

When in Rome..?

Session 1: Not ashamed of the Gospel

TIMING 30-45 minutes, then leading into ministry

BUZZ GROUPS Pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

ILLUSTRATIONS We have some ideas, but your own ideas/stories work better

FOCUS Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group



ICEBREAKER When was the last time you did something really embarrassing?!

Introduction to the series

People often think of a journey through Romans as a trek in the Himalayas, or a visit to the Louvre Musee, Paris. In each session we'll go to some of the peak/masterpiece passages. We behave out of what we believe to be true. But are all our own beliefs correct? Is "our truth" *the truth*? In Romans Paul helps us review that. And with changed understanding, we adopt changed attitudes and new behaviours. We become more like Jesus.

Introduce session 1

Romans 1:16-17 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "the righteous will live by faith."

In these verses Paul outlines 4 foundations of Christian life that his letter will cover:

1. Live Shamelessly

"I am not ashamed of the gospel"

KEY POINT Don't cave in to compromise

"Shameless" is a hit TV series about an explosive family with little self-control or care and concern for others. The title describes how those surrounding them marvel at their willful lack of civility or sense of personal responsibility. We call such people "shameless" because us moral "Christian" people feel they ought to sense shame but they don't.

In the time of the Romans, the tables were turned. Pagan society called Christians brazen, weak foolish, unethical, disloyal and traitorous. There was no shelter or security for the early church from Pagan society.

Neither was there much comfort from the Jewish community. Judaism was acceptable to Rome. Although patronizing, at least it meant that Jews could practice their religion free from persecution by the state (as long as they didn't threaten it's power). Christianity started as a Jewish sect. So the early church faced a question: should it try to remain as a sect within the Jewish religion, and therefore benefit from its umbrella of protection? But how could they do that when, for example, Jesus had been rejected, condemned as a heretic and killed as a criminal by Judaism's top leadership? On top of that, many Gentiles were now following Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit, such that it didn't seem necessary to become a Jew at all!

Christians in Rome were between a rock and a hard place, despised on both sides. In AD 64

Emperor Nero would blame them for the great fire that destroyed the city, leading to the widespread persecution and expulsion of the city.

So to become a Christian in Rome was a big decision. So Paul writes them a letter to encourage them and give them some wisdom on how to live within that kind of society.

APPLICATION

Share a personal story about a time when you stepped out and shared what you really believe with someone, and their favourable reaction that wasn't as bad as you thought beforehand.

2. Get the Good News

“the gospel..is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes”

KEY POINT “gospel” means “good news”. Do we understand why the gospel is good news?

Summarizing what we believe can be quite hard.

BUZZ GROUPS TRY IT NOW IN PAIRS. WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS?

Paul highlights 4 things in this verse:

- (i) it's about God's power, not human religion or understanding = *The Power of God*
- (ii) the core message is about being rescued and restored = *salvation*
- (iii) it's for everyone not a special group = *everyone*
- (iv) it's received by believing, not rewarded on the basis of our performance = *who believes*

ILLUSTRATION

share which aspects of these 4 aspects you find most challenging and why

APPLICATION

Are you able to clearly articulate what you believe and why? Try writing it down in a few simple sentences. Perhaps invite people to do this as an individual exercise on a post-it.

3. See the Goal of the Gospel

“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed...”

KEY POINT the goal for us is to be in a right relationship with God (righteousness)— everything else flows from that – he loves us and wants us to know Him.

Anon *“If you don't know where you're going any road will get you there”*

Bill Hybels (*Courageous Leadership*) *“Vision is a picture of the future that produces passion”.*

The strongest visions motivate us and direct our entire being. These verses tell us what motivated the apostle Paul. “righteousness” is mentioned 232 times in the NIV Bible, as perhaps the central attribute of God's character that people either emulate, or fall way short of. It has three aspects of meaning:

- (i) right, loyal, good, covenant relationship (see Genesis 15:6; 18:19; Galatians 3:5-7)

- (ii) godly ethical behavior – fulfillment of the demands of relationship, e.g. monogamy in marriage
- (iii) being sure of the verdict of God on our lives, (he is both lawgiver and judge), our standing before Him.

Is a right relationship with God really our strongest desire and what we give our utmost efforts to pursue?

ILLUSTRATION

share some of your own battles, some of the alternative ends that you tend to pursue. Then share about why the classic spiritual disciplines are so important in your own life to constantly pull you back on track.

BUZZ GROUPS HONESTY TIME! IN PAIRS SHARE WHICH SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE (PRAYER, WORSHIP, BIBLE STUDY, REST, FASTING, ETC) IS CURRENTLY YOUR GREATEST SUCCESS AND WHICH YOU FIND THE GREATEST CHALLENGE.

