls)
- Joel 2:32 (discovery passage: calling on the name of the LORD; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 10:14-17 (the chain of sending; beautiful feet, Isa 52:7; faith comes by hearing)
- Romans 11:1-10 (read aloud: has God rejected his people?; Elijah; remnant by grace)
- 1 Kings 19:10-18 (discovery passage: the seven thousand; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 11:16-24 (read aloud with the tree sketched: broken for unbelief; stand by faith; kindness and severity; regrafting; cf. Rom 9:4-5, Jn 15:2)
- 1 John 2:19 (steelman text, cited within the press)
- Romans 11:25-36 (Dig Deeper: the mystery; all Israel; irrevocable gifts; mercy upon all; doxology)
- CCC 839, 674, 162 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 10:9

Session 12: Living Sacrifice

Romans 12 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the letter's great hinge: therefore. Eleven chapters of mercy become five chapters of life, beginning with worship redefined: bodies presented as a living sacrifice, minds transformed rather than conformed, gifts exercised in one body with many members, and love made genuine all the way down to blessing persecutors and overcoming evil with good.

Catholic Touchstone. Within its treatment of the moral life in the Church, the Catechism reaches for tonight's verses: "The moral life is spiritual worship" (CCC 2031, quoting 12:1-2). And the living sacrifice has an altar: in the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body (CCC 1368), because the baptized are a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices (CCC 1268). Romans 12 is not an alternative to the Mass; it is what the Mass makes of a life.

What You Need to Know

Weigh the first word: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God" (12:1). The therefore carries eleven chapters on its back: everything now commanded is a response to everything already given, and the appeal is made "by the mercies," not by the threats. The order your group learned in chapter 6 (indicative before imperative, become what you are) now structures the letter's whole second half: chapters 12-16 never introduce a new way to earn what chapters 1-11 declared free; they describe what a mercy-soaked life looks like.

The opening command is liturgical to its bones: "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (12:1). The cluster is temple vocabulary through and through: present (the offering verb of sacrificial contexts), sacrifice, holy, acceptable, worship. Paul takes the language of the altar and lays it over the whole embodied life, with one shocking modifier: living. Dead sacrifices stay on the altar; living ones can crawl off, which is why the offering must be renewed. And the instrument of renewal is the mind: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God" (12:2). Conformity happens to the unresisting, the world's mold pressing from outside; transformation (metamorphoo) is grace working from within, with our cooperation, and its fruit is discernment: the renewed mind can test and recognize God's will rather than needing a rule for every case.

Then the sacrifice gets a social body: "as in one body we have many members... so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (12:4-5), with differing gifts to be actually used (12:6-8): prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, mercy. Note the list's texture: mostly unglamorous, and "he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness" (12:8) may be its most demanding line. The chapter closes with the marks of genuine love (12:9-21), a rapid-fire rule of life your group should read slowly: hate evil, hold to good, outdo one another in honor, be patient in tribulation, constant in prayer, given to hospitality; then the impossible ones, "bless those who persecute you" (12:14), "repay no one evil for evil" (12:17), and the summary that will govern the rest of the letter's ethics: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (12:21). Tonight's two discoveries give the chapter its roots: what kind of sacrifice God always wanted, and what the New Testament calls the people who offer it.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

1 Samuel 15:22. "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice." Samuel's verdict on Saul is the Old Testament's own critique of worship detached from obedience, and it is the deep root of 12:1: what the prophets kept insisting sacrifice was for, the offerer's obedient self. For this study it is more than background; it joins the letter's first phrase to tonight's first verse. A discovery passage; guard it.

1 Peter 2:4-5. The New Testament names the offerers: "and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Living sacrifice (Paul) meets holy priesthood (Peter): the baptized are not spectators of an offering but a priestly people with something to offer. A discovery passage; keep it back.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

St. Augustine fused tonight's two key verses, the living sacrifice (12:1) and the one body (12:5), into the Church's deepest sentence about the Mass: "This is the sacrifice of Christians: we, being many, are one body in Christ. And this also is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar... in which she teaches that she herself is offered in the offering she makes to God" (City of God, Book X, chapter 6). At every Eucharist, on St. Augustine's reading, the Church does Romans 12:1 corporately: joined to Christ's own sacrifice, she places herself on the altar. The pew and the offering are not two locations.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA

St. Teresa of Calcutta spoke, in her letters and addresses, of serving Christ in his "distressing disguise," the poorest of the poor. This study's application of her phrase: the Lord received on the altar in the morning is touched in the broken bodies of the streets by afternoon, and the two encounters interpret each other. Her life is 12:1 with the romance stripped off: a body presented daily, in small, repetitive, unglamorous mercies, "with cheerfulness" (12:8).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

St. Ignatius of Loyola, in the Spiritual Exercises, teaches in substance that discerning God's will requires exactly the renovation Paul commands in 12:2: a mind freed from disordered attachments, neither conformed to the world's pulls nor to its own preferences, freed into holy indifference, ordered freedom from disordered attachment, for God's greater glory, and therefore able to recognize his will when it appears. The Exercises are, in their four movements, a school for verse 2: transformation by the renewal of the mind, ordered to proving "what is good and acceptable and perfect." His Suscipe prayer, in which the whole self, liberty, memory, understanding, will, is handed over, is the living sacrifice in the first person.

Catechism Connection

CCC 2031. The Catechism's section on the moral life in the Church opens by quoting tonight's text: "The moral life is spiritual worship. We 'present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,'" nourished within the Body of Christ and the liturgy. Morality's deepest category is not rule-keeping but offering.

CCC 1368. The Eucharistic completion of 12:1: "In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value." Bring your week to Mass; the altar is where the living sacrifice is laid.

CCC 1268. Who may offer: the baptized, made "living stones" for "a holy priesthood." The common priesthood of the faithful is not a metaphor for niceness; it is the standing that makes Romans 12:1 possible.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Title thread, penultimate deposit. Tonight's 1 Samuel discovery says it almost aloud: to obey is better than sacrifice, and the sacrifice God wants is obedience embodied. Do not connect it to 1:5 explicitly; let the phrase "the obedience of faith" go unsaid tonight so Session 15 can strike it clean.

The hinge. Mark the letter's architecture once, plainly: chapters 1-11 mercy, chapters 12-16 life, joined by "therefore." The group should be able to reproduce this map from memory by Session 15.

One body: plants tonight. 12:4-5 seeds the welcome-one-another material of chapters 14-15 (Session 14). Note the phrase "members one of another"; it returns with a dinner table attached.

Overcome evil with good: plants tonight. 12:21 is the bridge into chapter 13 (authority, love, armor of light) and the ethical summary of the letter's back half. Next session opens with it in hand.

Session Goals

1. The group can explain the therefore: why chapters 12-16 are response before requirement: truly required of those living in grace, never the purchase price of what grace gave.
2. The group discovers 1 Samuel 15:22 and 1 Peter 2:4-5, and can connect living sacrifice, obedience, and the priesthood of the baptized.
3. The group can distinguish conformity from transformation and name one concrete mold the world is currently pressing on them.
4. Each participant identifies one gift from 12:6-8 they possess and one concrete use for it in the parish or group.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 min
- Build questions 1-2 with the 1 Samuel discovery: 25 min
- Build question 3 with the 1 Peter discovery, and the gifts inventory: 20 min
- Steelman chain: 13 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and read 12:9-21 aloud without discussion, asking each person to silently mark the one command aimed at them. Never cut the discoveries or the steelman answer.

Session 12: Living Sacrifice

Romans 12 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father of mercies, everything you ask tonight, your mercy first makes possible. Here are our bodies: make them a living sacrifice. Here are our minds: transform them. Here are our gifts: put them to work in your one body. We offer what we are because of what you have done. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. What is something you do with your body, hands, feet, voice, that feels most like the real you: cooking, building, singing, running, holding?
2. Where do you most feel the world's mold pressing on you right now: to want certain things, fear certain things, measure yourself certain ways?

Build

Read Romans 12:1-2 aloud, twice.

