

Discovering God's Good News for You



STONECROFT



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Stonecroft Bible Studies

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Welcome to Stonecroft Bible Studies!

It doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done... God wants to be in relationship with you. And one place He tells you about Himself is in His Word—the Bible. Whether the Bible is familiar or new to you, its contents will transform your life and bring answers to your biggest questions.

Gather with people in your communities—women, men, couples, young and old alike—and dig into the heart of the Good News as explained by the apostle Paul. Find out how being right with God is a gift from Him because of what His Son, Jesus Christ, did—and how our faith, and nothing more, gains us access to an unbreakable family relationship with the Father.

Each chapter of *Discovering God's Good News for You* includes discussion questions to stir up meaningful conversation, specific Scripture verses to investigate, and time for prayer to connect with God and each other.

Discover more of God and His ways through this small-group exploration of the Bible.

Tips for Using This Study

This book includes several features that make it easy to use and helpful for your life:

- The page number or numbers given after every Bible reference are keyed to the page numbers in the *Abundant Life Bible*. This paperback Bible uses the New Living Translation, a translation in straightforward, up-to-date language. We encourage you to obtain a copy through your group leader or at stonecroft.org.
- Each chapter ends with a section called “Thoughts, Notes, and Prayer Requests.” Use this space for notes or for thoughts that come to you during your group time or study, as well as prayer requests.
- In the back of the book you will find “Journal Pages”—a space available for writing down how the study is changing your life or any other personal thoughts, reactions, and reflections.
- Please make this book and study your own. We encourage you to use it and mark it in any way that helps you grow in your relationship with God!

If you find this study helpful, you may want to investigate other resources from Stonecroft. Please take a look at “Stonecroft Resources” in the back of the book or online at **stonecroft.org/store**.

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Introduction

The book of Romans centers on the topic of salvation and the truth that salvation is available only through the Gospel of Christ. Paul, the author of Romans, had achieved all the typical marks of success as a Pharisee. He was passionate about his work and did his best to wholeheartedly support Judaism. Then one day he had a supernatural encounter that turned his life upside down. Until that day, Paul had dedicated his life to eradicating the teachings of Jesus Christ—a man who claimed to be God. In fact, Paul so violently opposed anything that had to do with Jesus, he mercilessly persecuted Jesus’ followers.

We read in Acts 9 how Paul (then named Saul) encountered Jesus Christ, and his life radically changed. He became as passionate about proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ as he had been about eradicating it. The completeness of the transforming work of Christ is explained in the book of Romans.

Paul, a highly educated, articulate, intelligent man, wrote at least 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament. These books are actual letters he wrote to Christians in various locations. Romans is the longest letter he wrote, and it is considered by many to be his masterpiece. It is an essay on basic theological issues, the Gospel or Good News, and the fundamentals of salvation.

In this divinely inspired writing, Paul passed on truths as applicable to us today as they were when he first wrote them, about AD 57. At the time of this writing, he was staying in Corinth on his third missionary journey. He had never been to Rome but hoped to go there on his way to Spain. Paul felt a strong connection to the church in Rome, which included both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Although he had never met most of them, he nonetheless considered them to be his brothers and sisters in Christ. He wrote the letter by way of introduction and to make a strong declaration for faith in Jesus Christ.¹

Although there are 16 chapters in Romans, in this book we will be studying only the first 8. Three major themes in these chapters (and in the whole book) include the Gospel, faith, and God's righteousness. A key passage is Romans 1:16-17 (page 857):

I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”

Romans is far more than just a letter written to the Christian community in Rome. More importantly, it is a personal letter God has written to *us* to draw us closer to Him and to show us how we can have peace with Him. As we study Paul's letter, we'll see clearly that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to have a personal relationship with God. It is also the key that opens the door to His remarkable promises.

Okay! Now that we know a little about the background of this wonderful book, let's get started. Good things await us!

Can We Know God?

Romans 1:1-32

Karen came to the place of literally crying out to God, “If you are real and you know me, I’m going to believe in you. I just can’t do this anymore. I give up. I give up, and I’m going to believe in you.”

In her early thirties, Karen lived in Southern California and had a successful business career. She was focused on career, goals, and success.

