

THE INTERPRETATION BIBLE STUDIES LEADER HELPS

ROMANS

The IBS Leader Helps are designed to facilitate group study by providing lesson plans for the ten units in each of the Interpretation Bible Studies. These lesson plans utilize a variety of interactive methods, which have been chosen for the express purpose of engaging participants in the learning process.

Each participant in the group should have a copy of IBS study book and should make a commitment to do advance preparation for each session.

The sessions are planned for one hour. If the time allotted is shorter than an hour, it will be necessary to be selective about the activities, choosing those that are most appropriate for your group.

Leader Preparation

Read Romans in its entirety before beginning to teach. It is important to familiarize yourself with the book's overall content, so you can see how the individual passages fit into the larger scope of the book.

Skim through the whole study book to discern its flow. This is especially helpful if there are multiple teachers, in order to prevent leaping ahead into the next unit.

Prepare the room ahead of time. For informal discussion and ease of sharing, a semi-circular arrangement of chairs works best. Position yourself as one of the group, instead of setting yourself apart as "the authority."

Secure necessary teaching aids. A newsprint easel is an invaluable asset. Be sure to have markers and masking tape if you wish to display the sheets for future reference. A map of the Mediterranean world in the time of the early church is very helpful. Check the teaching suggestions for other necessary materials, such as hymnals, paper, pencils, art materials, and so on.

Prepare necessary handouts. In this study participants will develop an ongoing glossary of the terms used in Romans. A folder or notebook will be helpful.

Keep the key idea firmly in mind. Make sure all activities point participants towards this goal.

Pray for God's guidance. Prior to making preparations for the session, allow time to pray for each participant and for yourself.

Unit 1: Linked to the Old Testament—Source of Life for the Church (Background to Romans)

Key Idea: Paul, the writer of Romans, was a man of his time shaped by the Old Testament tradition and his cultural context, yet also transformed by the power of God revealed through Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

Advance Preparation

On individual index cards, print the following:

- Adam and Eve
- Tower of Babel
- Abraham and Sarah
- Jacob and Esau
- Joseph
- Moses
- Ten Commandments
- Judges and Prophets
- Kings
- Division of the Kingdom
- Destruction of Israel
- Exile of Judah
- Destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem
- Prophets and the Messianic Hope
- Return of Exiles
- Temple Is Rebuilt
- Emergence of Rabbinic Judaism
- Roman Occupation

Participants will be developing an ongoing glossary of the terms Paul uses in Romans. They will need folders or notebooks, paper, and pens or pencils.

Make three columns on a sheet of newsprint. Head one “Jewish,” another “Greek,” and a third “Roman.” You will also need blank sheets of newsprint, tape, and markers.

Obtain a CD or tape of the *Messiah* and a CD or tape player. Choose a selection to play for the closing. Some possibilities are:

- “O Thou that Tellest Good Tidings to Zion”
- “For Unto Us a Child Is Born”
- “The Hallelujah Chorus”
- “Since by Man Came Death”
- “If God Be for Us, Who Can Be Against Us”

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Opening Words

Begin with Paul's words from Romans 1:7, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

2. Prayer

Use this prayer, or pray one of your own:

Gracious God, we give thanks for each person present here, and for the gifts they bring. Be with us as we encounter you through your word. For we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

3. Expectations and Assumptions

Refer participants to question 1 of the Questions for Reflections at the end of the unit in the study book. The authors say here that Paul's context shaped the context of his letter to the Romans. Ask participants to tell their names and what expectations and assumptions they bring to this study of Romans. Jot these down on newsprint and save the newsprint for use in Unit 10, the last session of the study.

Presentation (15 minutes)

4. Ordering Old Testament Events and Figures

Shuffle the index cards you prepared so they are not in the correct order and give each participant one card. If you have a small group, you may need to give each person two cards. Then call the attention of participants to the sidebar on p. 4 of the study book and ask a volunteer to read it aloud.

Note that elsewhere on p. 4, the authors call Paul an "Old Testament person" and say that was the context that shaped him. Ask for who has the card with the earliest Old Testament figure or event printed on it. Tape it to the wall. Then ask for the second, and continue until all events and figures are taped to the wall in order. If there are questions about the order, refer to pp. 5–6 of the study book.

5. Review of Three Cultures

Call the attention of participants to the three columns on the newsprint you prepared. Ask them to briefly scan the material in the study book and call out aspects of each of the three cultures embraced and transcended by the Letter to the Romans. Participants may also add any further information they have about the three cultural contexts.

Exploration (25 minutes)

6. Discussion of Paul's Thought

Respond to the following statements, using the information on pp. 6–8 of the study book:

- For Paul, the gospel and the Holy Spirit change the ways we think about God and the ways we think about ourselves as dramatically as the computer changes the way we think about producing a letter. (p. 7)
- For Paul, faith words take on meaning within human history. History is the context within which faith language has meaning. (p. 8)

7. Identification of Overarching Themes

Ask participants to scan the information on pp. 8–9 of the study book regarding the four major concepts in the Old Testament. Then ask volunteers to name these concepts and give a brief definition of each as you list them on newsprint. Comment that the authors tell us that the coming of Jesus brought a new way to look at human affairs. Refer the participants to the diagram on p. 9 of the study book.