1. Weigh the first word: what is the "therefore" standing on, and what difference does it make that the appeal comes "by the mercies of God" rather than by threat? Then list the temple words in verse 1: what has Paul done to the location of worship?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The therefore stands on eleven chapters: justification, baptism, the Spirit, the olive tree, mercy upon all. Nothing in chapters 12-16 earns any of it; everything responds to all of it, which is why the appeal is "by the mercies": gratitude, not fear, is the engine of Christian morality, and a command read without the therefore always curdles into religion of the exhausting kind. The temple words: present, sacrifice, holy, acceptable, worship: a cluster that strongly evokes the altar, relocated onto "your bodies." Worship has not been abolished or interiorized into mere feelings; it has been extended: the offering now includes Monday, and the temple courts now include your commute. One modifier changes everything: living. A dead sacrifice stays offered; a living one can crawl off the altar, which is why this offering asks for daily renewal.

Discovery moment. Say: "A sacrifice that consists of the offerer's own obedient self is not Paul's invention. a prophet, the last of Israel's judges, said it to Israel's first king, in a single famous sentence comparing sacrifice to something better. Find Samuel's verdict on Saul, in 1 Samuel 15."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

1 Samuel 15:22: "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Saul had kept the livestock "to sacrifice," and Samuel names the evasion: worship offered instead of obedience is not worship. God's complaint against sacrifice was never the altar; it was the substitution, the ram standing in for the surrendered will. Romans 12:1 closes the gap for good: the sacrifice is the obedient self, body and

all, so nothing can be offered instead of you. Let the group sit one beat with what this study has been saying since its first night about the kind of faith God counts, and move on without naming it.

2. Verse 2 sets conformed against transformed. What is the difference in where the shaping force comes from? And notice the promised result: what does a renewed mind become able to do?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Conformity is molding from outside: the world presses, and the soft thing takes its shape, usually without noticing (nobody decides to be conformed; it is what happens while deciding nothing). Transformation (metamorphoo, the transfiguration word) is grace working from within, with our cooperation, "by the renewal of your mind": new inputs, new loves, new habits of attention, prayer, Scripture, the sacraments, until the shape changes from the inside out. And the result is discernment: "that you may prove what is the will of God" (12:2): a renewed mind does not need a rule for every situation; it develops a taste for God's will and recognizes it, the way a trained ear hears a wrong note. Ask the group practically: name one input you would have to change this month for renewal to outpace conformity, and be specific about screens.

Read Romans 12:3-8 aloud.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul says present your bodies as a sacrifice; another apostle tells us what that makes us. Find 1 Peter 2:4-5, and note the two things believers are built into, and what they exist to offer."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

1 Peter 2:5: "and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." A house, and a priesthood: sacrifice implies priests, and Peter says the baptized are them. This is the Church's teaching on the common priesthood of the faithful (CCC 1268): by Baptism, every Christian has real standing to offer, and Romans 12:1 is that priesthood's daily work. Now join it to the one body (12:4-5): many members, differing gifts, each meant to be used: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, mercy with cheerfulness (12:6-8). Run the inventory live: have each person name one gift from the list they recognize in themselves, and one they see in someone else in the room, out loud. A body where members wait to be asked is a body asleep; "members one of another" (12:5) means your gift is partly their property.

Steelman: Does Romans 12 Retire the Liturgy?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is a reading beloved in much of evangelicalism, and it has real force. Paul takes every word of temple worship, sacrifice, priest-work, acceptable offering, and applies it to ordinary bodily life. 'Spiritual worship,' on this reading, means the age of altars, rituals, and priestly sacrifice is over: all of life is worship now, so no special rite is needed, and any church that still speaks of an altar, a sacrifice, and a priesthood, as Catholics do at every Mass, has walked backwards into the shadows Paul left. Its strongest artillery is Hebrews: one priest, one offering, once for all (Heb 10:10-14), so a standing altar and a ministerial priesthood look like a return to what that once-for-all retired, while Baptism and the Supper remain as ordinances, not sacrifices. Isn't Romans 12:1 the end of liturgy, and the Mass exactly the kind of repeated ritual sacrifice the New Covenant retired?" Give it its full strength, and honor what is right in it before you press: it is gloriously true that all of life is now the arena of worship. Then press.

3. Press: Three tests. What does 12:1 actually extend, and can extending something abolish it? What did the group just find in 1 Peter 2:5 about priesthood and offering in the New Covenant? And look ahead one page: how does Paul describe his own ministry in Romans 15:16?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

First: 12:1 extends altar language to all of life; extension is not abolition, and the argument proves too much, since if sacrificial vocabulary is retired, Paul chose a strange way to say so, drenching the verse in it. All of life becoming worship does not mean no act of worship is central, any more than all of life becoming prayer means no one should ever kneel. Second: the New Covenant Peter describes still has a priesthood and still has sacrifices to offer, now shared by all the baptized; the categories are transformed, not retired. Third: Romans 15:16, Paul on Paul: grace was given him "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." The apostle describes his own work liturgically, as priestly service producing an acceptable offering, in this very letter. So the Catholic both/and, which keeps everything the steelman loves: all of life is worship (the Church says so at CCC 2031, quoting tonight's verse), and the Eucharist is where that whole-life offering is gathered and joined to the one sacrifice of Christ, "the sacrifice of the members of his Body" united with his total offering (CCC 1368). The Mass does not compete with your Monday; it is where your Monday gets placed on the altar. St. Augustine said it sixteen centuries ago: in what she offers, the Church herself is offered. And meet Hebrews head-on, because the Church agrees with every word of it: one sacrifice, once for all, never repeated; the Mass is not another offering but that once-for-all offering sacramentally re-presented, made present across time (CCC 1366-1367), and the ministerial priesthood adds no priest beside Christ but makes the one Priest's act present; common and ministerial priesthood differ in essence and both are real (CCC 1547). The full apologetic belongs to another study; tonight's takeaway is that Romans 12:1 and the altar were never rivals.

DIG DEEPER

The impossible verses (12:14-21). "Bless those who persecute you" (12:14), "repay no one evil for evil" (12:17), "if your enemy is hungry, feed him" (12:20): the last is Proverbs 25:21-22 quoted word for word, and the first breathes his Master's Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:44); the closing line is the Christian theory of moral combat: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (12:21). Evil's favorite victory is reproduction: making its victims into copies of itself. The only non-defeat is refusing the copy, and the only counterattack that cannot be countered is good. "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (12:15) belongs on the same battlefield: presence is also a weapon. Every martyr, and every parishioner who answered contempt with patience this week, fought under 12:21.

Send

1. What would it mean, concretely, to place this week on the altar at Sunday's Mass: which task, which suffering, which relationship goes into the offering?
2. Which gift from 12:6-8 did the group name in you tonight, and what is one use for it in this parish within the month?

Live It This Week

- Each morning this week, pray a one-sentence 12:1: Lord, here is my body and this day; a living sacrifice. Renew it when you catch yourself crawling off the altar.
- At Mass this Sunday, at the offertory, deliberately place your week, its work, suffering, and people, on the altar with the bread and wine (CCC 1368).
- Use the gift the group named in you once this week, concretely, for someone in the body; and do one act of mercy "with cheerfulness" (12:8), the cheerfulness on purpose.

Memory Verse

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

Romans 12:2 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Take, Lord, and receive all that we are: bodies and minds, gifts and days. What you have given, we return; what you are renewing, finish. Make of the many in this room one living sacrifice, joined to the offering of your Son, and send us out unconformed, transformed, and cheerful in mercy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Session 12: Living Sacrifice

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 12:1-2 (read aloud twice: therefore; living sacrifice; conformed vs transformed)
- 1 Samuel 15:22 (discovery passage: to obey is better than sacrifice; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 12:3-8 (read aloud: one body, many members; the gifts inventory)
- 1 Peter 2:4-5 (discovery passage: living stones, holy priesthood, spiritual sacrifices; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 15:16 (steelman text: the priestly service of the gospel; cited within the press)
- Romans 12:9-21 (Dig Deeper: genuine love; bless persecutors; overcome evil with good)
- CCC 2031, 1368, 1268 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 12:2

Session 13: Put On the Lord Jesus Christ

Romans 13 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers how the living sacrifice behaves in public: subject to legitimate authority as God's servant for the common good, yet answerable first to God; owing everyone one permanent debt, love, which fulfills the whole law; and awake to the hour, casting off works of darkness and putting on the armor of light, until the chapter ends in the very sentence that converted St. Augustine, which this study met on its first night: "put on the Lord Jesus Christ."