As a new wife and stepmom with an eight-year old stepdaughter, she was trying to figure out how to be a mom, a wife, a career person, and still be herself. Pressures of married life, priorities, values, and demands were overwhelming. Karen could no longer meet the needs of her husband, her child, her career, and her own expectations. Nothing fully satisfied her.

In desperation one night, sitting on her back porch, she cried out to God.

Something changed in her that day—her transformation journey began.

“I knew something changed. I gave up my life and said, ‘God, I’m giving my life into your hands.’ I gave up. And I knew God was the answer.”

And just like Paul, she began to experience a level of fulfillment and satisfaction beyond anything she'd ever imagined.



Prayer

God, you created the heavens and earth and put everything in place. You made the world to be lived in, not to be a place of empty chaos. Your plans stand firm forever; your intentions can never be shaken. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so your ways are higher than my ways and your thoughts are higher than my thoughts (Isaiah 45:18, page 553; Psalm 33:11, page 427; and Isaiah 55:9, page 560).

Exactly what is Christianity all about?

Is there a difference between being “religious” and being a Christian?

Does living a good, moral life make us a Christian?

These are some of the questions we'll answer in the next few weeks as we look at Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome.

Paul, the Writer of Romans

You'll notice Paul begins his letter by introducing himself and stating to whom he writes. Read Romans 1:1,7 (page 857).

What does Paul call himself in Romans 1:1?

What do you think he means when he refers to himself as a slave of Jesus?

It speaks to his level of commitment. When Paul gave his life to Christ, it was a total relinquishment. He completely let go of his former life, his former belief system—everything! From that point on he viewed himself as being owned by God—because God had purchased his redemption with the life of His Son, Jesus.

What other way does Paul identify himself?

Apostles were men who'd been chosen by God to spread the Gospel after the death and resurrection of Jesus. God specifically called Paul to take this message to the Gentiles. God's calling of Paul surprises us on two levels. First, although Paul had always been a very religious man, he was not a Christian. He considered Christianity to be a false religion and was a violent opponent of the Gospel. Read Acts 26:9-11 (page 854).

It's startling to think of a man who was so committed to eliminating the Christian belief system suddenly becoming its most outspoken supporter. And yet that is Paul's story! It is also surprising that God called Paul, a very devout Jew, to take His message to *Gentiles*. At that

time a real cultural barrier existed between Jews and Gentiles, with little intermingling between the two groups. How did this surprising call of God take place? Continue reading in Acts 26:12-18 (page 854) to find out.

Just imagine what such an experience would have been like. God used extraordinary measures to call a man of extraordinary passion to fulfill an extraordinary mission. Paul's life modeled the "about-face" that happens when one experiences the transforming power of Jesus Christ. And many observed this dramatic change. Read Galatians 1:22-24 (page 890).

Paul's commitment to Jesus came at a price. He suffered great physical and emotional pain as a result—something you cannot always tell from his writing. There is a spirit of joy emanating from the pen of this man. He finds a reason to rejoice even when he's been beaten and thrown in prison. But do not mistake it for just a thin veneer of joy; it is supernatural, bone-deep joy straight from God. What Paul teaches in his writing is that this same joy is available to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ.

The Heart of the Gospel

To understand the Gospel (or Good News) Paul so passionately wrote about, read Romans 1:2-4 (page 857).

How would you define the Gospel according to this passage?

Jesus Christ is the heart of the Gospel message. His coming was promised in the Old Testament and recorded in the New Testament. He was a descendant of King David, and He was called the *King of the Jews*. Ultimately, He is the Son of God, a fact to which His resurrection attests. We have access to the same transforming power of God that Paul experienced when we, too, believe in and commit our lives to Christ.

Paul points to Jesus' resurrection as proof of His deity. There is other proof as well. Read Matthew 3:16-17 (page 735).

All three persons of the Trinity are represented in these verses: the voice of God the Father, the Holy Spirit in a form like a dove, and Jesus the Son. Throughout the New Testament we find proof that Jesus is the Son of God and that He was resurrected from death. Romans is especially rich in such proof.

The Christians in Rome

Read Romans 1:6-10 (page 857).

