

# MAX LUCADO

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LIFE LESSONS *from*  
**ROMANS**  
*God's Big Picture*

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PREPARED BY THE LIVINGSTONE CORPORATION



*Life Lessons from Romans*

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## HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

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**T**he Bible is a peculiar book. Words crafted in another language. Deeds done in a distant era. Events recorded in a far-off land. Counsel offered to a foreign people. It is a peculiar book.

It's surprising that anyone reads it. It's too old. Some of its writings date back 5,000 years. It's too bizarre. The book speaks of incredible floods, fires, earthquakes, and people with supernatural abilities. It's too radical. The Bible calls for undying devotion to a carpenter who called himself God's Son.

Logic says this book shouldn't survive. Too old, too bizarre, too radical.

The Bible has been banned, burned, scoffed, and ridiculed. Scholars have mocked it as foolish. Kings have branded it as illegal. A thousand times over the grave has been dug and the dirge has begun, but somehow the Bible never stays in the grave. Not only has it survived, but it has also thrived. It is the single most popular book in all of history. It has been the bestselling book in the world for years!

There is no way on earth to explain it. Which perhaps is the only explanation. For the Bible's durability is not found on *earth* but in *heaven*. The millions who have tested its claims and claimed its promises know there is but one answer: the Bible is God's book and God's voice.

## LIFE LESSONS

As you read it, you would be wise to give some thought to two questions: *What is the purpose of the Bible?* and *How do I study the Bible?* Time spent reflecting on these two issues will greatly enhance your Bible study.

What is the purpose of the Bible?

Let the Bible itself answer that question: “*From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*” (2 Timothy 3:15).

The purpose of the Bible? Salvation. God’s highest passion is to get his children home. His book, the Bible, describes his plan of salvation. The purpose of the Bible is to proclaim God’s plan and passion to save his children.

This is the reason why this book has endured through the centuries. It dares to tackle the toughest questions about life: *Where do I go after I die? Is there a God? What do I do with my fears?* The Bible is the treasure map that leads to God’s highest treasure—eternal life.

But how do you study the Bible? Countless copies of Scripture sit unread on bookshelves and nightstands simply because people don’t know how to read it. What can you do to make the Bible real in your life?

The clearest answer is found in the words of Jesus: “*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you*” (Matthew 7:7).

The first step in understanding the Bible is asking God to help you. You should read it prayerfully. If anyone understands God’s Word, it is because of God and not the reader.

“*The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you*” (John 14:26).

Before reading the Bible, pray and invite God to speak to you. Don’t go to Scripture looking for your idea, but go searching for his.

Not only should you read the Bible prayerfully, but you should also read it carefully. “*Seek and you will find*” is the pledge. The Bible is not

a newspaper to be skimmed but rather a mine to be quarried. *“If you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God”* (Proverbs 2:4–5).

Any worthy find requires effort. The Bible is no exception. To understand the Bible, you don’t have to be brilliant, but you must be willing to roll up your sleeves and search.

*“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15).

Here’s a practical point. Study the Bible a bit at a time. Hunger is not satisfied by eating twenty-one meals in one sitting once a week. The body needs a steady diet to remain strong. So does the soul. When God sent food to his people in the wilderness, he didn’t provide loaves already made. Instead, he sent them manna in the shape of *“thin flakes like frost on the ground”* (Exodus 16:14).

God gave manna in limited portions.

God sends spiritual food the same way. He opens the heavens with just enough nutrients for today’s hunger. He provides *“a rule for this, a rule for that; a little here, a little there”* (Isaiah 28:10).

Don’t be discouraged if your reading reaps a small harvest. Some days a lesser portion is all that is needed. What is important is to search every day for that day’s message. A steady diet of God’s Word over a lifetime builds a healthy soul and mind.

It’s much like the little girl who returned from her first day at school feeling a bit dejected. Her mom asked, “Did you learn anything?”

“Apparently not enough,” the girl responded. “I have to go back tomorrow, and the next day, and the next . . .”

Such is the case with learning. And such is the case with Bible study. Understanding comes little by little over a lifetime.