Catholic Touchstone. The Church reads 13:1-7 with both hands: authority comes from God and deserves genuine obedience in its sphere (CCC 1899-1900), and that same origin sets its limits, for "the citizen is obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order" (CCC 2242, citing Acts 5:29). And the love command is not a lower bar than the law but its fullness: at the evening of life, we will be judged on love (CCC 1022).

What You Need to Know

Handle 13:1-7 with precision, because history has handled it badly. Paul's claims: "there is no authority except from God" (13:1); the ruler "is God's servant for your good" (13:4); therefore be subject, pay taxes, give respect and honor where due (13:5-7). Three facts frame the passage. First, Paul wrote it under Nero, to Christians in the capital, a few years before, as ancient tradition holds, that same state killed him: this is not naivety about government. Second, the passage grounds authority theologically, and a grounding is also a leash: an authority that exists from God is answerable to God, holds office as servant (13:4, twice), and is ordered to your good; the office's legitimacy is tied to its purpose. Third, Scripture itself models the limit: the apostles who taught submission also stood in courtrooms saying "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), and the Church canonized the martyrs who refused the pinch of incense. The Catholic synthesis (CCC 1899-1903, 2242): real, conscientious civic duty, and a conscience that answers to God first when the two collide. Tonight's Wisdom discovery gives your group the frame Scripture itself puts around kings. Keep the discussion at the level of principle; the moment it becomes a referendum on current politics, name the move and return to the text: Paul gave Rome principles, not a party.

Then the debt that cannot be retired (13:8-10): "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." The commandments are "summed up" in loving neighbor as self (13:9, quoting a verse the group will be surprised to locate), and "love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (13:10). Be careful with the logic: love is not a vaguer substitute for the commandments; it is their engine and their measure. The commandments describe what love never does (murder, adultery, theft, coveting), so appeals to "love" against the commandments have misread both. This lands the law-thread's last piece: the law upheld (3:31), fulfilled in us by the Spirit (8:4), is fulfilled as love (13:10).

Finally the wake-up call (13:11-14): "salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand" (13:11-12). The imagery is a soldier's reveille: cast off the works of darkness, "put on the armor of light" (13:12), conduct becoming daytime (13:13), and then the sentence: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (13:14). Your group has met this verse before: it is the sentence St. Augustine's eyes fell on in the Milan garden, the one after which, as he tells it, he needed to read no further (Session 1). Tonight the study arrives, in course, at the very words. Let the group

discover the recognition themselves if they can; it is a rehearsal for how Session 15 will feel. One more echo worth an aside: "armor" here (13:12) and "instruments" of righteousness in 6:13 render the same Greek word, *hopla*, weapons: what you yielded to God in chapter 6, you wear in chapter 13.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Wisdom 6:1-3. Scripture's own frame for rulers, from a deuterocanonical book again: "Listen therefore, O kings... your dominion was given you from the Lord, and your sovereignty from the Most High, who will search out your works and inquire into your plans." Given from the Lord: Paul's 13:1. Who will search out your works: the leash. Authority from God was never authority without audit. A discovery passage; keep it back.

Leviticus 19:18. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (13:9) is not a New Testament invention; Paul and Jesus both quote Moses: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (Lev 19:18), from the heart of the holiness code. Most people are astonished to find it there; let them be. A discovery passage; guard it.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JUSTIN MARTYR

Writing to the emperor himself around AD 155, St. Justin Martyr explained the Christian position in almost exactly Paul's terms: everywhere, he says, we more readily than all men endeavor to pay the taxes to those you appoint, as Jesus taught; we render worship to God alone, but in all other things we gladly serve you, praying that in you the royal power may be found joined with sound judgment (First Apology 17). Taxes gladly, worship never: the both/and of Romans 13, written openly to the emperor by a man Rome would behead. One of the Church's earliest surviving public accounts of Christian civic duty was written by a martyr who had read this chapter carefully.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS MORE

On the scaffold in 1535, St. Thomas More, Chancellor of England, condemned after refusing to swear what conscience forbade, declared, as the earliest contemporary report (the Paris Newsletter of 1535) records it, that he died "the King's good servant, and God's first." The sentence is Romans 13 compressed to seven words: good servant, truly, taxes and honor and years of loyal office; and God's first, because the authority that gave the king his crown also set its limit. More did not rebel; he declined, paid the price, and blessed the king from the block. Where obedience to God and Caesar part, the Catholic does not seize power or surrender conscience; he suffers, and the suffering is the testimony.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

"At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love" (St. John of the Cross, quoted at CCC 1022). Tonight's chapter says why the examination has one subject: love is the fulfilling of the law (13:10), so the final audit of a life and the law's whole demand turn out to be the same question. St. John's sentence also guards the standard from going soft: he was a reformer, a prisoner, and a mystic of the purgative way; the love he means is not a mood but the fire that has burned selfishness out. To be judged on love is not the easy exam; it is the total one.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1899-1900. Authority, required by the moral order, comes from God: the duty of obedience and honor to legitimate authority is genuine, and the Catechism cites this chapter for it. Catholics are not anarchists on principle; the state is not a necessary evil but a servant with a mandate.

CCC 2242. The limit, in the Church's own words: "The citizen is obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order," grounded in "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Both paragraphs are the Church reading Romans 13 whole.

CCC 1022. The particular judgment, carrying St. John of the Cross's sentence: judged on our love. Set beside 13:8-10, it means the permanent debt is also the final exam.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

St. Augustine's verse: PAYS OFF tonight. 13:13-14 is the Session 1 Voice arriving in course. If someone recognizes it, hand them the moment; if no one does, ask "where has this study heard this verse before?" and wait. Then note what the study has done: the group has now read, in context, the sentence that converted the Church's greatest teacher of grace.

Hopla echo. "Instruments" of righteousness (6:13) and "armor" of light (13:12) translate the same Greek word. One aside, no lecture: yielded weapons become worn armor.

Law thread: final piece. 3:31 upheld, 8:4 fulfilled in us, 13:10 fulfilled as love. Name the three-step arc once; it completes the law thread for the study.

Overcome evil with good: carried. 12:21 governs 13:1-7 more than is obvious: subjection, taxes, and honor are that maxim applied to public life. One sentence connects them.

Session Goals

1. The group can state the Catholic both/and on authority (genuine duty, conscience's limit) with texts for each half (13:1-7; Acts 5:29; Wis 6:1-3).
2. The group discovers Wisdom 6:1-3 and Leviticus 19:18 and can explain love as the law's fulfillment, not its replacement.
3. The group recognizes 13:13-14 as St. Augustine's conversion text and can say what "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" asks of them.
4. The group keeps the entire discussion at the level of principle, and the leader can name and redirect partisan drift.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 min
- Build questions 1-2 with the Wisdom discovery and the steelman: 32 min
- Build question 3 with the Leviticus discovery: 18 min
- Build question 4 (the hour; St. Augustine's verse): 13 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress 13:6-7 (taxes, revenue, respect, honor) into one sentence. Never cut the discoveries, the steelman answer, or the St. Augustine recognition.

Session 13: Put On the Lord Jesus Christ

Romans 13 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, all authority is yours, lent to servants and audited by you. Make us good citizens and better saints: subject where we owe subjection, unbending where we owe you first, and debtors to everyone in love alone. The night is far gone; wake us, arm us with light, and clothe us in your Son. Amen.

Win

1. What is a rule or authority you obey gladly because you can see the good it serves, and one you obey grudgingly? What makes the difference?
2. Finish honestly: I put off spiritually urgent things because I assume I have _____.

Build

Read Romans 13:1-7 aloud.

1. Before anything else: who was emperor when Paul wrote this, and what does that fact do to lazy readings in both directions? Then find the job description hidden in verse 4: what is the ruler called, and for what?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Nero. Paul commands subjection, taxes, and honor under a regime that would later execute him, which forbids two lazy readings at once: this is not a passage that only applies under good governments (Paul had no such luxury), and it is not naivety about power (Paul knew Roman power from custody and courtrooms). The job description: the ruler "is God's servant for your good" (13:4), servant twice in one verse, and minister again in 13:6. Authority in this passage is never autonomous: it is derived ("from God," 13:1), diaconal (servant), and directed ("for your good"). Every word that grounds the duty of obedience also builds the platform for the question the steelman will ask: what about when the servant turns on the good?