Now list the following on newsprint, and ask participants to give a brief definition based on what the study book says:

- justification by faith
- grace
- to be crucified with Christ
- to be raised with Christ

Response (5 minutes)

8. Beginning the Glossary

Hand out the folders or notebooks. Ask participants to use the newsprint notes to begin making entries in their personal glossaries for the concepts and terms discussed during this session. Remind them that as the study continues, there will be opportunities to add to and expand these definitions.

9. Hearing a Portion of Handel's "Messiah"

The authors tell us that Romans is not a formal textbook on theology, but rather “a powerful reflection upon the gift of faith in God that comes through Jesus the Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit” (p. 11). Point out that they suggest Romans can best be compared with a magnificent piece of music like the *Messiah*.

Introduce the selection from the *Messiah* you will be playing. Play the selection and then invite the participants to comment on their response to the music.

Closing (5 minutes)

10. Closing Prayer and Benediction

Tell participants you opened with the salutation that begins the book of Romans, and you will end with the closing words of the book. Then pray this prayer or one of your own:

God of the Old Testament, we give thanks for your creative and saving acts in history. God of the New Testament, we give thanks for the amazing gift of your son our Lord Jesus Christ. Grant that our lives may show evidence of a trust in your loving power. Amen.

End with Paul's words from Romans 16:25–27:

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

11. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 2 and Romans 1:1–17. Ask them also to write down their understanding of Christian faith, as suggested in question 1 at the end of the unit. Also ask a volunteer to research on the Internet or in reference books what ancient Roman houses looked like during the first century. A good reference source is *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* by Carolyn Osiek and David L Balch (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

Unit 2: Opening the Letter—Meeting the Author and Recipients (Romans 1:1–17)

Key Idea: In the prologue, Paul introduces himself as an apostle, establishes a tone of mutuality and respect with “the saints,” and presents his theme that God is Lord of all, not just the Jews.

Advance Preparation

You will need a map of the Mediterranean world in early Christian times, such as a map of Paul’s missionary trips. Print Romans 1:16–17 on newsprint, and post the newsprint where it can be easily read. Look over the information in step 3 from *The Family in the New Testament World* about the house church.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Opening Words

Begin by saying, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. Litany of Thanks

Invite participants to join in this litany by responding: “We give thanks to you, O God.”

We give thanks to you O God, through Jesus Christ, for each one here,
because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world

We give thanks to you, O God.

For the opportunity to be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith;

We give thanks to you, O God.

For the gospel, the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith,

We give thanks to you, O God.

Presentation (15 minutes)

3. Who, When, and Where

On a map of the Mediterranean in early Christian times, locate Rome. Also find Macedonia (Greece) and locate Corinth, near Athens. Using the information on p. 13 of the study book, have participants quickly name to whom the letter was addressed, as well as when and where it was written. Remind participants that Rome was a center of great power and that people of many diverse cultures lived or visited there.

Note that at this time the church met in private homes. Ask the person who researched houses of this time to report what they looked like. Remind participants that the church met around a common meal. Give them the following information:

The triclinia [dining room] was designed to hold nine diners reclining on three couches arranged together as three sides of a square, with the open side toward the open inner space of the house. There was also limited space in the dining room for others sitting on chairs alongside the couches. The inner courtyard or open space was the key to flexibility, for there, people could be placed in any kind of arrangement, depending on space available: makeshift dining couches, tables, or seated on the ground.

(From Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, p. 34.)

4. *Hearing the Letter*

Ask participants to characterize themselves silently as you name off various categories:

- Married, single, divorced
- Parents or not
- Grandparents or not
- Well traveled, or someone who has rarely been away from home
- Living in the city of their birth, or living in another location
- College educated or not
- Life-long member of your denomination or not

As the authors suggest, ask participants to imagine they are among those recipients of the letter hearing it read for the first time. Remind the participants that the authors ask us to read Romans not to hear Paul's words, but God's (p. 14). Then ask a volunteer to read Romans 1:1–17 aloud.

Exploration (25 minutes)

5. "A Good Beginning" (vs. 1–5)

Note that the authors, in speaking of David Bosch's book *Transforming Mission*, say that Bosch insists that Paul underwent a radical change in his values, his way of defining himself, and his commitments as a result of his conversion. Ask: Why?

Then discuss question 2 at the end of the unit, and ask: How does Paul define "go spel" in these verses?

6. *“To My Friends” (vs. 6–13)*

Discuss the following:

- What does the expression “called to be saints” mean to Paul?
- What is the significance of the greeting “Grace to you and peace”?

Then discuss question 3 at the end of the unit.

7. *“Gospel Power” (vs. 14–17)*

Begin by asking: Why do the authors say that Paul is showing how his theology is a mission theology?

Then share this quote from p. 19 of the study book: “Missionary activity is not something Christians do to share the gospel. Missionary activity is something Christians do to experience the full power of the gospel.” Ask: How do you respond to this statement?

End this step by discussing question 4 at the end of the unit.

Response (10 minutes)

8. *Sharing Faith Definitions*

Ask participants to pair up and share the statements of faith they wrote as the assignment from the previous session.

Closing (5 minutes)

9. *Words from Scripture*

Ask participants to read aloud Romans 1:16–17 from the newsprint.

10. *Prayer*

Use the following prayer or one of your own:

We give thanks to you O God, through Jesus Christ, for each one here, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. We are grateful for this opportunity to be mutually encouraged by one other’s faith. Thank you for the gospel, the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, and for this opportunity to be transformed by your word. For we ask it in Jesus Christ. Amen.