There is a third step in understanding the Bible. After the asking and seeking comes the knocking. After you ask and search, *“knock and the door will be opened to you”* (Matthew 7:7).

## LIFE LESSONS

To knock is to stand at God's door. To make yourself available. To climb the steps, cross the porch, stand at the doorway, and volunteer. Knocking goes beyond the realm of thinking and into the realm of acting.

To knock is to ask, *What can I do? How can I obey? Where can I go?*

It's one thing to know what to do. It's another to do it. But for those who do it—those who choose to obey—a special reward awaits them.

*"Whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do"* (James 1:25).

What a promise. Blessings come to those who do what they read in God's Word! It's the same with medicine. If you only read the label but ignore the pills, it won't help. It's the same with food. If you only read the recipe but never cook, you won't be fed. And it's the same with the Bible. If you only read the words but never obey, you'll never know the joy God has promised.

Ask. Search. Knock. Simple, isn't it? So why don't you give it a try? If you do, you'll see why the Bible is the most remarkable book in history.

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## INTRODUCTION TO *The Book of Romans*

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**A**t the moment I don't feel too smart. I just got off the wrong plane that took me to the wrong city and left me at the wrong airport. I went east instead of west and ended up in Houston instead of Denver.

It didn't look like the wrong plane, but it was. I walked through the wrong gate, dozed off on the wrong flight, and ended up in the wrong place.

Paul says we've all done the same thing. Not with airplanes and airports, but with our lives and God. He tells the Roman readers, "There is no one righteous, not even one. . . . All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10, 23).

We are all on the wrong plane, he says. All of us. Gentile and Jew. Every person has taken the wrong turn. And we need help.

In this profound epistle, Paul explores all the wrong options and takes us to the only correct one. The wrong solutions are pleasure and pride (Romans 1–2), and the correct solution is Christ Jesus (3:21–26). According to Paul, we are saved by grace (undeserved, unearned favor), through faith (complete trust) in Jesus and his work.



## LIFE LESSONS

The letter concludes with practical instruction for a growing church, including thoughts on spiritual gifts (12:3–8), genuine love (12:9–21), and good citizenship (13:1–14). The final chapters provide brilliant instruction for dealing with everything from church division to difficult brethren.

Romans is a life-changing letter for people who are willing to admit they are sinners. For those who admit they are on the wrong plane, the letter provides the correct itinerary.

Read it and take note. That flight home is one you don't want to miss.

## AUTHOR AND DATE

Paul, who persecuted the early church before his life was radically altered by meeting the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:1–31). Paul's letter to the Romans is unique in that he did not found the church, which appears to have been a mixed community of Jewish and Gentile believers who had already become famous for their faith (see Romans 1:8). It is likely Paul wrote the letter c. AD 57 from Corinth, as he entrusted Phoebe of nearby Cenchreae to deliver it (see 16:1–2). Paul employed a scribe named Tertius to compose the letter (see 16:22).

## SITUATION

After ministering for two years in Ephesus, Paul sensed it was time to move on to his next mission for Christ. It is likely he had been planning for some time to journey west to Rome and then on to Spain (see Romans 15:22–24), and he evidently wanted to have the Roman church as a base of operation. For this plan to materialize, Paul needed to present to the elders a concise explanation of the gospel he had been sharing with his churches for more than twenty years. The result was a letter that has since become one of the foundational documents in helping believers understand Christian doctrine and the tenets of their faith.

## INTRODUCTION

### KEY THEMES

- All people are in need of a relationship with God.
- God has prepared for that relationship through his own sacrifice.
- Faith is the requirement of that relationship.
- Forgiveness is available from God for anyone.

### KEY VERSES

*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).*

### CONTENTS

- I. The Bad News—The Nature of Humanity (1:1—3:20)
- II. The Good News (3:21—5:21)
- III. The Ongoing Problem of Sin (6:1—8:39)
- IV. Israel's Place in God's Plan (9:1—11:36)
- V. Christian Living (12:1—16:27)





## LESSON ONE

# RIGHT WITH GOD

*In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*

ROMANS 1:17



## REFLECTION

The book of Romans offers an expanded and detailed look at God’s special plan for the human race. It will show you the “before and after” conditions of your life in relation to Jesus Christ. As you begin this study, consider your lifestyle before you became a Christian. What are some of the major changes that Christ has made in your life?