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul's claim that authority is 'from God' has an Old Testament address, in a book addressed directly to kings, and the same passage that grants their authority adds something rulers prefer to forget. Find the opening of Wisdom 6."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Wisdom 6:1-3: "Listen therefore, O kings... your dominion was given you from the Lord, and your sovereignty from the Most High, who will search out your works and inquire into your plans." Given from the Lord: there is Paul's 13:1. Who will search out your works: there is the audit no earthly office escapes. Scripture never taught the divine right of kings to do as they please; it taught the divine mandate of kings to serve, with an inspection coming. (And note, again, which shelf this frame sits on: a deuterocanonical book, load-bearing under Romans for the second time in this study.) Authority from God is authority under God, which is exactly where the next question presses.

Steelman: Does Romans 13 Command Unconditional Obedience?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is the reading at its full strength, and history has taken it seriously, sometimes to its shame. The text has no exception clause. 'Let every person be subject' (13:1); 'he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment' (13:2). Paul does not add 'unless the ruler is wicked': he wrote under Nero and still said it. On this reading, the Christian's duty is submission, full stop, and every appeal to conscience against the state is just rebellion wearing a pious mask. Rulers have quoted it that way for centuries. If the plain text is unconditional, who are we to add conditions?" Let it stand. Then press, with a discovery.

Discovery moment (inside the steelman). Say: "Before we answer from Romans, watch the apostles themselves handle the collision. Find Acts 5:27-29: Peter and the apostles, before the council, ordered to stop preaching. Read their answer aloud."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Acts 5:29: "We must obey God rather than men." The same apostolic church that taught submission drew the line in a courtroom and took the flogging that followed (Acts 5:40-41). Now assemble the whole answer from tonight's texts. The grounding is the limit: authority "from God" (13:1) is authority under God, audited (Wis 6:3), defined as servant "for your good" (13:4); a command to do evil is the office abandoning its own charter, and obeying God first is not resisting the authority but honoring its source. The Church states it plainly: obedience to legitimate authority is a real duty (CCC 1899-1900), and "the citizen is obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order" (CCC 2242, citing Acts 5:29). And mark the manner, because it separates conscience from mere rebellion: the apostles, the martyrs, and St. Thomas More did not riot or seize power; they declined the evil command specifically, kept every other duty, and accepted the cost. Their path of refusal-with-suffering is the Church's constant pattern, though not her only permitted remedy: lawful challenge and appeal remain open, and the Catechism sets out strict conditions under which resistance to oppression can be legitimate (CCC 2243). Keep this at principle level in the room: the moment it becomes about a current party or politician, name the drift and return to the text; Paul equipped consciences, not campaigns.

Read Romans 13:8-10 aloud.

Discovery moment. Say: "'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (13:9): most people assume Jesus coined it. He was quoting, and so is Paul. Find the original command, buried in the middle of the Old Testament's holiness laws, in Leviticus 19."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Leviticus 19:18: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord," sitting in the Torah between commands about wages, justice, and grudges. Jesus' second great commandment is already in Moses, which matters for how your group reads 13:8-10: "love is the fulfilling of the law" (13:10) does not mean love replaces the commandments with a warm feeling; it means the commandments are love's job description: "love does no wrong to a neighbor" (13:10), and murder, adultery, theft, and coveting are the wrongs love never does (13:9). So the two counterfeit readings die together: legalism (commandments without love: Saul's livestock, last week) and sentimentalism ("love" invoked against the commandments: a love that wrongs the neighbor while feeling warmly toward them). And the study's law-thread completes: the law upheld by faith (3:31), fulfilled in us by the Spirit (8:4), turns out to be fulfilled as love

(13:10). One permanent debt remains on every account: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another" (13:8), the debt that is never paid off and never in default while it is being paid.

2. Read 13:11-14 aloud. What time is it, according to Paul, and what are the wardrobe instructions? Then look hard at verse 14. Where has this study heard that sentence before?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The hour: late. "Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand" (13:11-12): every day of the Christian life is closer to the dawn than the last, so live as daylight people now: "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (13:12), and note the armor: the same Greek word (hopla) as the "instruments" of righteousness you yielded in 6:13; what was surrendered is now worn. Then the sentence: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (13:14). Let the room find it: this is the verse from our first night, the one St. Augustine's eyes fell on in the Milan garden, after which he needed to read no further (Confessions VIII.12). Your group has now traveled the whole road to the sentence that ended his war, and they arrive knowing what he knew when the light flooded in: behind "put on Christ" stand thirteen chapters of mercy, and a font where the putting-on began (6:3; Gal 3:27). "Make no provision for the flesh" is the practical edge: do not pre-stock the fall; the soldier of light does not keep the old uniform in the closet.

DIG DEEPER

Nearer now than when we first believed (13:11). Paul's eschatology is a posture, not a datebook. He does not say when the day comes; he says which direction time runs: toward it. Two errors doze through the sentence: the panic that sets dates, and the drowse that assumes the alarm is broken because it has rung so long. The Church's liturgy keeps Paul's posture on an annual clock: every Advent she prays this very passage, waking as if the year were the age. The practical form of watchfulness is not calculation but readiness: live tonight so that the day's arrival would be a joy interrupted, not a scramble.

Send

1. Where in your public life, work, citizenship, online, does honoring authority need work, and where might conscience be asking you to politely, costly decline something? (Principles, not parties.)
2. What "provision for the flesh" are you still keeping in the closet, the pre-stocked occasion of the fall, and what would it mean to clear it out this week?

Live It This Week

- Pay one debt of honor deliberately this week: genuine respect to someone in rightful authority over you (boss, pastor, parent, official), in word or writing (13:7 names civil authority; the wider circle is its natural analogy).
- Identify one "provision for the flesh" and remove it: the app, the stash, the bookmark, the route past the occasion. Do not negotiate with it; clear it (13:14).

- Each night this week, pray one sentence before sleep: Lord, the night is far gone; clothe me in Christ for the day at hand.

Memory Verse

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

Romans 13:14 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, our armor and our garment, the sentence that ended St. Augustine's night has reached us in ours. We cast off what belongs to darkness; we owe every neighbor love; we serve every rightful authority, and you first. Clothe us, and let the day find us dressed. Amen.

Session 13: Put On the Lord Jesus Christ

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 13:1-7 (read aloud: authority from God; God's servant for your good; taxes, respect, honor)
- Wisdom 6:1-3 (discovery passage: dominion given from the Lord, who will search out your works; do not reveal in advance)
- Acts 5:27-29 (steelman discovery: we must obey God rather than men; do not reveal in advance; cf. Acts 5:40-41)
- Romans 13:8-10 (read aloud: owe no one anything except love; love fulfills the law)
- Leviticus 19:18 (discovery passage: love your neighbor as yourself; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 13:11-14 (read aloud: the hour; armor of light; put on the Lord Jesus Christ; cf. Rom 6:13 hopla, Gal 3:27, Confessions VIII.12)
- CCC 1899-1900, 2242, 1022 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 13:14

Session 14: Welcome One Another

Romans 14:1-15:13 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers how one body handles honest disagreement: in genuinely indifferent matters, the strong bear with the weak, no one despises and no one passes judgment, a certain conscience binds even when mistaken, liberty bows to love, and the table stays open, "welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you." The group also learns the skill of telling indifferent matters from essential ones, which is half of Christian peace.

Catholic Touchstone. Two Catholic teachings anchor the chapter: conscience binds, "a human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience" (CCC 1790), and scandal is real sin, behavior that leads another to do evil (CCC 2284). Between those two truths runs the Church's old wisdom of legitimate diversity within real unity (CCC 814): not everything Catholics differ over is a difference in the faith.

What You Need to Know

Ground the dispute historically before anyone moralizes it. Recall Session 1: Claudius expelled Rome's Jews; the churches became largely Gentile; the Jewish believers came home to communities that had stopped keeping kosher and the calendar. On that reconstruction, the presenting issues are what you would predict: food ("one believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables," 14:2, likely avoiding market meat of doubtful origin) and days (14:5, the sabbaths and feasts). The "weak in faith" (14:1) are not the morally lax but the scrupulous: those whose conscience still binds them to observances; the "strong" know that "nothing is unclean in itself" (14:14). Watch what Paul does and refuses to do: doctrinally he sides with the strong, openly (14:14, 20), and pastorally he binds the strong hardest: welcome, do not despise, do not argue the weak out of their scruples, and never let your liberty "cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died" (14:15). The strong prove their strength by what they can refrain from.