11. *Assignment*

Ask participants to read Unit 3 and Romans 1:18—2:16.

Unit 3: Sin and Salvation (Romans 1:18—2:16)

Key Idea: Lack of trust in God leads to alienation from God, resulting in the wrath of God.

Advance Preparation

Locate some advertisements for four-wheel drive vehicles in magazines or newspapers. On newsprint, print “Wrath of God” and “Sin,” leaving some space under each term to print the definition. You will need Bibles or copies of Psalm 51:1, 3–5, 10–12, and 17 for everyone.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. *Opening Words*

Begin by saying, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. *Responsive Reading*

Read Psalm 51:1, 3–5, 10–12, and 17 responsively:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. . . .
For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

**Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.
Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. . . .**

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

**Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. . . .
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.**

3. *Prayer*

Use the following prayer or one of your own:

God of wisdom and justice,
deliver us from the foolishness of ignoring you.
Teach us your wisdom through Jesus Christ,
that we may seek your goodness
and embody your love to all your people,
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(From *Book of Common Worship*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, p. 623.)

Presentation (15 minutes)

4. Small Group Work

Divide into two smaller groups:

- Have Group 1 read “The Many Faces of Sin—Part I” on pp. 20–21 of the study book. Ask them to find one definition of *sin* in that section and print it on the newsprint labeled “Sin.” Also ask them to examine the ads for four-wheel drive vehicles and look for parallels to idol worship.
- Have Group 2 read “Lies, Lies, and More Lies” and “An Order to the World.” They should find a second definition of *sin* and print it under the first on the newsprint. Also ask them to be prepared to give several examples of the consequences of ignoring the laws of God, both those given in the study book (like bridge building) and others they can think of.

5. Sharing Findings

When the two groups have had several minutes to work, come together to share findings. First print the definition of “wrath of God” from p. 20 of the study book. Then ask each group to share its definition of *sin*, as well as whatever they wish to share on idolatry and ignoring God’s laws.

Ask: According to the authors, what are two important points that Paul is making in these verses? Then discuss question 1 at the end of the unit.

Exploration (25 minutes)

6. Exploring Idolatry

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Romans 1:24–32. Point out the authors’ caution on p. 23 against reading Romans 1 apart from Romans 2:

As you read this chapter, realize that Paul is not seeking to give a list of sins. He is sharing his insight into the nature of sin. This discussion continues into the next chapter of the letter. To read chapter 1 of Romans apart from chapter 2 is to fall into a trap, the trap of believing ourselves wise, even wise about the ways of God, only to discover that we have become fools.

Ask another volunteer to read aloud Romans 2:1–11. Then discuss questions 2 and 3 at the end of the unit.

Ask: What does Martin Luther mean when he says that sin is “the heart turned in upon itself, the heart that enthrones itself in God’s place” (p. 24)?

Finally, discuss C. K. Barrett’s points on p. 24 of the study book.

7. *Making Connections*

Note that on p. 25 the authors say: “In current debates about issues of morality, Paul’s opposition to ‘sins of the flesh’ as listed in chapter 1 is often cited. The sins of excessive religiosity in chapter 2 are often overlooked.” Ask: How do you respond to this statement?

Follow up this conversation by asking: According to the authors, what is Paul’s understanding of the law? What is the relationship between law and faith?

8. *Updating the Glossary*

Give participants a few minutes to add the definitions on newsprint to their personal glossaries.

Response (10 minutes)

9. *Inward Obedience: A Matter of the Heart*

Ask participants to reflect on areas in their lives where their hearts are turned in on themselves, enthroned in the place of God.

Closing (5 minutes)

10. *Renunciations from the Rite of Baptism*

Ask participants to respond to these renunciations from the baptismal rite, responding “I do” to the first two and “I will, with God’s help” to the last.

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God,
do you turn from the ways of sin
and renounce evil and its power in the world?

I do.

Do you turn to Jesus Christ
and accept him as your Lord and Savior,
trusting in his grace and love?

I do.

Will you be Christ’s faithful disciple,
obeying his Word and showing his love?

I will, with God’s help.

(From *Book of Common Worship*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, p. 480.)

11. Prayer

Use the following prayer or one of your own:

Defend, O Lord, these your servants
with your heavenly grace,
that they may continue yours forever,
and daily increase in your Holy Spirit more and more,
until they come to your everlasting kingdom. Amen.

(Adapted from *Book of Common Worship*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, p. 484.)

12. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 4 and Romans 2:17—4:25. Ask them also to reflect on question 3 at the end of the unit.

Unit 4: Faith as “Trust” vs. Belief or Obedience (Romans 2:17—4:25)

Key Idea: To live by the grace of God, which engenders faith, is to be set free from believing we can obey the law; yet at the same time, it is to be respectful of the law.

Advance Preparation

If possible, obtain a copy of *Christian Doctrine, Revised Edition*, by Shirley C. Guthrie and read the pages listed in the sidebar on p. 33 of your study book. Using *Christian Doctrine* or another resource, prepare to present the images of atonement to the group. You will need hymnals for each participant, as well as copies of the following reading.

A Reading on Romans 3:10–18

Group 1: There is no one who is righteous, not even one;

Group 2: There is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God.