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## SITUATION

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to a group of Christians in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, to lay out his Christian doctrine after years of missionary work. Although he had not yet visited Rome, he thought highly of the believers there. He wanted to spend time with them, just as he had done with the many fledgling churches around the Mediterranean Sea. This letter was Paul’s way of saying, “Here are all the central lessons I would teach you if I were with you.” In his opening comments, he describes the glory and power of the gospel of Christ.

## OBSERVATION

*Read Romans 1:16–32 from the New International  
Version or the New King James Version.*

### NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. <sup>17</sup> For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a

righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

<sup>18</sup> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, <sup>19</sup> since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

<sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. <sup>25</sup> They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

<sup>26</sup> Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. <sup>27</sup> In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. <sup>29</sup> They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; <sup>31</sup> they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. <sup>32</sup> Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

## LIFE LESSONS

### NEW KING JAMES VERSION

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, <sup>21</sup> because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

<sup>24</sup> Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

<sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. <sup>27</sup> Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

<sup>28</sup> And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; <sup>29</sup> being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, <sup>30</sup> backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; <sup>32</sup> who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice

such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

## EXPLORATION

**1.** What does Paul mean when he says he is “not ashamed of the gospel” (Romans 1:16)?

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**2.** In what ways does God reveal himself to people (see also Psalm 19:1, John 14:10, 26; Acts 14:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; and 1 John 5:13)?

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**3.** How does Paul say that some people have provoked God to anger?

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**4.** How and why is the truth of the gospel hidden from some individuals?

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**5.** What happens when God lets people go their own way?

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**6.** How does Paul say people can find freedom from the bondage of sin?

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## INSPIRATION

Behind him, a trail of tracks. Beneath him, a pounding stallion. Before him, miles of trail to cover. Within him, a flint-rock resolve.

Squinty eyed. Firm jawed. Rawboned. Pony Express riders had one assignment—deliver the message safely and quickly. They seized every advantage: the shortest route, the fastest horse, the lightest saddle. Even the lightest lunchbox.

Only the sturdy were hired. Could they handle the horses? The heat? Could they outrun robbers and outlast blizzards? The young and the orphans were preferred. Those selected were given \$125 a month (a good salary in 1860), a Colt revolver, a lightweight rifle, a bright red shirt, blue trousers, and eight hours to cover eighty miles, six days a week. Hard work and high pay. But the message was worth it.

The apostle Paul would have loved the Pony Express. For he, like the riders, had been entrusted with a message.

“I have a duty to all people,” Paul told the Roman church (Romans 1:14 NCV). He had something for them—a message. He’d been entrusted as a Pony Express courier with a divine message, the gospel. Nothing mattered more to Paul than the gospel. “I am not ashamed of the gospel,” he wrote next, “because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Paul existed to deliver the message. How people remembered him was secondary. (Why else would he have introduced himself as a slave in Romans 1:1?) How people remembered Christ was primary. Paul’s message was not about himself. His message was all about Christ. (From *It’s Not About Me* by Max Lucado.)

## REACTION

**7.** How does Paul describe your condition before you accepted Christ as your Savior?

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**8.** How would you describe righteousness to a new believer?

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**9.** Based on this passage, what is required to be right with God (see also John 14:6)?

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**10.** In what ways have you seen the righteousness of Christ transform a person's life?

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## LIFE LESSONS

**11.** In what areas of your life do your sinful desires tend to interfere with living a righteous life?

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**12.** How does this passage encourage you to live by faith?

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## LIFE LESSONS

Whether we are new in our faith or have trusted in Christ for years, all of us struggle with the tendency to fall back on our righteousness, our “track record” or ability to do and be good, rather than placing our hope in Christ. Really understanding that Jesus wants our complete trust is an ongoing process. Putting faith in Jesus is a starting point, but it isn’t the end of it. Each day is a fresh opportunity to acknowledge and experience living by Christ’s righteousness.