The chapter's spine is a set of sentences your group should carry out the door. Ownership: "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls" (14:4), and "none of us lives to himself... whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (14:7-8). Accountability: "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God... each of us shall give account of himself to God" (14:10, 12), the letter's last echo of chapter 2's judgment. Proportion: "the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (14:17). Conscience: "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (14:23), the verse behind the Church's teaching that conscience binds. And the model: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak... For Christ did not please himself" (15:1-3). It all lands at 15:7: "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God": the word that opened the chapter (14:1) closes it, now with its christological warrant. How did Christ welcome you? Then that is the standard.

Two cautions for leading. First, this chapter is about genuinely indifferent matters (the old word is *adiaphora*): observances, foods, customs, styles. It is not a license for treating doctrine or the moral law as matters of taste, and the chapter itself says so from inside (14:17 names righteousness as the kingdom's substance; 14:23 calls faithless action sin); the steelman handles this head-on. Second, the nearest application for most Catholic groups is our own in-house wars over genuinely lawful options: legitimate liturgical preferences among approved forms, devotional styles, fasting practices beyond what the Church requires, how the rosary is or is not prayed. (Matters settled by doctrine or binding discipline, and actual liturgical abuses, are not Romans 14

territory.) Expect the discussion to go there; let it, at the level of principle, and keep 14:3's two verbs in view, because each side has its favorite sin: the strong despise, the weak pass judgment.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalms 69:9. Paul grounds "Christ did not please himself" in the psalter: "The reproaches of those who reproached thee fell on me" (15:3). Psalm 69 is one of the Passion psalms the apostles reached for repeatedly (zeal for the house, the vinegar). Small honesty note for you: Paul quotes the Greek psalter, so his wording differs slightly from the RSV2CE's Hebrew-based rendering of Ps 69:9 ("the insults of those who insult thee have fallen on me"); same verse, two translation streams. A discovery passage; keep it back.

Mark 7:18-19. Paul's boldest sentence, "nothing is unclean in itself" (14:14), which he asserts "in the Lord Jesus," has its warrant in the Lord Jesus: Mark records him declaring "all foods clean." Paul's teaching accords with, and may well transmit, the Lord's own. A discovery passage; guard it.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN XXIII

In his first encyclical, *Ad Petri Cathedram*, St. John XXIII commended an old Christian axiom, often repeated though its original author is uncertain: in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity. It is Romans 14 in three clauses. The pope who would open the Second Vatican Council commended it as wisdom for how Catholics disagree: the essentials are not negotiable, the genuinely doubtful are not battlegrounds, and charity is not the third rule but the atmosphere of the other two.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

On the road to his martyrdom around AD 107, St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote ahead to the churches with one anxiety above the wild beasts: their unity. Be careful, he urges, to observe one Eucharist; for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup, one altar, one bishop with his presbyters and deacons (Letter to the Philadelphians 4). Ignatius guards the Eucharistic table; Romans 14's disputed meals are the shared tables of daily fellowship, connected without being identical: a community whose members will not eat together is rehearsing division at the altar. Paul spends a whole chapter keeping the weak and the free at one another's tables. (Welcome at table is not the same question as the Church's conditions for receiving Communion, which this chapter does not address.)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. PHILIP NERI

St. Philip Neri, the sixteenth-century apostle of Rome, teaches in substance, by the life his early biographers (beginning with Bacci) recount, that souls are won with gentleness and joy or usually not at all: he corrected with humor, wore his penances lightly, and refused to crush tender consciences. He is 14:17 in a cassock: the kingdom as righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. A room arguing about observances has forgotten its own atmosphere; St. Philip's instinct in disputes was to lower the temperature and raise the joy.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1790. "A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. If he were deliberately to act against it, he would condemn himself." This is 14:23 in catechetical form, and it comes with the duty your group learned in Session 3: conscience binds, and must therefore be formed, since ignorance can be culpable (the surrounding paragraphs say both).

CCC 2284-2285. Scandal: "an attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil," which takes on a particular gravity from the authority of those who cause it or the weakness of those who suffer it (CCC 2285); here it lands on the strong. Paul's "do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died" (14:15) is the apostolic form of these paragraphs.

CCC 814. The Church's unity is marked from the beginning by "a great diversity which comes from both the variety of God's gifts and the diversity of those who receive them." Legitimate diversity is not a leak in the ship; sin against unity is; the Catechism names those wounds, heresy, apostasy, and schism, at CCC 817, never differing customs.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

One body: pays off tonight. 12:4-5 ("members one of another") planted it; the welcome-table is where it either becomes real or does not. One connecting sentence.

Judgment seat: last echo. 14:10-12 is chapter 2's judgment (Session 3) heard one final time, now aimed at intra-church judging. Note the symmetry: the letter that began by disarming the judge ends by disarming him again, at the parish potluck.

Root of Jesse: quiet plant. The Dig Deeper catena ends at Isaiah 11:10, "the root of Jesse... in him shall the Gentiles hope," which is 1:3 (descended from David) returning. Plant it without comment; Session 15 harvests the letter's whole frame next week.

Final session prep. Take-Home 14 tells everyone to bring BOTH written answers (the Session 1 original and the Session 8 revision) to the final session. Announce it aloud tonight as well.

Session Goals

1. The group can define the weak and the strong historically and explain why Paul agrees with the strong and binds them hardest.
2. The group discovers Psalm 69:9 and Mark 7:18-19 and can trace "nothing unclean in itself" to the Lord's own declaration.
3. The group can distinguish indifferent matters from essentials, state why a certain conscience binds even when erroneous (14:23; CCC 1790), and name scandal as the strong's characteristic sin.
4. The group applies 14:3's two verbs (despise, condemn) to one honest in-house Catholic example without the room dividing.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 min
- Build questions 1-2 with the Mark discovery: 26 min
- Build question 3 with the Psalm 69 discovery: 17 min

- Steelman chain: 15 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer, and the bring-both-answers announcement: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress 14:5-9 (days; living and dying to the Lord) to two sentences with 14:8 read aloud. Never cut the discoveries or the steelman answer.

Session 14: Welcome One Another

Romans 14:1-15:13 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, you welcomed us when we were unwelcomeable; teach us tonight to welcome one another. Guard the essentials in us, loosen our grip on the rest, and pour charity over all of it. Make this group a table where the weak are safe and the strong are gentle, for the glory of your name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. What is a family or household difference (schedules, food, holiday customs) that once caused real friction and now makes you smile? What changed?
2. Where have you seen Christians treat a matter of taste like a matter of faith, or a matter of faith like a matter of taste?

Build

Read Romans 14:1-12 aloud.

1. Identify the two parties and their issues. Then find the two different sins in 14:3: what is the strong man's temptation toward the weak, and the weak man's toward the strong? Which is yours?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The weak in faith keep food scruples and observe days (14:2, 5), on the reading most interpreters favor, Jewish believers (and sympathizers) holding kosher practice and the calendar after the Claudius upheaval (ascetic and market-meat concerns are the main alternatives); the strong eat anything, knowing food is clean. The two sins of 14:3: "let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats." Despising is the strong man's sin: contempt, eye-rolling, treating tender consciences as stupidity. Passing judgment is the weak man's sin (14:3's own verb): making my scruple God's law, with condemnation as its natural escalation. Every in-house Catholic quarrel your group can name runs on these two engines, and each side is usually certain only the other engine exists. Paul's grounds for disarmament: "God has welcomed him" (14:3); "it is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Master is able to make him stand" (14:4); and "each of us shall give account of himself to God" (14:12): of himself, the pronoun that ends most arguments.