4. Live by faith

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

KEY POINT How do we receive the good news? How do we achieve the goal of righteousness? How do we get right with God and know Him?

- Through Jesus, God is making his own godliness available to us. We can live in a right relationship with God, becoming like him in character. See 1 Peter 2:24
- The historical events of Jesus’ death and resurrection. They only can have any impact on us today if we believe those events have a timeless significance. To believe that is faith
- But is faith just about beliefs, in other words inner thoughts? Is that what “faith” means?
- No! US best-selling author Jim Wallis says “faith is personal, but it is never private”. There’s always a public outworking of genuine, authentic, biblical faith. It cannot but result in good works

(see James 2:14-26).

So, we *live by faith*, not just believe the right things. We know God and live differently as a result.

ILLUSTRATION

Share a story in your own life about how your motivation for doing good works changed when you realized that you could do them out of love for God, and do them with him through relationship, rather than on your own. Perhaps you found that you began to do them as an act of worship – in response to God’s love – rather than as a means of getting his (or others’) approval.

IDEAS FOR MINISTRY

Pray to end, incorporating the key scripture for this session. Start by thanking God, say sorry for any failings that have been identified, and ask God to help us understand and to change. Importantly, ask the Holy Spirit to come and bring healing, encouragement and revelation.

When in Rome..?

Session 2: Right Relationship

TIMING 30-45 minutes, then leading into ministry

BUZZ GROUPS Pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

ILLUSTRATIONS We have some ideas, but your own ideas/stories work better

FOCUS Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group



ICEBREAKER What was the last thing you broke? How did you break it? Did you get it fixed?

Introduce Session 2

Romans 3:21-24 ²¹*But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.* ²²*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,* ²³*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* ²⁴*and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

Imagine a car garage opened near you with a big board outside saying “all repairs free”. Suspicious of a catch, we’d probably refuse to believe it. But imagine two people tested the claim. The first person’s car was quite new and only needed a new wiper blade. The other car was completely knackered and needed a new engine, gearbox, transmission, braking system, electrical faults fixed as well as internal and external bodywork repairs. Sure enough, the garage repaired both for free. The analogy highlights three core truths in this session’s scripture:

- Firstly, it’s not that the repairs cost nothing – they do – but the garage chooses not to charge customers for that cost. Because it’s free, there’s nothing the customers can do to pay for it. All they can do – the only part they play in the transaction – is to receive it.
- Secondly, to receive the offer, customers have to believe it’s genuine and take their car there to be fixed. To access the offer requires faith – belief in the message and action in response to it. Like the gospel message, there would be plenty of people who wouldn’t believe this offer were it made!
- Thirdly, like the cars, we’re all in a greater or lesser extent of disrepair. We all need fixing, to be put right in some way or other. Some need a wiper blade. Most need more serious work.

Share your own personal story of receiving God’s offer and getting fixed.

However, a serious downfall of the car analogy is that biblical “righteousness” is a relational term – it’s not about what happens when some individual thing gets fixed, but about what happens when our relationship with God gets fixed. The Bible argues that the most fundamental repair we all need is to be reconciled with God so that we can receive his very self from him – his Spirit – so that we can begin to become like him. We can assume God’s own righteousness. Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection has made this possible.

The key question is how do we get this righteousness, this repair we so badly need?

1. Believe the offer

²¹*But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.*

The law and the prophets tell us what God expects, about His standard. But we can't reach the standard. We can't fulfil the law or prophets. We all constantly fail, to a greater or lesser extent. So in reality, actually the law and prophets just reveal our sin and need of God.

The Gospel (good news) is that we get right by God by faith, not because we earn it by our works or obedience to the law.

This is what God has said all along! Paul takes Abraham as "exhibit A". His righteousness was based in his faith, not his ability to obey the law, because he was righteous or accepted by God, before the law was even given! (see Genesis 15:6 and Romans 4:1-25)

Share a personal example of an area of life where you long to be righteous but acknowledge that this side of heaven you never really will be, e.g. you feel you don't pray, give or rest enough, or you do envy and covet others' possessions or powers. Share what a relief it is to you to know that your failure is not the decisive factor – not that you give up trying – but that you don't labour under condemnation about it.

Application

What's this area of life for you? Can you name an area where you need "a righteousness from God, apart from the law, to be made known" to you? Where you get your sense of value, personal worth from God, or somewhere else – hence why dissatisfied?

2. Get to the garage

²²*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.*

Paul argues that what we need isn't just a vague sense of faith or "spirituality". Getting right with God only comes through one route – faith in Jesus. Apparently, it's not enough just to believe God exists, and then follow whatever blend of the world religions appeals to us. Jesus is the only garage making the free offer.