## DEVOTION

*Father, forgive us for being witnesses of your majesty and yet living as though you do not exist. Forgive us, Lord, when we put more hope in the things of this earth than in the incredible promises of your heaven. Have mercy on our hardened hearts. Transform us into your likeness.*

# JOURNALING

If you recently trusted Christ, what lessons in living by faith have you learned? If you've been a believer for a while, what disciplines have you learned about keeping your faith lively?

## FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Romans during this twelve-part study, read Romans 1:1–32. For more Bible passages on righteousness, read 1 Samuel 26:23; 1 Kings 10:9; Habakkuk 2:4; Zephaniah 2:3; Malachi 4:2; Romans 8:10; Galatians 3:11; and 2 Timothy 3:16.



## LESSON TWO

# KNOWING CHRIST

*All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous*

ROMANS 2:12–13 NKJV



## REFLECTION

In the last lesson, you saw how in the beginning people deliberately rebelled, and now every generation experiences the results of that rebellion. Repentance is the first step that begins the journey home, and the gospel offers the hope for that journey. What steps have you taken recently to deepen your relationship with Christ?

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## SITUATION

Paul was aware that his audience had a divided worldview—Jewish and Gentile—and that he needed to get the attention of two kinds of thinking. In this next part of his letter, he addresses the self-confident Jewish mindset that assumed a special place in God’s plan, as well as the Gentile mind that was proudly self-reliant. Both ways of thinking needed to undergo a change of perspective by seeing the human condition from God’s holy perspective.

## OBSERVATION

*Read Romans 2:1–16 from the New International  
Version or the New King James Version.*

### NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

<sup>1</sup> You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. <sup>2</sup> Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on

truth. <sup>3</sup> So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? <sup>4</sup> Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

<sup>5</sup> But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. <sup>6</sup> God "will repay each person according to what they have done." <sup>7</sup> To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. <sup>8</sup> But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. <sup>9</sup> There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; <sup>10</sup> but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. <sup>11</sup> For God does not show favoritism.

<sup>12</sup> All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. <sup>13</sup> For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. <sup>14</sup> (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. <sup>15</sup> They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) <sup>16</sup> This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

#### NEW KING JAMES VERSION

<sup>1</sup> Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. <sup>2</sup> But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. <sup>3</sup> And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things,



## LIFE LESSONS

and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup> Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? <sup>5</sup> But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, <sup>6</sup> who “will render to each one according to his deeds”: <sup>7</sup> eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; <sup>8</sup> but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, <sup>9</sup> tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; <sup>10</sup> but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>11</sup> For there is no partiality with God.

<sup>12</sup> For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law <sup>13</sup> (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; <sup>14</sup> for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, <sup>15</sup> who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) <sup>16</sup> in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

## EXPLORATION

**1.** What reason did Paul give for advising the believers to avoid judging others?

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**2.** What does Paul say was God's purpose for extending kindness toward the believers?

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**3.** What guidelines does Paul say that God will use to reward or punish people?

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**4.** If hearing the law does not make people right with God, what does?

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**5.** How can you tell right from wrong? What guides you in this?

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**6.** What does it mean to have the requirements of God's law written on your heart?

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## INSPIRATION

I've wondered, at times, what kind of man this Judas was. What he looked like, how he acted, who his friends were. . . . But for all the things we don't know about Judas, there is one thing we know for sure: he had

## LIFE LESSONS

no relationship with the Master. He had seen Jesus, but he did not know him. He had heard Jesus, but he did not understand him. He had religion, but no relationship.

As Satan worked his way around the table in the Upper Room, he needed a special kind of man to betray our Lord. He needed a man who had seen Jesus, but did not know him. He needed a man who knew the actions of Jesus, but had missed out on the mission of Jesus. Judas was this man. He knew the empire but had never known the Man.

We learn this timeless lesson from the betrayer. Satan's best tools of destruction are not from outside the church, they are from within the church. A church will never die from the immorality in Hollywood or the corruption in Washington. But it will die from corrosion within—from those who bear the name of Jesus but have never met him, and from those who have religion, but no relationship.