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul stakes his boldest claim on the Lord's own authority: 'I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself' (14:14). His teaching matches the Lord's own, given over a dispute about washing and eating. Find the declaration near the end of Mark 7."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Mark 7:18-19: what goes into a man from outside cannot defile him, "since it enters, not his heart but his stomach"; and Mark adds the editorial thunderclap: "Thus he declared all foods clean." So the strong are doctrinally right, and Paul says so in public, twice (14:14, 20): the kosher wall, given for a season, has served its purpose. Now watch what Paul does with being right: he immediately handcuffs it. "It is

unclean for any one who thinks it unclean" (14:14), and "if your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died" (14:15). Being right is not a license; it is a responsibility, and its price is measured at the cross: Christ died for the brother your liberty could flatten. The Church's name for the strong man's failure here is scandal (CCC 2284-2285): conduct that leads another to act against conscience, and "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (14:23), so pressuring a scrupulous brother past his conscience does not free him; it teaches him to sin. A certain judgment of conscience binds even when mistaken (CCC 1790), which is why the path for the weak is formation over time (CCC 1783-1785), never violation tonight.

2. Read 14:17 and weigh it. If the kingdom is not food and drink, what is it? What does this verse do to every dispute about observances, and what does it explicitly NOT relativize?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

"The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (14:17). It is Paul's proportion-check: observances are servants of the kingdom, not its substance, so a fight about the servants that destroys the substance has lost everything to keep nothing. But read the verse's positive half as closely as its negative: the kingdom is righteousness, so this text cannot be conscripted to relativize the moral law; it relativizes menus, not commandments. And it is peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, which means the temperature and atmosphere of a disagreement are themselves theological data: a faction that is right without peace or joy has misplaced the kingdom while defending it.

Read Romans 15:1-13 aloud.

Discovery moment. Say: "'Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written...' (15:3). Paul reaches for a psalm the apostles quoted constantly about the Passion, a psalm of zeal and vinegar. Find the verse he cites, in Psalm 69."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Psalm 69:9: "For zeal for thy house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult thee have fallen on me." (Paul's wording, "the reproaches of those who reproached thee fell on me," follows the Greek psalter the apostles used; same verse, two translation streams, worth one honest sentence to the group.) The argument: bearing with the weak has a model, and the model is Calvary: Christ absorbed reproaches that were not his, so the strong can absorb inconveniences that are not theirs. Then the crescendo: welcome one another "as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (15:7), and Christ's welcome reached both rooms of the house: he became "a servant to the circumcised" to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, and opened mercy to the Gentiles (15:8-9), sealed with a four-text catena in which Moses, David, and Isaiah all summon the nations to praise (15:9-12). The dispute about menus dissolves into a choir with two sections singing one hymn. And Paul signs the section with a benediction worth praying over your group verbatim: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (15:13).

Steelman: Is Everything Now a Disputable Matter?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is a reading you will meet everywhere, inside the Church and out, and it deserves its strongest form. Paul, faced with a religious dispute, refuses to legislate: 'let every

one be fully convinced in his own mind' (14:5); each stands before his own master (14:4); who are you to judge? On this reading, Romans 14 is Christianity's declaration of private judgment: sincere conviction is what matters, rules are secondary, and any church that binds consciences on food, days, worship, or, extend the logic, doctrine and morals, has unlearned this chapter. In its strongest confessional form the claim is narrower and sharper: Scripture alone binds the conscience, so in everything Scripture leaves free no church may legislate, and Rome's fasts, feasts, and disciplines are exactly the man-made burdens Paul refuses to impose. Isn't 'fully convinced in his own mind' the death of religious authority?" Let its modern plausibility fill the room. Then press.

3. Press: Three tests from inside the chapter and one from the letter. What kind of matters is Paul handling, and does he treat them as unknowable? What does 14:17 put beyond dispute? What does 14:23 call unfaithful action? And glance ahead: how does Paul treat deviation from "the doctrine which you have been taught" two chapters from now (16:17)?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

First: the chapter's subject matter is observances, foods and days, genuinely indifferent things, and Paul does not treat even these as unknowable: he settles the doctrinal question himself, with authority, "in the Lord Jesus" (14:14). The liberty of 14:5 operates inside a truth an apostle has just defined; private judgment did not draw the boundaries of the dispute, apostolic teaching did, which quietly makes the opposite point: someone must have authority to declare which matters are indifferent, or every faction will promote its preferences to essentials and demote essentials to preferences. (That answers the sharper confessional form too: Romans 14 itself shows an apostle, not the private reader, drawing the line between bound and free; and the Church's disciplines bind as household order under real authority, not as divine law added to the gospel.) Second: 14:17 puts righteousness inside the kingdom's definition; the moral law is not on the menu. Third: 14:23 makes sincerity necessary but not sufficient: acting against conscience is sin, and nothing in the chapter says acting from a malformed conscience is thereby made good, which is why conscience must be formed (Session 3; CCC 1790 and its neighbors). Fourth: the same Paul writes, later in chapter 16 (16:17), "take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them": there is a taught doctrine, it is normative, and departure from it is not a Romans 14 liberty. So the honest synthesis, which is the Church's: in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity, the axiom St. John XXIII approvingly cited in his first encyclical. Romans 14 is the charter of the middle clause, not the abolition of the first. And turn the blade toward our own house before closing: Catholics rarely err today by relativizing food laws; we err by fighting lawful liturgical and devotional options as if they were the Creed. This chapter reads us, both verbs of 14:3 at a time.

DIG DEEPER

The catena's last note (15:12). Paul closes the section with Isaiah: "The root of Jesse shall come, he who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles hope" (15:12, citing Isa 11:10). Hear the frame clicking shut: the letter opened with the gospel of the Son "descended from David" (1:3), and its argument ends with David's root as the hope of the nations. The scandal Rome's house churches were living, Jews and Gentiles at one table, is not a problem the gospel tolerates; it is the very thing the prophets said the Messiah would produce. Keep this connection in your pocket; next week the letter's first sentence returns in another way, and the group will find it themselves.

Send

1. Which verb of 14:3 is yours, despising or condemning, and toward whom? What would welcoming that person "as Christ has welcomed you" (15:7) cost?
2. Where might your liberty, speech, or example be a stumbling block to someone weaker than you assume? What will you refrain from, for love, this week?

Live It This Week

- Identify one in-house preference you have treated as an essential, and pray for the Catholics on the other side of it, by name if you can, every day this week.
- Do one concrete act of welcome toward a Christian whose style or scruples grate on you: a meal, a message, a seat saved.
- Pray 15:13 over your group and your parish each day: God of hope, fill them with all joy and peace in believing.
- FIND BOTH OF YOUR WRITTEN ANSWERS, the Session 1 sealed guess and the Session 8 revision, AND BRING THEM NEXT WEEK. The final session needs them.

Memory Verse

"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

Romans 15:7 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord Christ, you did not please yourself; you bore what was not yours and welcomed those who were not worthy, and we are they. Make the strong among us gentle and the scrupulous among us free, and all of us one at your table. May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing. Amen.

Session 14: Welcome One Another

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 14:1-12 (read aloud: weak and strong; despise and condemn; his own master; judgment seat; account of himself)
- Mark 7:18-19 (discovery passage: he declared all foods clean; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 14:13-23 (nothing unclean in itself; ruin of one for whom Christ died; kingdom as righteousness, peace, joy; whatever is not from faith is sin)
- Romans 15:1-13 (read aloud: bear with the weak; Christ did not please himself; welcome one another; the catena; the benediction)
- Psalm 69:9 (discovery passage: the reproaches fell on me; do not reveal in advance; note the Greek-psalter wording)
- Romans 16:17 (steelman text: the doctrine which you have been taught; cited within the press)
- Isaiah 11:10 with Romans 15:12 (Dig Deeper: the root of Jesse; frame with 1:3)
- CCC 1790 (with 1783-1785), 2284-2285, 814, 817 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 15:7. ANNOUNCE: bring both written answers next week.

Session 15: To the Only Wise God

Romans 15:14-16:27 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The final session lets the letter end as Paul ended it: mission (Spain, and the collection binding Gentile and Jewish churches in real communion), persons (Phoebe and the two dozen and more named saints of Rome's house churches), vigilance (mark those who oppose the taught doctrine), victory (the God of peace crushing Satan underfoot, the Bible's first promise kept), and doxology, in which the group discovers with their own eyes that the letter's last thought is its first: the obedience of faith. The study closes with a final-answer ritual and a commissioning.

Catholic Touchstone. The Catechism gives the study's title its final face: "The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith" (CCC 148). And the ending's texture is Catholic ecclesiology in miniature: a priestly ministry of the gospel, letters of communion between churches, a normative deposit of doctrine, material solidarity across the world, and a family of named saints: the Church visible and warm at once.