Group 1: All have turned aside, together they have become worthless;

Group 2: There is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one.

Reader 1: Their throats are opened graves;

Reader 2: They use their tongues to deceive.

Reader 3: The venom of vipers is under their lips.

Reader 4: Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.

Reader 5: Their feet are swift to shed blood;

Reader 6: Ruin and misery are in their paths,
and the way of peace they have not known.

All: There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Opening Words

Begin by saying, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. Prayer

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

Gracious God, we know that we all have sinned and fall short of your glory. Your word teaches us that we are justified by faith alone, through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We give thanks for that! Amen.

3. A Reading from Romans 3:10b–18

Assign parts for the reading you have prepared. Have the group and individual readers then read their respective parts aloud.

Presentation and Exploration (35 minutes)

4. Christianity and the Jews

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Romans 2:17—3:9. Ask participants to name the five main points listed by the authors in the section titled “Christianity and the Jews” (pp. 29–30). List these on newsprint. Ask: According to the authors, what happens if we claim the law as a vehicle for righteousness? (See p. 30.)

5. The Law of Faith

Now ask someone to read aloud Romans 3:21–31. Note the authors’ point that the Greek preposition connected to the word *faith* may be translated either as *of* or *in*. Ask: What is the distinction between “through faith *in* Jesus Christ” and “through faith *of* Jesus Christ?”

Ask: What is atonement? Present for the group various images for atonement that you have found in your research. Print a definition of *atonement* on newsprint. Then ask: What is the “law of faith”?

6. An Example about the Law

Ask someone to name and define Paul Tillich’s three categories of law (pp. 31–32). List these on newsprint. Next to each type of law, jot down the ways we determine the “right speed” on the highway. Now ask participants to name John Calvin’s uses of law for Christian people (pp. 32–33). List those on newsprint. Ask: How can we apply the example of determining a right highway speed to these uses? List the responses next to the corresponding use of the law.

Now ask:

- Can you think of any time when it would be justifiable to exceed the posted speed? on what grounds?
- Would this be an example of transcending obedience to the law?
- What are the dangers inherent in breaking the law?

7. *Abraham and Faith*

Ask someone to read aloud Genesis 15:1–6. (Also, if your group is not familiar with the story of Hagar and Ishmael, have someone read Gen. 16 or quickly summarize the story for the group.) Then read Romans 4:1–22 in “round robin” style, with one person reading the first verse, another reading the second, and so on.

On newsprint, print the word “Faith.” Ask: How does this passage define *faith*, according to the authors? Print this definition on newsprint.

Then note that the authors say circumcision as a sign of faith came *after* faith, not before. Ask: What sign of the covenant has the same significance for the Christian faith?

End this step by asking:

- What does faith in God rest upon?
- What does it mean to grow strong in faith?

Print the participants’ responses to these last two questions on the newsprint under the definition for *faith*.

8. *The Present Experience of Faith*

Ask a volunteer to Romans 4:22–25. Call the attention of participants to the sidebar on p. 34 of the study book. Ask: How would you explain the meaning of this quotation?

9. *Updating the Glossaries*

Give the participants a few minutes to add the information from the newsprint to their personal glossaries under the words *faith* and *atonement*.

Response (10 minutes)

10. *Discussing Cultural Temptations*

Discuss the assignment from the previous session, which was to reflect on question 3 at the end of the unit.

11. Open-ended Sentence

Ask participants to respond to this open-ended sentence: “Because of God’s acceptance in Christ, I”

Closing (10 minutes)

12. Singing a Hymn

Sing “The God of Abraham Praise” or another hymn on faith and trust.

13. Closing Words and Prayer

Ask a volunteer to read the quotation from Martin Luther on pp. 34–35 of the study book. Then close with the following prayer, or one of your own:

God of Abraham, of David, and of all of us, we give thanks for your justice, that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy you justify us through faith. Guide us as we seek to understand more about this great gift. For we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

14. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 5 and Romans 5:1—6:23. Also ask them to look up the words *slave* and *slavery* in both a secular dictionary and a Bible dictionary, if possible.

Unit 5: Justified, Reconciled, Sanctified (Romans 5:1—6:23)

Key Idea: God’s faith in and love for us creates the gift of justification.

Advance Preparation

Make copies of the following sheet on “Justification Versus Sanctification,” from Shirley Guthrie’s revised edition of *Christian Doctrine*.

Justification vs. Sanctification

Justification tells us how a person becomes a Christian. **Sanctification** tells us how a person grows in the Christian life.

Justification tells us about God’s gracious action toward us. **Sanctification** tells us about our response with obedient action toward God.

Justification tells us that God is *for* us, forgiving and saving us from sin. **Sanctification** tells us that by the Holy Spirit the same God works *in* us helping us to leave our sin behind and begin a new and radically different kind of life.

In **justification** the covenant-making God makes a promise: “I will be your God.” In **sanctification**, the same God also gives an inescapable command: “You shall be my people.”

Justification tells us that Christ is our Savior who died for us. **Sanctification** tells us that the same Christ is our Lord who commands us to live for him.

Justification tells us that God adopts us to be God’s children. **Sanctification** tells us that God expects and helps us to *live* as God’s children—and therefore as brothers and sisters of one another.