Judas bore the cloak of religion, but he never knew the heart of Christ. Let's make it our goal to know him . . . deeply. (From *Shaped by God* by Max Lucado.)

## REACTION

**7.** What similarities do you see between Judas and the people Paul addressed in this letter?

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**8.** How does Paul explain the difference between being religious and being right with God?

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**9.** How would you define *hypocrisy*? Why do you think it is so harmful to the church?

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**10.** What are some examples of spiritual corrosion that you see in the church today?

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**11.** In what subtle ways does Satan try to corrode your relationship with Christ?

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**12.** How can you guard against Satan's attacks?

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## LIFE LESSONS

One area of relentless temptation we can expect to encounter involves our tendency to compare ourselves with others. This type of judging has only one purpose: to make ourselves feel better, superior, and spiritually safe. The Bible consistently points out the dangers and sin of such comparisons. In Romans 2:1–16, Paul shows that comparisons simply deny the truth that we all stand before a holy God as fallen creatures in desperate need of his mercy. When we forget to include ourselves in that picture, we can't see others clearly.

## LIFE LESSONS

## DEVOTION

*Father, we have all taken wrong paths and made wrong choices. We know your law, yet we choose to ignore it. We strive to impress others with our knowledge of you when our hearts are far from you. Forgive us, Father. Guide us into a truer, deeper relationship with you.*

## JOURNALING

What can you do to deepen your relationship with Christ? How can you know him better?

## FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Romans during this twelve-part study, read Romans 2:1–3:8. For more Bible passages on developing a relationship with Christ, read Matthew 12:50; John 1:12; 15:5; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 3:26; and Philippians 3:8.



## LESSON THREE

# A PRICELESS GIFT

*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,  
and all are justified freely by his grace through  
the redemption that came by Christ Jesus*

ROMANS 3:23–24



# REFLECTION

It's easy to question God's dealings with you. His ways are not your ways, and you will never fully understand the mysteries of his justice, holiness, and power. What would you do with humanity if you were God? How would you respond to your sinful creatures? Think about how God has worked in your life recently. What about your salvation is still a mystery to you?

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# SITUATION

Paul has created a stalemate regarding God's laws. Paul says they are good, but they are also incapable of motivating us to live up to God's righteous expectations. Whether the law is present or not, we can't obey it perfectly, so we are still sinners. It is quite a predicament! But Paul is only laying the foundation for the good news that follows in this section of his letter. As you read Paul's letter to the Romans, note that *justification* refers to God's declaration that we are not guilty for our sins, *redemption* means that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins by dying on the cross, and *atonement* refers to Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.

# OBSERVATION

*Read Romans 3:21–31 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.*

## NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

<sup>21</sup> But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righ-

teousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.<sup>25</sup> God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— <sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. <sup>28</sup> For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. <sup>29</sup> Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, <sup>30</sup> since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. <sup>31</sup> Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

#### NEW KING JAMES VERSION

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, <sup>26</sup> to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. <sup>28</sup> Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. <sup>29</sup> Or is He the God of the Jews



## LIFE LESSONS

only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup>since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. <sup>31</sup>Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

## EXPLORATION

**1.** What does Paul say all people share when it comes to God's laws and his standards?

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**2.** How are people made right with God? What is required of them?

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**3.** How did God demonstrate his righteousness in not just "dismissing" people's sins?

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**4.** How does God's plan demonstrate his fairness toward all of humanity?

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**5.** What should prevent believers from bragging?

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**6.** How has God shown that he is both just and merciful to you?

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## INSPIRATION

Up until this point in Paul's letter, all efforts at salvation have been from earth upward. Humans have inflated their balloons with their own hot air and not been able to leave the atmosphere. Our pleas of ignorance are inexcusable. Our comparisons with others are impermissible. Our religious merits are unacceptable (2:29). The conclusion is unavoidable: self-salvation simply does not work. We have no way to save ourselves.