What You Need to Know

Movement one: the missionary (15:14-33). Paul names his ministry in liturgical vocabulary your group met in Session 12: grace was given him "in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable" (15:16). His ambition: "to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named" (15:20), which is why Rome was not his field of first evangelization, though he longed to preach among and strengthen them too (1:15), but his hoped-for staging ground for Spain (15:24, 28). First, though, Jerusalem, carrying the collection from Macedonia and Achaia "for the poor among the saints" (15:26), and note Paul's theology of it: the Gentiles "are in debt to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings" (15:27): communion is not a sentiment; it moves money. He asks their prayers for the journey (15:30-32); he knew Jerusalem was dangerous, and he was right: the trip ends in the arrest that eventually brings him to Rome in chains. He never reached Spain so far as we know; he reached Rome as a prisoner and watered it with his blood, and in the strange way of providence, the outcome can be read as exceeding the asking.

Movement two: the persons (16:1-16). First, Phoebe: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae... for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well" (16:1-2). Two honest notes. The RSV2CE's "deaconess" renders diakonos, a word Paul uses elsewhere for "servant" and "minister"; what precisely Phoebe's role was, Scripture does not define, and the Church, which has clarified that the ordained diaconate belongs to the sacrament of Holy Orders, does not read this verse as settling a question it does not address. What is very likely, as the Church has long inferred: Phoebe as the letter's carrier, since a commendation like this is what you gave the bearer. What is certain: a patron and protector of many (the word behind "helper" is strong), commended to the whole Roman church. Then the greetings: twenty-six names in the greetings, twenty-seven with Phoebe, plus households and unnamed kin: house churches ("the church in their house," 16:5), Prisca and Aquila who "risked their necks" (16:3-4), workers and beloved ones, many of them women, several of them slaves' names. On 16:7, be honest at the level the study has practiced: the RSV2CE prints "Greet Andronicus and Junias... they are men of note among the apostles," reading the second name as a man's; many ancient readers, St. John Chrysostom among them, read the name as Junia, a woman, and marveled at the honor; and scholars also debate whether the phrase means "notable among the apostles" or "well known to the apostles." The Church has not defined the verse; teach the certainties (an

honored, suffering, senior pair of Jewish believers, in Christ before Paul) and hold the disputed parts with open hands.

Movement three: vigilance and victory (16:17-20). One warning: "take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them" (16:17): there is a taught deposit, and charity toward persons never meant indifference toward it (last week's steelman, confirmed by the author). Then the promise your group will trace to the Bible's third chapter: "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (16:20). Movement four: the doxology (16:25-27), and inside it, the study's buried treasure: the mystery now disclosed to all nations "to bring about the obedience of faith." Do not say the phrase before the discovery moment; the group must find with their own eyes that Paul's last thought is his first (1:5), and then the study's title, threads, and fifteen weeks close in one turn of a page. The final ritual and commissioning follow; run them unhurried, and end on the benediction.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Genesis 3:15. Paul's promise that "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (16:20) reaches back to the Bible's first promise of redemption, spoken to the serpent in Eden: enmity between the serpent and the woman, between his seed and hers; "he shall bruise your head." The protoevangelium, the first gospel, and Paul's small addition is enormous: under YOUR feet; the Body shares the Head's victory. A discovery passage; guard it.

Romans 1:5. The session's second discovery is the letter itself: the doxology's "obedience of faith" (16:26) sends the group back to the first sentence they ever read in this study. Fifteen weeks of Scripture searching ends with the group discovering the study's own architecture. Do not rob them of it.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

St. John Chrysostom would not let his congregation skip the names. Preaching through Romans 16, he lingers over each greeting as over relics, and at 16:7 he marvels openly: "Oh how great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!" (Homilies on Romans 31), reading the name as Junia and the honor at full strength. And in his final homily on the letter he confesses what Romans had done to him: he loves Rome itself, he says, above all for this, that Paul wrote to the Romans in life and lies among them in death, and he longs to see even the dust of that body. The greatest preacher of the ancient Church ends the greatest letter with unashamed emotion over its people, which is exactly how a study of it should end.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. LAWRENCE

The tradition recounted by St. Ambrose (On the Duties of the Clergy, Book II) tells how St. Lawrence, deacon of Rome, ordered by the prefect in 258 to surrender the Church's treasures, asked for three days, gathered the city's poor, the blind, and the lame, and presented them: these are the treasures of the Church. It is Paul's collection theology (15:26-27) made into a single unforgettable scene: the wealth Christians carry between churches and centuries is Christ in his members, and the poor of the saints are not the Church's burden but her treasury. The gridiron and the martyr's jokes come down through the wider tradition; the treasures scene is St. Ambrose's own account, and Rome has never forgotten either.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS

St. Irenaeus, the study's theologian of recapitulation, supplies the final session's deepest note: "The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience" (Against Heresies, Book III, quoted at CCC 494). What disobedience tangled in a garden, obedience loosened in a fiat: and the Catechism draws tonight's conclusion for us: "The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith" (CCC 148). The phrase your group has traced from the letter's first sentence to its last is not an abstraction; it has a face, a name, and a yes. Where Genesis 3:15 promised the woman's seed would crush the serpent, the obedience of faith is how the promise walks.

Catechism Connection

CCC 148. "The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith." The Catechism closes the study's title thread in a single sentence: the phrase Paul frames the letter with has its perfect human instance, and she said it in one word.

CCC 494. Carries the St. Irenaeus sentence (Eve's knot, Mary's obedience) and Mary's fiat as "the obedience of faith" in action: believing that nothing is impossible with God and consenting.

CCC 849-850. The missionary mandate: the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature (CCC 850, drawing on Ad Gentes 2), sent to all nations. Paul's Spain ambition and the sending chain of 10:14-15 are not apostolic idiosyncrasy; they are the Church's permanent shape, and tonight's commissioning stands on this paragraph.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

THE INCLUSIO: HARVESTS TONIGHT. Fifteen weeks of restraint pay off in one discovery. Run it exactly as scripted, after the Genesis 3:15 discovery, and let a group member be the one who says "that's the first verse" out loud. Then, and only then, name the study's architecture: 1:5 and 16:26, the frame around everything.

Root of Jesse, closed. Last week's Isa 11:10 plant plus tonight's frame: descended from David (1:3) to the root of Jesse (15:12) to the obedience of faith among all nations (16:26). One sentence in the harvest.

Gen 3:15 and Session 6. The serpent-crusher promise connects Adam-and-Christ (Session 6) and Mary's obedience (tonight's St. Irenaeus Voice). Let the Voices carry it; no lecture.

The final ritual. Both written answers in hand (announced last week; message anyone who forgot to bring theirs, they can rewrite from memory). Third and final answer written tonight, all three kept. Close with the 15:13 benediction and the commissioning.

Session Goals

1. The group can describe Paul's mission logic (unreached fields, the collection as embodied communion) and what actually happened on the Jerusalem road.
2. The group meets Phoebe and the Roman saints, and can state the certainties and the honest open questions about 16:1-2 and 16:7.
3. The group discovers Genesis 3:15 behind 16:20 and the inclusio of 1:5 and 16:26 with their own eyes.

4. Every participant writes a final answer, keeps all three, and leaves commissioned: with one named mission field and the study's benediction.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win question (one only): 10 min
- Build questions 1-2 (mission and collection; Phoebe and the names): 28 min
- Build question 3 with the Genesis 3:15 discovery, then the inclusio discovery: 20 min
- The final ritual and commissioning: 15 min
- Memory verse, closing prayer and benediction: 10 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress 16:17-19 (vigilance) to one read-aloud with a single sentence of comment. Never cut the discoveries or the final ritual; they are the destination of fifteen weeks.

Session 15: To the Only Wise God

Romans 15:14-16:27 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, fifteen weeks ago we opened a letter; tonight we finish it changed. Thank you for every discovery, every hard question you did not fear, every mercy the apostle showed us. Give us tonight the joy of the ending, the honesty of the open questions, and the obedience of faith to carry out the door. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. Fifteen weeks in one breath: what is the single moment of this study you will still remember a year from now?

Build

Read Romans 15:14-33 aloud.