Justification tells us that we are made free *from* the self-justification that breaks relationship with God and our fellow human beings, and therefore ruins our own lives. **Sanctification** tells us what it means to live as free people—free *for* God, free *for* others, and therefore free *for* our own true self fulfillment.

Justification and **sanctification** are related as gift and task, creed and deed, theology and ethics, faith and life, passively receiving and actively giving in return. No one is a Christian until he or she is both justified *and* sanctified.

(From Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine, Revised Edition*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994, pp. 331–32.)

Make a stop sign by cutting an octagon from a sheet of red poster board and attaching a yardstick to the back with masking tape. In large letters, print “Therefore” on the sign. Also cut a large apple shape from red poster board and a cross from white poster board. (Note: Save the “Therefore” sign for use in the next session as well.)

If possible, obtain a copy of the poster “Footprints” mentioned on p. 36 of the study book. Post it where it can be easily seen.

Locate a small, attractive bowl you can use in the closing activity and fill it with water.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Opening Words

Begin by saying, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. Prayer

Use this prayer, or one of your own:

God, we give thanks to you for the gift of the faith of Jesus, which allows us to trust in you. We know you are with us throughout all of life, every step of the way. Be with us now as we seek to encounter you through your word. Amen.

Presentation and Exploration (35 minutes)

3. Definition of Terms

Hold up the “Therefore” sign you made. Tell participants that, as the authors of the study book point out on p. 36, the word “therefore” in Paul’s letter signifies a place to stop, look, and discover what it is pointing to.

If you have the poster “Footprints,” point out that often the genuine meaning of faith comes in looking back at our lives and discerning the active presence of God.

Using the material in the text, briefly review the previous passage (Rom. 2:17—4:25). Then have someone read aloud Romans 5:1–5.

On newsprint, print the words *justified* and *justification*. Ask participants to give definitions for these terms, and print their responses next to the words. Then have the participants complete this sentence: “Faith leads to”

End this step by discussing question 2 at the end of this unit.

4. *Adam vs. Christ*

Ask someone to read aloud Romans 5:6–21. Give another person the “Therefore” sign and ask that he or she hold up the sign when indicated in the scripture. Now print the words “reconciled” and “reconciliation” on newsprint and have participants come up with definitions for them.

Divide into two small groups. Give one group the construction paper apple and ask them to print on it words or phrases from the study book, from scripture, or from their own experience that describe the condition of Adam. Give the other group the construction paper cross and have them do the same for the condition of Christ. After giving them a few minutes to work, let each group share aspects of the dichotomy that Adam and Christ represent. Note that this passage is a primary source for the doctrine of original sin.

5. *Sin and Grace*

Ask that someone read aloud Romans 6:1–11. Ask participants to respond to the following statement from p. 41 of the study book:

To be baptized into Christ, to share faith in God through Christ, is also to share in Christ’s death in a very real, though spiritual, way. To die to the power of sin and self is to experience our own “I” crucified by God’s love for us. (p. 41)

Tell the participants that in the early church, baptismal fonts were compared to a tomb. Baptism was usually celebrated during the Easter vigil to emphasize the dying and rising in Christ. Sometimes the font was hexagonal in shape, symbolizing the sixth day, the day of Jesus’ death. Sometimes the baptistry was octagonal in shape, signifying the eighth day, the day of resurrection. The candidate who entered a hexagonally shaped font knew that he was to die in Christ, but as he left the font and stood once more in the octagonally shaped baptistry, he knew we was to walk in newness of life. (Information based on “Space for Baptism” by S. Anita Stauffer in *Reformed Liturgy and Music*, Vol. XIX, Number 4, Fall 1985.)

6. *Slaves of Righteousness*

Again hold up the “Therefore” sign and ask someone to read Romans 5:12–21. The image of slavery, while still a painful memory in this culture, may need exploring. Ask volunteers to report what they found when they looked up the words *slave* and *slavery* in a dictionary. Then look at the phrase “slave to sin” and ask participants to call out phrases or words that explore the implications of that phrase (such as, “a slave to sin would be completely submissive to sin”). Do the same for the phrase “slave to righteousness.”

7. *Justification and Sanctification*

Ask a volunteer to reread Romans 5:22–23. Review justification by grace, God’s gift of acceptance and life despite our unworthiness. Then go over the handout, “Justification vs. Sanctification.”

Response (15 minutes)*8. Remembering Your Baptism*

Read the following words from the service of baptism:

In the waters of Jordan
 Jesus was baptized by John
 and anointed with your Spirit.
 By the baptism of his own death and resurrection,
 Christ set us free from sin and death,
 and opened the way to eternal life.

We thank you, O God, for the water of Baptism.
 In it we are buried with Christ in his death.
 From it we are raised to share in his resurrection.
 Through it we are reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(From *Book of Common Worship*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, p. 439.)

Then pass the bowl of water to the first person, inviting him or her to dip fingers in the water as you say, "Remember your baptism and be thankful." That person then passes the bowl to the next, saying the words to him or her. Continue until each person has received the bowl.

9. Apostle's Creed

Say the Apostle's Creed, the creed used at baptism.

Closing (5 minutes)*10. Singing a Hymn*

Sing "Baptized in Water" or another baptismal hymn.

11. Prayer

Use the following prayer or one of your own:

Eternal God,
 Send your Spirit to move over this water
 that is may be a fountain of deliverance and rebirth.
 Wash away the sin of all who are cleansed by it.
 Raise them to new life,
 and graft them to the body of Christ.