So, how does God make us right with him? How can he punish the sin and love the sinner? Paul has made it clear, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness" (Romans 1:18). Is God going to lower his standard so we can be forgiven? Is God going to look away and pretend we've never sinned? Would we want a God who altered the rules and made exceptions? No. We want a God who "does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17) and who "does not show favoritism" (Romans 2:11).

Besides, to ignore our sin is to endorse our sin. If our sin has no price, we should just sin on! If our sin brings no pain, we should sin on! In fact, we should "do evil that good may result" (Romans 3:8). Is this the aim of God? To compromise his holiness and enable our evil?

Of course not. Then what is he to do? How can he be just and love the sinner? How can he be loving and punish the sin? How can he satisfy his standard *and* forgive my mistakes? Is there any way God could honor the integrity of heaven without turning his back on me?

There is. "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ. . . . God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:19, 21). The perfect record of Jesus was given to us, and our imperfect record was given to Christ. "For

## LIFE LESSONS

Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18). As a result, God’s holiness is honored and his children are forgiven. By his perfect life, Jesus fulfilled the commands of the law. By his death, he satisfied the demands of sin. Jesus suffered not like a sinner, but as a sinner. Why else would he cry, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46 NKJV).

Ponder the achievement of God. He doesn’t condone our sin, nor does he compromise his standard. He doesn’t ignore our rebellion, nor does he relax his demands. Rather than dismiss our sin, he assumes our sin and, incredibly, sentences himself. God’s holiness is honored. Our sin is punished. And we are redeemed. God is still God. The wages of sin is still death. And we are made perfect. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado).

## REACTION

**7.** When did you first realize salvation is a free gift provided by Christ?

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**8.** Who or what helped you reach that realization?

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**9.** In what different ways do people try to earn salvation?

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**10.** How was Jesus able to fulfill the commands of God's law and atone for our sins?

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**11.** How would your life today be different without Jesus? What has his gift meant to you?

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**12.** How will you respond to God for being both merciful *and* just?

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## LIFE LESSONS

What is priceless can't be bought or earned. Eternal life is just such a treasure. We receive it free or not at all. We could never afford it. We could never deserve it. It's God's gift to us, or we don't have it. But it would be a huge mistake to conclude in this case that what is free is cheap. It cost God a great deal, including his Son's life, to provide this gift for us. There's no room for bragging in our response, but only gratitude.

## DEVOTION

*Father in heaven, we come to you, aware that we do not deserve to be in your presence. We thank you that you have provided a path for us through the blood of your precious Son. Your saving grace is a priceless gift. Keep us amazed and mesmerized by what you have done for us.*

# JOURNALING

How can you tell others about the free gift of salvation that God has given to you?

## FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Romans during this twelve-part study, read Romans 3:9–31. For more Bible passages on the gift of salvation, read John 3:16; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 1 Timothy 1:15; Titus 2:11; and Hebrews 5:7–9.



## LESSON FOUR

# THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

*He did not waver at the promise of God through  
unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory  
to God, and being fully convinced that what He  
had promised He was also able to perform.*

ROMANS 4:20–21 NKJV



## REFLECTION

With the exception of Moses, no character in the Old Testament is mentioned more in the New Testament than Abraham. He was considered by the Jewish people to be the founding father of the nation of Israel, and they held him in high regard for putting his faith in God and trusting that the Lord would deliver on his promises. Think of someone who has been an example of great faith to you. What are the evidences of that person's faith?

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## SITUATION

In this next portion of Paul's letter, he makes the case for God having an ancient plan for salvation. Paul begins by tracing the Jewish lineage back to its beginning with Abraham—the original patriarch of the Jewish nation who was not himself a Jew. Paul argued that if God granted salvation (righteousness by faith) to Abraham long before he fathered the Jewish nation, would it not make sense to conclude that God has a plan for the rest of the Gentiles? In this way, Paul shows that God's plan has always been based on faith, not lineage.