1. Find Paul's job description (15:16), his ambition (15:20), and his itinerary (15:24-28). What is the collection, and what does Paul's "debt" logic in 15:27 teach about what communion between churches actually is? Then: did Paul's travel prayers (15:30-32) get answered?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The job: "the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable" (15:16), Session 12's liturgical vocabulary describing evangelization itself. The ambition: virgin soil, "not where Christ has already been named" (15:20), hence Spain, with Rome as the sending base he hopes will speed him (15:24). The collection: Gentile Macedonia and Achaia sending relief to the poor among Jerusalem's saints, and Paul's logic makes it more than charity: the Gentiles "are in debt," having shared Israel's spiritual blessings, so material solidarity is communion made visible and payable (15:27): the olive tree (Session 11) with a treasury. And the prayers: Paul asked to be delivered from the disobedient in Judea and to come to Rome with joy (15:31-32). He was arrested in Jerusalem, spent years in custody, and reached Rome in chains, where tradition holds he was beheaded under Nero. The prayer can be read as answered sideways and greater: Rome got Paul for good, his martyrdom sealed his witness, and "we know that in everything God works for good" (8:28) got its author as its proof. Let the group sit with that honestly: unanswered prayers and over-answered ones can be the same prayers.

Read Romans 16:1-16 aloud, all the names, slowly; do not skip or stumble past them.

2. Meet Phoebe (16:1-2): what is she commended as, what has she done, and what is she almost certainly carrying? Then scan the list: what kinds of people make up Rome's churches, and what surprises you? Handle 16:7 honestly: what is certain, and what is disputed?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Phoebe: "our sister... a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae," to be received "as befits the saints," "a helper of many and of myself as well" (16:1-2). A commendation like this is what a letter-bearer carried, so Phoebe is very likely, as the Church has long inferred, the one entrusted to deliver Romans itself: the

greatest letter ever written traveled in her luggage. Honest precision, as this study has practiced it: "deaconess" renders diakonos, a word Paul uses for servant and minister broadly; what her role involved, Scripture does not define, and this verse does not settle questions about Holy Orders that it does not address; her greatness needs no inflation and tolerates no erasure: patron, protector, trusted courier, saint. The list: twenty-six named in the greetings, twenty-seven counting Phoebe, plus households and unnamed kin: house churches (16:5), tentmaker missionaries who "risked their necks" for Paul (Prisca and Aquila, 16:3-4), many women laborers ("Mary, who has worked hard among you," 16:6), names common among slaves and freedmen beside possible aristocrats: a cross-section of the empire, kissing in greeting (16:16). And 16:7: the RSV2CE reads "Andronicus and Junias... men of note among the apostles." Certain: a Jewish pair, imprisoned with Paul, in Christ before him, held in honor. Disputed, and honestly so: many ancient readers, St. John Chrysostom gladly among them, read the second name as Junia, a woman; and the phrase itself may mean notable among the apostles (in the broad sense of commissioned missionaries) or well known to the apostles. The Church has not defined it; hold the open parts with open hands, and honor what is certain: the earliest Church's front line was full of households, couples, women, slaves, and people of no worldly standing whom heaven knew by name.

Read Romans 16:17-20 aloud.

Discovery moment. Say: "'then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet' (16:20). Crushing a serpent underfoot is the Bible's first promise of redemption, made in a garden, to a snake, about a woman and her seed. Find the Bible's first gospel, in Genesis 3."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." The Church calls it the protoevangelium, the first announcement of the gospel: from the wreckage of Eden, a promise that the woman's offspring would crush the serpent's head at the cost of a wounded heel. Paul, eleven chapters after retelling Adam's fall (5:12), applies the victory Christ has already won and anticipates its final crushing, with one staggering adjustment: "under YOUR feet." The victory is Christ's, and the Body shares the Head's triumph: the ordinary saints just named can be seen as the feet in the sentence. And notice who stands beside the promise from its first utterance: the woman. Tonight's third Voice will finish that thought. First, one more discovery, the study's last.

Read Romans 16:25-27 aloud, slowly. Then run the study's final discovery.

Discovery moment: the inclusio. Say: "Paul's doxology says the mystery is now made known to all nations for a purpose: 'to bring about the obedience of faith' (16:26). That phrase should sound familiar. Paul has used it exactly once before, in a sentence you have known for fifteen weeks. Find it." Then wait. Let someone turn to the first page of the letter and say it aloud.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Romans 1:5: "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations." The letter's first thought and its last thought are the same thought: Paul framed sixteen chapters, justification, baptism, the Spirit, Israel, the living sacrifice, the welcome table, inside one phrase, and this study took its name from the frame. Now harvest the whole arc aloud, briefly: faith that submits intellect and will (Session 1; CCC 143); Abraham, whose faith set out, grew strong, and was completed (Session 5); the Son

whose obedience undid the disobedience of Adam (Session 6, 5:19); hearts made "obedient from the heart" at the font (Session 7, 6:17); the law fulfilled as love by the Spirit (Sessions 9 and 13); a body offered as a living sacrifice, since to obey is better than sacrifice (Session 12); and now the mystery published among all nations for exactly this: the obedience of faith. The question your sealed guess asked, what must a person do to be saved, has spent fifteen weeks becoming this answer: receive everything, grace, Christ, Baptism, the Spirit, by a living faith that hands God everything, works through love, and perseveres, all of it supplied, sustained, and crowned by God himself. To the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ (16:27).

The Final Answer: Closing Ritual

Everyone takes out both written answers: the Session 1 sealed guess and the Session 8 revision. Read your own two answers silently, in order. Then, at the bottom of tonight's Take-Home, write your third and final answer to the same question, dated: In one sentence, what must a person do to be saved? Keep all three together somewhere you will find them in ten years. Then two rounds aloud, brief, voluntary: (1) one sentence: how did your answer travel from the first writing to the last? (2) one sentence: what will you do differently because of this letter? Close the sharing by reading Romans 15:13 over the group as a benediction, by name if the group is small. Then the commissioning below.

The commissioning. Say: "Paul looked at a map and saw Spain: the place where Christ was not yet named, that he was built to reach. Before we pray, name your Spain silently: the person, place, or work where your obedience of faith is being sent, and be specific. The chain of 10:14-15 does not end in this room unless we end it." Allow thirty seconds of silence, then close with the prayer below.

DIG DEEPER

Why the names matter (a last word for the road). Romans ends in a crowd on purpose. The letter that scaled the highest doctrines in Scripture lands in a room of particular people: a courier, a tentmaking couple, a hard-working Mary, prisoners, households, a woman Paul calls his own mother too (16:13). Doctrine that does not land in named people has not landed; and every parish directory is Romans 16 continued, the communion of saints in its working clothes. St. John Chrysostom lingered over these names as over relics; the least we owe them is to read our own list the same way.

Send

The Send questions are the ritual and the commissioning above; nothing further is needed tonight.

Live It From Here

- Keep all three answers together, dated, and reread them yearly: on the anniversary of tonight, or on your baptismal date from Session 7.
- Take one first concrete step toward your Spain within seven days, and tell one person from this group what it was.
- Read Romans again, alone, one chapter a day for sixteen days, and watch how much of it now reads you.

- Entrust the whole of it to the one who most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith (CCC 148): one Memorare or one decade, for this group, tonight.

Memory Verse

"Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations."

Romans 1:5 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Now to him who is able to strengthen us according to the gospel we have studied: Father, we thank you for this letter and this table, for every question you answered and every one you outrank. Crush Satan under our feet soon; send us to our Spains; and work in us, all our lives, the obedience of faith. May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may abound in hope. To the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Session 15: To the Only Wise God

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 15:14-33 (read aloud: priestly service; Spain; the collection; the travel prayers; cf. Rom 8:28)
- Romans 16:1-16 (read aloud, all names: Phoebe; Prisca and Aquila; the house churches; 16:7 handled honestly)
- Romans 16:17-20 (read aloud: mark the dissenters; the God of peace will crush Satan)
- Genesis 3:15 (discovery passage: the protoevangelium; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 16:25-27 (read slowly: the doxology; launches the inclusio discovery)
- Romans 1:5 (the inclusio discovery's destination; the group finds it themselves)
- Romans 15:13 (the benediction, read over the group in the ritual)
- CCC 148, 494, 849-850 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 1:5