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon them,
 that they may have power to do your will,

and continue forever in the risen life of Christ.
To you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God,
be all praise, honor and glory,
now and forever. Amen.

(Adapted from *Book of Common Worship*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, p. 439.)

12. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 6 and Roman 7:1—8:11. Ask them also to answer the questions in paragraph 2 on p. 43 of the study book, and to check the definitions in their notebooks against those the authors give on p. 49. Suggest that they augment the definitions already in their glossaries and add any words not already there.

Unit 6: Beyond Religion to Faith (Roman 7:1—8:11)

Key Idea: Through faith we are being transformed from being slaves to our self-centered selves and becoming willing Spirit-filled slaves to the righteous will of God.

Advance Preparation

On newsprint, print the questions from paragraph 2 on p. 43 in the study book, and post these where they can be easily read. You will also need the poster board “Therefore” sign from last session. Gather some art supplies (poster board and markers, crayons, and so on) for step 7.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Opening Words

Begin by saying, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. Prayer

Use this prayer, or one of your own:

God of grace and peace, we give thanks for this opportunity to be theologians, that is, to explore our faith and seek to understand it better. Lead us closer to you and to life in the Spirit. For we ask it in Christ’s name, Amen.

Presentation (10 minutes)

3. Reviewing and Recapping

Ask participants to recap the three observations the authors make about Paul on pp. 44–45 of the study book. Then discuss the questions the authors pose in the second paragraph on p. 43. On newsprint, make two columns. Label one “Appealing” and the other “Appalling.” Then ask participants to call out, at will, what they like and dislike about the message of Romans so far. Record their responses in the appropriate column.

Exploration (25 minutes)

4. Love and Law

Ask participants to respond, in light of Romans 7, to this statement from p. 46 of the study book: “Love is a *response* of faith, not the *source* or beginning of faith.”

Then ask: How do the authors characterize the distinction between religion and faith?

Finally, discuss the following statements from p. 47 of the study book:

- “Sin persists, even among the redeemed.”—Reinhold Niebuhr
- “The practice of religion cannot save a person; salvation comes from God through Christ.”—reference from C. K. Barrett

5. *Spirit and Flesh*

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Romans 8:1–11. Have another person hold up the “Therefore” sign in v. 1, signaling a point to stop and pay attention.

Then ask someone else to read the first paragraph of the section in the study book titled “Spirit and Flesh (8:1–11)” (see pp. 47–48). Discuss the three examples of living in the flesh cited by the authors (college athletics, entertainment driven lives, and pushing to do good deeds). Ask the following:

- How do you respond to these examples? Would you agree that each is a valid example of “fleshly living”? What other examples would you give?
- What do you think of this statement: “The most important decisions in life (and in ministry) may be deciding which worthwhile things *not* to do, and then finding the courage *not* to do them” (p. 48)?

End this step by discussing question 2 at the end of the unit.

6. *Checking Definitions*

Discuss the vocabulary list the authors give on p. 49, and compare these definitions to what the participants have in their glossaries. Ask: Which concepts are still unclear?

Response (15 minutes)

7. *Paul’s Themes*

Remind participants that Romans is early theology, what the authors call “faith seeking understanding.” Divide into four small groups or pairs, and assign each group or pair one of the four themes on p. 50. Ask the small groups or pairs to prepare to present an explanation of the theme to the rest of the group, using any method they like (by drawing a diagram or a picture, presenting an example, using a quotation, and so on). After allowing several minutes for groups to work, have each group present its theme to the total group.

Closing (5 minutes)

8. *Guided Silent Prayer*

Invite participants to offer silent prayers of confession, thanksgiving, and petition as you read the following phrases from Romans 7:24–25:

Wretched human beings that we are! Who will rescue us from this body of death? O God, we confess that we . . .

Thanks be to you, God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, for . . .

So then, with our minds we are slaves to the law of God, but with our flesh we are slaves to the law of sin. We pray. O God for a transformed way of thinking about . . .

For we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

9. Assignment

Ask participant to read Unit 7 and Romans 8:12–39. Also ask volunteers to research the process of adoption in our society and the laws that apply.

Unit 7: The “Convictions of Our Faith (Romans 8:12–39)

Key Idea: All we who are children of God and called to suffer as Christ suffered can have confidence and hope that God will do right by the whole created order.

Advance Preparation

Provide paper and pencils or pens for the participants.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Opening Words

Begin by saying, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. Prayer

Use the following prayer or one of your own:

God of grace, we give thanks for the inexpressible gift of knowing that there is no condemnation for those who see Christ as the proof of your amazing love for us. Lead us to understand that we who are led by the Spirit are children of God. For we ask it in Christ’s name. Amen.

Presentation/Exploration (35 minutes)

3. Children of God

Discuss the Roman concept of adoption as presented in the text. Point out that the use of *abba* (“daddy”) was the intimate form of referring to a father. Jesus used this word to refer to God. Ask those who researched adoption in our culture to report what they found about adoption laws.

Note the reference on p. 53 of the study book to Paul Achtemeier’s comment that Romans 8:15–17 has the power to redefine our understanding of family. The authors go on to say that a family that endures suffering for the well-being of a family member or for the community may have a stronger than average sense of identity. Ask: What has been your experience?

