

READING ROMANS

OCT 9 - NOV 20



Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Week 1: Setting the Scene

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. What previous experience have you had reading the Letter to the Romans ("Romans")? What influence has it had on your own faith journey and why? What are you looking forward to about this series?
3. Read Romans 15:17-24. What kind of transition is going on in Paul's ministry "career"? What emotion do you detect here? How might this personal circumstance affect his purpose for writing to the churches in Rome?
4. Read Romans 15:25-33. Why do you think Paul is apprehensive about his upcoming trip to Jerusalem? What influence might this have had on the content of this letter.
5. In the message on Sunday, we heard how Jewish followers of Jesus were returning to Rome after being expelled and rejoining churches that had since become more non-Jewish in culture. Reflect and share on the following:
 - How do you think the returnees would have felt?
 - What kind of reception do you think they might have had?
 - What are some comparable situations in modern day Christianity?
 - What about at Cedar Ridge specifically?
 - Have you ever felt a lack of acceptance from a faith community?
 - Have you ever felt uncomfortable when new people have joined your faith community?
6. Read Romans 1:1-7. How do you see Paul making a connection with people from a Jewish background in his salutation? How does he reach out to non-Jewish people? Why do you think reconciliation and unity is so important to Paul?
7. If you are discussing these questions as a group, break up into smaller groups of 2 or 3 and share about how life is going at the moment. If you are reflecting on these questions alone, take some time this week to meet with a trusted friend to share. After sharing, spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week: Sacred Reading of Scripture – Romans 1:7-17

This is a way of praying with scripture that has been used for centuries by followers of Jesus and is often called "Lectio Divina" which is Latin for sacred or divine reading. A regular practice of Lectio Divina cultivates the ability to listen deeply to scripture and allow God's presence to open our lives. It helps us listen for the still small voice of God speaking to us personally here and now, and to grow in awareness of God's presence with us, in us and around us. We interact with the text of scripture but unlike Bible study we do not analyze or dissect it. We listen in quiet and allow the words to settle into us as we quiet our thinking to receive them deeply into our hearts.

There are many ways to engage with Lectio Divina, but four steps are commonly used: read, meditate, respond, and rest (you might prefer to listen to the scripture rather than read it and there are some

great apps and websites for that such as www.biblegateway.com). Before you begin the steps outlined below, sit comfortably in silence with your back straight, feet planted on the floor, arms relaxed, and hands supported in your lap. Close your eyes and relax your shoulders. Listen to your breath as you breathe. Feel your breath in your nostrils, chest, and abdomen, inhaling and then exhaling fully and deeply—hold your exhale a bit longer than usual to completely expel air. Continue with regular rhythmic deep breathing. Allow tension to fade away from your body, and your spirit to be at peace.

Read

Read the passage of scripture (Romans 1:7-17). This is best done slowly and intentionally with an awareness of God's presence speaking through the text. Simply listen for God's voice in this moment. Don't search or seek out the meaning on your own, but rather wait, and listen for something to emerge. When a word or phrase seems to settle on you, take it in and just sit with it in the silence.

Meditate

Read the text again for the purpose of "hearing" or "seeing" God in it. This is a deep searching of the heart. Ponder it, reflect on it, ask how this is applicable to your own experience, your own life? How is God reaching you right now, speaking to you in the word or phrase?

Respond

The third reading is for the purpose of responding back to God, expressing honestly whatever is happening in your heart and spirit as a result of listening. There may be joy, tears, awe, reverence, even confusion - give any emotion or thought that arises freely to God at this time. And listen for how God might want you to turn, move or act because of what you've heard.

Rest

Finally, let your mind and emotions settle to rest in silence and simply seek to love and be loved by God. Anytime distracting thoughts arise, just return to the word that stood out in the reading, and repeat it, and allow other thoughts to fade. Allow this "sacred word" to symbolize all your love for God, and your willingness to give God all your attention. Sit in the presence of God and use the word as a window through which to gaze upon God and to allow the love of God to stream into your heart and spirit.

Week 2: We Are All In This Together

1. What resonated with you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything you thought was confusing or unhelpful?
2. Ruth talked about how different theologians have interpreted Romans 1-4 through their own worldview—focusing on honor and shame, law-breaking and punishment, contractual arrangements with God, etc.—while Paul is writing from a worldview of covenants and sacrifice. How does your worldview impact how you read the Bible?
3. Read Romans 1:16-32. This section contains several religious terms that have been interpreted in many ways. What is your understanding of the following terms, and how has that changed over the course of your faith journey?
 - Sin
 - Salvation
 - Faith
 - The gospel
4. Cedar Ridge welcomes and affirms all people, regardless of sexuality or gender identity. This passage has been misused to oppress and persecute LGBTQ+ people. How does understanding this passage in its historical context (where sexual orientation was unknown and heterosexuality was assumed to be “natural”), and in its literary context (on a section addressing idolatry and injustice) shed a different light on the text?
5. Read Romans 3:9-26 and discuss the following:
 - What does this passage say about sin? How does sin act like a “power”?
 - How has the righteousness (or faithfulness) of God been made known?
 - Why was the shedding of blood important in the first century Jewish context? How is this analogy helpful today? How is it unhelpful?
6. Read Romans 4:1-8 and 16-21. How is Abraham an illustration of God’s grace and our response?
7. If you are discussing these questions as a group, take some time to share briefly about an area where you need God’s grace, or an area where you want to be more faithful. (You might want to break up into smaller groups of 2 or 3 to do this.) If you are reflecting on these questions alone, take some time this week to meet with a trusted friend to share. After sharing, spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week: Living in grace