## OBSERVATION

*Read Romans 4:13–25 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.*

### NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

<sup>13</sup> It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righ-

teousness that comes by faith. <sup>14</sup> For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, <sup>15</sup> because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. <sup>17</sup> As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

<sup>18</sup> Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>19</sup> Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. <sup>20</sup> Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup> This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." <sup>23</sup> The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, <sup>24</sup> but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. <sup>25</sup> He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

#### NEW KING JAMES VERSION

<sup>13</sup> For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, <sup>15</sup> because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all <sup>17</sup> (as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the



## LIFE LESSONS

dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; <sup>18</sup>who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “So shall your descendants be.” <sup>19</sup>And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. <sup>20</sup>He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, <sup>21</sup>and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. <sup>22</sup>And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

<sup>23</sup>Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, <sup>24</sup>but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup>who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

## EXPLORATION

**1.** Abraham’s life may have been filled with love for God, good works, and obedience to religious rules. But none of these things made him acceptable to God. What did?

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**2.** How did Abraham receive God’s promise? How can others receive it?

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**3.** What obstacles did Abraham overcome to believe God’s promise?

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**4.** What does it mean to have a strong faith? Does faith rely on its source or its object? Explain.

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**5.** What words were written for both Abraham and us?

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**6.** How has God credited you with righteousness? How do you respond to this act?

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## INSPIRATION

Henry Drummond writes, “You will find, if you think for a moment, that the people who influence you are people who believe in you. In an atmosphere of suspicion men shrivel up; but in that atmosphere, they expand and find encouragement and educative fellowship. It is a wonderful thing that here and there in this hard uncharitable world there should still be left a few rare souls who think no evil. This is the great unworldliness. Love sees the bright side, puts the best construction on every action. What a delightful state of mind to live in! What a stimulus and benediction even to meet with it for a day! To be trusted is to be saved. And if we try to influence or elevate others, we shall soon see that success is in proportion to their belief of our belief in them. For the respect of another is the first restoration of the self-respect a man has lost; our ideal of what he is becomes to him the hope and pattern of what he may become.”

## LIFE LESSONS

This faith moves mountains of inertia in other people. It pulverizes prejudices and impossibilities. This faith is the fruit of God's Gracious Spirit that sweetens a sour world. It replaces suspicion and distrust with friendship and hope and good cheer. It makes our friends, family, and casual acquaintances stand tall.

Faith of this caliber comes from God. If we lack it, we must ask for it. He urges us to come boldly requesting good gifts from Him (see Luke 11:9–13). He does bestow His Gracious Spirit on those who request His presence and are prepared to cooperate wholeheartedly with His commands (see Acts 5:32). He will not withhold any good thing from those who seek His faith in sincerity. He is faithful. (From *A Gardener Looks at the Fruits of the Spirit* by Philip Keller.)

## REACTION

**7.** How does Abraham's example inspire you to have deeper faith in God?

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**8.** What are some ways that your life and faith could influence others?

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**9.** When was a time when someone else's faith made a difference in your life? Explain.

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**10.** What are some things that can keep your faith from growing?

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**11.** What do you usually do when you experience doubts?

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**12.** What can you learn from Abraham about dealing with hindrances to faith?

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## LIFE LESSONS

Almost everyone in Abraham's day, as in our own day, had faith of one kind or another. Some of them believed in idols, others believed in luck or fate, and many simply had faith in themselves. Abraham's faith had a divine object. He had faith in God, and he acted on it. The faith people witness in our lives may not automatically communicate the object of our faith. They will see the effects of our faith. If they ask, we must be ready to tell them our faith rests in Jesus Christ. We live by faith because we live in him.

## DEVOTION

*Father, you accepted Abraham's faith, and you accept ours today. We do not deserve your forgiveness and mercy, yet you give it freely. Thank you for covering our guilt in the blood of your only Son. Continue to strengthen our faith in you, for your glory.*

# JOURNALING

How are the people around you impacted by your faith in God?

## FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Romans during this twelve-part study, read Romans 4:1–5:21. For more Bible passages on faith, read Genesis 15:6; 2 Chronicles 20:20; Isaiah 7:9; Habakkuk 2:4; Matthew 9:29; 21:22; Acts 15:9; and Hebrews 11:6.