Then ask: What is the “stumbling block” of the gospel? End this step by discussing question 2 at the end of this unit.

4. *Comparison of Passages*

Ask someone to read aloud Romans 8:22–24. Then ask volunteers to read aloud the following:

- John 3:1–8
- Genesis 3:14–16
- Genesis 18:1–15

Discuss the images of laboring, birth/new birth, and hope out of barrenness. Ask: What experiences have you had with laboring, birth, or barrenness? What insights about the end time, when God will deal with the whole created order, do you gain from these images?

5. *Discovering Good News*

On p. 55, the authors credit C. H. Dodd with pointing out that “this text is not suggesting that the universe is an orderly system in which everything will work out in the end.” Ask: What is the text suggesting instead?

Then discuss Achtemeier’s three specific proclamations of good news in this passage, summarized on p. 56 of the study book.

Response (15 minutes)

6. *Paraphrasing Scripture*

Ask participants to write a paraphrase of Romans 8:31–39, as suggested in question 3 at the end of this unit. After allowing time for work, invite volunteers to read their paraphrases.

Closing (5 minutes)

7. *Affirmation of Our Faith*

Ask participants to affirm their faith by reciting together The Apostles’ Creed.

8. *Assignment*

Ask participants to read Unit 8 and Romans 9:1—11:26. Also ask that they reflect on questions 1 and 3 at the end of the unit.

Unit 8: The Promises of God to Israel and to Us (Romans 9:1—11:26)

Key Idea: The grace our righteous God showed in choosing the Jews is evident again in the call to faith in Christ.

Advance Preparation

On one strip of poster board, print: “What then are we to say?” On another, print: “By no means!” Keep these handy for step 3.

On a sheet of poster board, sketch a tree with roots underground. Leave room for writing around the roots. At the top of the poster board, print the following quote from p. 60 of the study book:

The Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New, tells repeatedly of people who have been called by God, yet who fail to be faithful to God. God’s people fail to obey, they fail to understand, and they fail to trust, yet God acts with mercy toward them. God’s power is such that no failure, however desperate, can thwart God’s redemptive plan.

Obtain some clay for participants to use in step 5. You might also want to get some pre-moistened wipes to use to clean up hands.

Note: Because questions 1 and 3 at the end of the unit are likely to spark extended discussion, exploration has been limited to one activity for this session.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. *Opening Words*

Begin by saying, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. *Prayer*

Ask participants to offer sentence prayers of thanksgiving or petition. After each prayer, participants can respond: “Lord of all, hear our prayer.”

Presentation (5 minutes)

3. *Reviewing and Recapping*

Using the material on p. 58 of the study book, briefly review the major sections of Romans and their themes. Then show the poster board strips you prepared. Ask participants to go back to Romans 6:1 and scan quickly forward, looking for the question “What then are we to say?” Note that Paul uses this question to indicate he is wrestling with a difficult issue. Also have them be alert for the affirmation, “By no means!”

Exploration (30 minutes)*4. “These Roots Support You”*

Ask participants to name Old Testament characters Paul utilizes to demonstrate that God’s word has not failed. Print the names of these characters on the roots of the tree you drew. Then ask participants to name other characters, either from the Old Testament or the New, that they believe also demonstrate this. Print those names on the roots also. Then discuss questions 1 and 3 at the end of the unit.

Ask a volunteer to read Romans 11:13–24. This image of grafting shoots onto olive tree root stock would have been familiar to Paul’s readers. Ask participants if they can think of a comparable contemporary image, such as grafting roses.

Response (15 minutes)*5. Expression through Clay*

Give each participant a piece of clay. Let them manipulate the clay as you read Romans 9:19–22. Ask them to reflect on God’s gracious purposes for creation as they mold the clay.

6. Singing a Hymn

Sing “Have Thine Own Way” together.

Closing (5 minutes)*7. Prayer*

Read the lines from “God Is Working His Purpose Out,” found on p. 64 of the study book. Then close with this prayer, or one of your own:

Lord God, we know that from you and through you and to you are all things. To you be the glory forever. Amen.

8. Assignment

Ask participants to read Unit 9 and Romans 12:1—15:13.

Unit 9: After Talking the Talk, How Do We Walk the Walk? (Romans 12:1—15:13)

Key Idea: The church, those “saints” who have heard the gospel and by grace have responded, seek to be transformed by God’s grace into living the Christian life.

Advance Preparation

You will need Bibles (or copies of Romans 12:9–18) and hymnals for each participant. Prepare three sheets of newsprint ahead of time: Head one sheet “Yea,” one sheet “Nay,” and one sheet “Abstain.”

Opening (5 minutes)

1. *Opening Words*

Begin by saying, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. *Unison Reading of the Marks of a True Christian*

Read Romans 12:9–18 in unison.

Presentation (5 minutes)

3. *Listening to Scripture*

Ask for a volunteer to read Romans 12:1–2 aloud. Remind participants that the authors of the study book tell us that a key word in this passage is *discern*, and that discernment takes place when we are open to God’s initiative. Because these are such familiar words of scripture, invite the participants to close their eyes as the words are read and try to open their minds and hearts to fresh insights the Spirit may have for them.

Exploration (30 minutes)

4. *Pauline Understanding of the Church*

Divide into two small groups. Give the groups the following assignments:

Group 1: Read Romans 12:3–4 and 1 Corinthians 12:12–27. Compare what Paul says in each case about the church as the body of Christ. What are the implications in this image for us?