How does Paul describe those he is writing to?

Paul clearly feels very connected to the Christians in Rome. He prays for them often—even though he's never met most of them! How remarkable this is. Yet one of the greatest ways to form a connection with someone is by praying for them.

The Romans' faith was talked about around the world. Why do you think news of their faith traveled so far?

Do you know someone you consider to have great faith? What makes their faith different than others'?

Read Romans 1:11-15 (page 857). What is Paul's motivation for visiting the Romans?

Paul was both a Jew and a Roman citizen. He was also fluent in Greek, so he had a wide range of people he could reach. He wanted to reach them all regardless of cultural differences. His sense of obligation to share the Gospel was huge. Read 1 Corinthians 9:16 (page 875).

The Power of the Gospel

Why is Paul so willing to preach without receiving financial support from those who hear him?

Read Romans 1:16-17 (page 857) and note another reason why Paul felt so compelled to share the Gospel.

Paul understood that whether or not someone believes the Gospel is literally a matter of life and death for that person. As he said, “*It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes.*”

Before we continue, perhaps the word *saving* should be explained. The Bible repeatedly tells us that God sent His Son to earth to *save* people from their sins. For one example, read Matthew 1:21 (page 733).

This is why we refer to Jesus as our *Savior*—because He saved us from the power and consequences of our sin. He did this when He died on the cross in order to pay the price for all our sins. His death and His resurrection three days later set us free—or saved us. That is why, when a person becomes a believer, they often say they have been *saved*.

The incredible aspect of our salvation is that it is far more than just forgiveness of sins. Salvation includes all three tenses: past, present, and future. The believer *has been* forgiven from the guilt and penalty of sin by what Jesus did for us *in the past*. The believer *is being* delivered from the power of sin by what Jesus *is doing for us now*, which is helping us to withstand temptation and to break destructive habits. The believer *will be* delivered from the presence of sin *in the future* when they transition into eternal life with God in heaven, where there will be no sorrow, regret, shame, guilt, unhappiness, or any other negative emotion as the result of sin.

Looking back at verse 16, to whom does God offer salvation?

No one is denied the opportunity to trust Christ as their Savior. How does Romans 1:17 say we receive salvation?

Faith is the *only way* we can trust Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Who does Jesus say works within us, drawing any person who comes to Him, according to John 6:44 (pages 814-815)?

What does the one who comes receive, according to John 6:47?

Refusal to Recognize God

Read Romans 1:18-20 (page 857).

Against whom does God show His anger?

How do we know the truth about God?

These three verses are important! Read them again slowly, taking in everything they are saying. What phrase impresses you most strongly?

God has made the truth of His existence obvious to everyone! Does that stun you? In other words, He has imprinted all of creation with His signature. That means that within the heart of everyone who says there is no God is a veiled recognition of the very truth they are denying—and a deliberate choice to believe a lie.

Read Romans 1:21-32 (pages 857-858). What are the results of refusing to recognize God?

What is your reaction to the fact that God abandoned them to whatever they wanted to do?

Do you think that God's anger was justified?

Many would reject Jesus, but God sent His Son to die for our sins; He made a way for us to come to Him. While hating our sin and rejection, He still passionately loves us! We see His anger, and we also see the full scope of His love.

When people refuse to acknowledge the existence of God, their darkened and confused thought process shows up in their behavior.

It's a dismaying list of behaviors, but look at it again. What do all of these behaviors have in common?

Self-centeredness. When we deny God, we move ourselves into the position of God; ego becomes supreme. We can develop an insatiable appetite for pleasure and our souls deteriorate in the process. Worst of all, as verse 32 says, we take others with us. Our ego's appetite can only be satisfied when it recognizes God as our Creator and accepts the love He holds out to us—through His Son's death on the cross.

Where do you stand in light of what we've been discussing?
What do you really believe?

Who do you put your trust in?

Don't let your unanswered questions stop you from believing what God clearly says in His Word. Step out in faith and tell Him that in spite of your questions, you want to trust Jesus as your Savior. Once you do that, the answers will start to come.

————— *Personal Reflection and Application* —————

From this chapter,

I see...

I believe...

I will...

[illegible]