All are justified by God’s grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:24)

Throughout this week, contemplate Romans 3:24.

- When you feel far from God, or your heart is heavy, remember God’s gift of grace. You are unconditionally loved, and nothing you can do will lessen (or increase) God’s love for you.
- When people are difficult or hurtful, remember all are recipients of God’s grace. Choose to love and extend grace in response to God’s love and grace to you.

Week 3: The Spirit of Life

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. Paul, the author of this letter to the Romans, emphasizes a mystical view of Jesus as “the Risen Christ” in our present reality, and focuses less on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. How would you describe your own experience of Christ in your everyday life? What impact does this have on your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors? How does this experience relate to how you respond to the teachings of Jesus?
3. Read Romans 5:12-21. Why do you think Paul uses the metaphor of Adam to universalize the human condition he calls “sin”? In what way do you experience sin as universal? How do you see the collective nature of sin playing out in your own life personally and in society in general?
4. In the above passage, Paul compares Adam to Jesus and seems to suggest that while Adam brings a universal problem, Jesus Christ brings a universal solution. How do you think this universality of Christ applies to humanity as a whole? What is the significance of this in terms of how we live as followers of Jesus and in how we view the world?
5. Read Romans 7:14-25 in The Message version (you can find this easily online at www.biblegateway.com). Can you describe a time when you have experienced this same kind of compulsion, where it seemed despite your awareness and understanding you still felt compelled to act out in a way that was wrong? Now read Romans 8:1-17 (in The Message version again). Can you describe an experience like this when you felt the “Law of the Spirit of Life” (the Spirit of Christ) at work in you such that you seemed empowered to act in ways you may not have thought possible?
6. From Romans 5:1-8 and Romans 8:35-39, what encouragement can you identify to help with the struggle between the two powers at work in you in the above question? What practices might help you experience more of God’s love empowering you?
7. If you are discussing these questions as a group break up into smaller groups of 2 or 3 and share about the readings in question 5 above. What are some current issues and situations in your life where you are struggling to do what you know is the right thing and need to experience more of the Spirit of Christ? After sharing, spend some time praying for one another. If you are reflecting on these questions alone, take some time this week to meet with a trusted friend to share and pray.

Practice for the week: Spirit consciousness

This week take a brief moment at the beginning of each day to center yourself on God’s love and acceptance, and invite the Spirit of Christ to fill your whole being. Let go and just sink into union with Christ. Throughout the day, try to be conscious of moments where you feel negative compulsions. This might relate to what you consume (eat, drink, watch, etc.), or how you react to situations or people, or how you think and feel. In these moments, invite the Spirit of Christ, recenter, and sink into union. Each time you feel positive empowerment in this way, give thanks. Each time you feel the compulsion still overcame you, don’t beat yourself up—just acknowledge your struggle and that the Spirit of Christ is

still with you. Determine to persevere in the struggle because *"perseverance produces character, character produces hope and hope does not disappoint because God has poured out love into our hearts through God's Spirit given freely to us"* (Romans 5:3-5).

Week 4: The Mystery of Mercy

1. What has impacted you most in your reading of Romans and this series so far? What has been inspiring, what has been challenging?
2. What struck you about this week's reading (Romans 9-11) and what insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
3. When this letter was first written, there were no chapter or verse annotations included. Read Romans 8:35-9:5 in continuity. What does this passage say about God's love? What does it say about Paul's love? How might this influence the way we read Romans 9-11 as a whole?
4. Read Romans 9:6-18. What is your reaction to this passage? What about this seems unfair or unjust? What about it rings true for you? How does this relate to Jesus' words in Matthew 13:10-17? What do you think Jesus and Paul are trying to explain here?
5. Read Romans 10:1-4. The last verse here has been used to justify a perspective that God is "done" with Judaism and Jewish people (because the Torah is now ended).
 - Why do you think we are so quick to try to dismiss other people's religious views?
 - What has been your experience of this: have you been dismissed, or have you dismissed others?

The word for "end" means "goal" or "destination." In other words, Paul seems to be saying Christ is the fulfillment of all that the Jewish Law sought to accomplish, rather than the end of it.