Group 2: Read Romans 12:9–21 and Galatians 5:22–23. Compare the list of personality traits in Romans with the gifts of the spirit in Galatians. What are the implications in this image for us?

Allow a few minutes for work, then have the groups report.

5. *The Church Today*

Discuss question 2 at the end of the unit.

6. *Discussion on the Authority of Government*

Tell participants to think about particular points in the study book on pp. 68–69 that struck them, either positively or negatively. Post the sheets of newsprint headed “Yea” and “Nay.” Invite the participants to name a point and tell whether they reacted positively or negatively to it, then list it in the appropriate place. Then let others in the group react to that point. If there are points that were puzzling or unclear, list those on a sheet titled “Abstain.”

Discuss question 3 at the end of the unit. Then ask: What does Paul mention in Romans 13:8 as the particular obligation of Christians, over and above loyalty to governing structures? How is this lived out with respect to attitudes toward the weak (Rom. 14)?

Response (10 minutes)

7. *Life Intersections with Romans*

Call the attention of participants to the three ways Paul Achtimeier says that Romans 15:1–13 intersects with our lives, found on p. 71 of the study book. Divide the group into threes. In each group of three, ask each person to take one of the ways listed and identify a specific way in which it intersects with his or her life. For example, someone might name a specific problem in your congregation and then connect it with a problem and solution in Paul’s day.

Closing (10 minutes)

8. *Singing Hymns*

Sing hymns about being transformed by God and living the Christian life. Two examples are “Help Us Accept Each Other” and “When We Are Living.”

9. *Benediction*

Use Romans 15:13 as a benediction:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

10. *Assignment*

Ask participants to read Unit 10 and Romans 15:14—16:27. Also ask that they read Acts 15 to find out about a major controversy that occurred between Paul and the Jerusalem Christians and Acts 21—28 to get an understanding of the controversy that occurred when Paul reached Jerusalem. Remind participants of the definition of *faith* they wrote at the beginning of the study and ask them to be sure to bring it to the next session.

Unit 10: Valedictory (Romans 15:14—16:27)

Key Idea: We study Romans to let the Word of God inform and transform our lives and to receive the faith of Abraham and Sarah—fully mature in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Advance Preparation

You will again need a map of the Mediterranean area in the time of the early church, such as a map of Paul’s missionary journeys. You will also need a New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, or another version that has section headings.

On newsprint, make a list of those to whom Paul extends greetings in Romans 16. Also list on newsprint the summary of *faith* found on p. 76 in the study book under “Romans in an Overview.”

Locate the newsprint list of expectations and assumptions made during the first session and post it on the wall.

Decide if you will sing the Doxology for the closing or if you will need hymnals.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Opening Words

Begin by saying, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. Prayer

Use the following prayer or one of your own:

Lord God, we give thanks that we can proclaim the good news, so that those who have never been told of you can see, and those who have never heard of you can understand. Fill us with your Spirit. For we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Presentation (20 minutes)

3. Paul’s Travel Route

On the map, trace Paul’s route from Corinth in Macedonia (Greece) to Jerusalem, then to Rome and on to Spain. Estimate the number of miles this journey would cover.

4. *The Jerusalem Controversies*

Ask a volunteer to give a brief synopsis of the Council of Jerusalem and the issue of circumcision as it is related in Romans 15. Then use the headings in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible to quickly review the events that occurred when Paul went to Jerusalem. Ask participants to add details they remember from the reading they were assigned at the end of the previous session. Again use the map as a reference point for charting Paul's route.

5. *Paul's Greetings*

Call the attention of participants to the list of names from Romans 16 on newsprint. Ask: Which names does the study book say are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible? Point out Phoebe, named by Paul as a deacon, and Prisca (also known as Priscilla), named in Acts as an equal to her husband.

Exploration (25 minutes)

6. *Discussion of Paul's Admonitions*

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Romans 16:17–20. Note that the authors remark that these admonitions and instructions could have been written for any time, including our own (p. 76). Then discuss the following:

- What controversies are you aware of in this congregation? in this denomination?
- How can the church deal both firmly and graciously with individuals and groups who are at the center of these controversies?

Read the following statement from p. 74 of the study book:

For Paul, the church is not an institution or an organization; it is an embodiment of the kingdom of God, where grace reigns supreme and where all people come together as children of the one true God.

Ask: How do you respond to this statement with respect to dealing with controversy?

Response (5 minutes)

7. *Revisiting Definitions of "Faith"*

Have someone read aloud the summary of the faith proclaimed by Paul in Romans, which you have posted on newsprint. Then ask participants to review the definition of *faith* they wrote at the beginning of the study. As question 4 at the end of the unit suggests, give them time to revise that definition. Then offer those who are willing the opportunity to share their transformed definitions by completing the open-ended sentence "Faith is"

8. Reviewing Expectations and Assumptions

Call the attention of participants to the list of expectations and assumptions from the first session. Ask:

- What expectations were met?
- Which were not?
- What assumptions proved accurate?
- Which were transformed over the course of the study?

Closing (5 minutes)

9. Singing a Hymn

Sing the Doxology together or “Blest Be the Tie that Binds.”

10. Benediction

Invite the group to read in unison Romans 16:25–27, which says :

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.