- What might that kind of fulfillment look like practically in real life?
 - How does this relate to Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 (and in Matthew 5:17-18 in particular)?
 - What does it mean that Christ fulfills the law universally (for "everyone" in Romans 10:4)?
6. This section of Romans 9-11 has been used historically and in the present day to foster religious and socio-political elitism, where some people are in, and some people are out. What examples of this do you see in history? What examples do you see in the present day? Read Romans 11: 28-32. What does Paul see as the factor that unifies us all? What does this mean for your own life personally in how you view yourself and others?
 7. If you are discussing these questions as a group, break up into smaller groups of 2 or 3. Read Romans 10:20-21 where Paul twice cites the prophet Isaiah. Each share how in your current life you are experiencing the kind of mercy described in v20. Then each share about areas in your life where you are resistant (v21). After sharing, spend some time praying for one another. If you are reflecting on these questions alone, take some time this week to meet with a trusted friend to share and pray.

Practice for the week: The Mystery of Mercy

This week try to start each day by reading Romans 11:33-36 and center yourself on the mystery of God's mercy at work in the world. Throughout the day stay tuned in and consciously aware of God's mercy in every situation. When you have trouble such as when you fail in some way, or someone else does, or you experience conflict, ask how God's mercy might be at work in your life and others'. Consciously

open your heart to it and yield to God in the situation even though you might not understand how it is playing out. And when you have positive experiences, consciously celebrate God's mercy, and give thanks.

Week 5: Living as Children of God

1. What resonated with you from the message on Sunday? Was anything helpful or confusing? Was there anything with which you disagreed?
2. Read Romans 12:1. How do you understand the exhortation to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice”? Ruth mentioned on Sunday that the Greek reads that this is “your logical worship.” In what ways do you think this is the logical response to what Paul has presented in chapters 1-11?
3. Read Romans 12:2-8.
 - Think of a way or a situation in which you feel pressured to “conform to the pattern of this world.” What might it look like to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” in this context?
 - What does Paul think will be the result of this new perspective in terms of our thoughts about ourselves, other people, and the church community as a whole?
 - What gifts can or do you contribute to “the body”?
4. Read Romans 12:9-16. There are a lot of instructions here! Which seem most relevant to you right now, and why?
5. Read Romans 12:17-21 and Matthew 5:43-48. How do these two passages inform one another? What point do you think Paul is trying to make here?
6. Read Romans 13:1-7. This passage has been used by various regimes to stifle dissent. How can we understand this passage in a healthier way? How does this passage connect to Romans 12:17-21?
7. Read Romans 13:8-14. Paul uses the analogy of things we do in the dark versus things we do in the light, and declares that “the night is nearly over; the day is almost here.” Is there an area of your life, a specific relationship or situation where you would like to see more of God’s light? If you are discussing these questions in a group, take some time to share and pray for one another in smaller groups of 2 or 3. If you are reflecting alone, talk honestly to God about this, without shame or fear of judgment.

Practice for the week: Having the Mind of Christ

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—God’s good, pleasing and perfect will.

(Romans 12:2)

This week try to start each day by reading the verse above. Ask God to help you think with the mind of Christ as you go through your day. In your interactions with various people throughout the day, imagine how Jesus sees them. Ask yourself how you can respond to them in a loving way.

Week 6: Thankful for Family and Friends

1. What stood out to you from the message on Sunday? Was anything helpful or timely? Was there anything with which you disagreed?
2. Read Romans 14:1-23.
 - What divisive issues in the church today do you view as “disputable matters”?
 - Why do you think Paul uses the terms “weak” and “strong”? With which term do you identify, and why?
 - How does Paul address (i) having conviction, and (ii) striving for peace? Is it possible to do both simultaneously, and if so, how?
 - What does Paul mean when he says, “everything that does not come from faith is sin” (v. 23)?
3. Read Romans 15:1-13. Think of a relationship in which you find it hard to “bear with the failings” of another person. How might having “the mind of Christ” change the dynamics of the situation?
4. Read Romans 15:13 slowly, several times through. What resonates with you in this verse?
5. Look at the long list of greetings in Romans 16:1-23. Why do you think Paul thought it was important to include all these names? What might we learn from this?
6. As you look forward to the holidays, are there any potential personal interactions you are concerned about? If you are discussing these questions in a group, share briefly and pray for each other to have the mind of Christ, fulfil the law through love, and—as far as it depends on us—live at peace with everyone. If you are reflecting alone, talk honestly to God about this, without shame or fear of judgment.

Practice for the week: Practicing gratitude

To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

(Romans 1:7-12)

In all but one of his letters, Paul gives thanks to God for the people to whom he is writing. Each day this week, think of someone in your life who has been a source of comfort or encouragement to you. Pray for them; give thanks to God for them; and, if appropriate, send them a note of gratitude (a card, text, email, etc.).