BUZZ GROUPS WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO SOMEONE WHO ASKED YOU WHY IT'S NOT TRUE THAT "ALL RELIGIONS ARE EQUALLY VALID AS THEY ALL LEAD TO THE SAME GOD"? DON'T TO USE ANY RELIGIOUS JARGON!

Get some brief feedback. Don't allow any one individual to dominate, or let things go off-track. Keep moving on even if there's not a great sense of having resolved the question!

3. Request and receive the repairs

There is no difference, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

KEY POINT We all fail to reach God's own standards of righteousness (v.23).

Share your experience of failing tests and exams or missing a personal target in a sport you enjoy.

- On a “righteousness ladder” the good news is you’re above Hitler at the bottom.
- The bad news is you’re below Mother Theresa. And she said she fell way short of God’s standard.
- Some say “I don’t do wrong things that much – loads of people lie more than me”. It’s true that there are degrees of effect – the impact our actions have. But the scale of a particular behavior is not relevant to whether it’s actually wrong or not...you can’t murder someone a little bit!
- Whether a football striker misses the goal by a centimeter or ten meters, they still miss the goal.

ILLUSTRATE: SHOW WITH A SINGLE PIECE OF PAPER

Ask this hypothetical question: If you were able to fold a piece of paper in half 50 times, how thick would it get? Ask people for answers – some daring people may say a meter, as high as a fridge, or even as high as a house. The actual answer is the distance from the earth to the sun and back!¹

KEY POINT

Our instinct isn’t always correct. Our perceptions of sin aren’t always correct. We tend to think we’re not that bad and that our minor flaws are easily overlooked. But the Bible says sin is a really serious issue requiring a monumental response. Likewise, we also vastly underestimate how much God has done for us, what this state of righteousness is and how far he has removed our sins for us! (it’s the distance from earth to sun and back!)

Paul uses three words in v.24 whose meaning may not be immediately obvious:

- “justified” means being proved right, restored to a status that’s “just-as-if” we’d never.
- the meaning of “grace” can be remembered as an acronym: “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense”.
- “redemption” refers to buying or rescuing someone out of slavery. In the Old Testament it was a blood relation who might be able or obliged to do this (e.g. Boaz was Ruth’s “kinsman redeemer”)

BUZZ GROUPS WITH THOSE DEFINITIONS IN MIND, PUT V.23-24 INTO EVERYDAY LANGUAGE TO CONVEY WHAT YOU UNDERSTAND IT TO MEAN. AFTER 3-5 MINS ASK EACH PAIR TO SHARE THEIR VERSION WITH THE WIDER GROUP.

Arguably, the most important words are the last three: “*by Christ Jesus*”. Over the next two sessions we look in to how and why that happens.

IDEAS FOR MINISTRY

- This has been another session laying foundations. In a time of silence ask the Holy Spirit to show us what the “take-away” is for each person. How are we going to think or behave differently as a result of what God has helped us understand this evening?
- Ask for new sense of the scale of what God has done for us – maybe go back in to worship as a response.
- Ask for some words and pictures of comfort and encouragement on the themes of this session.

¹ FYI this is a classic example of the impact of an exponential growth rate. The folded paper would be $1 \times (2^{50})$ times as thick as the original sheet as each fold doubles the thickness. Assuming the initial paper is 1/100 of an inch thick the last fold would make a wad of paper almost 200 million miles thick. At just 100 folds, the paper would be as thick as the radius of the known universe!



When in Rome..?

Session 3: Reliable Hope

TIMING 30-45 minutes, then leading into ministry

BUZZ GROUPS Pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

ILLUSTRATIONS We have some ideas, but your own ideas/stories work better

FOCUS Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

ICEBREAKER Tell the person next to you what the high point of your day so far was?

Introduce Session 3

Romans 5:1-5 ¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Our faith in Jesus means that we have relationship with the most loving God and we experience His love by the Holy Spirit. Understanding this leads to changed attitudes and behaviours.

BUZZ GROUPS THINK OF THE PERSON WHO LOVES YOU THE MOST. HOW DOES YOUR EXPERIENCE OF LIFE DIFFER BECAUSE OF THEIR LOVE FOR YOU? WHAT WOULD LIFE BE LIKE WITHOUT IT?

In these verses there's 5 changes to our lives that result from being justified by faith in Jesus:

[NB. focus on two or three, and move through the others more quickly].

1. Peace

"Therefore...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"

KEY POINT We're declared innocent even though we should be condemned as guilty ["justified" = "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned. We have peace with God.

Peace will provide true quality of life – less anxiety, better sleep, less anger and frustration, less depression, clearer thinking. *Illustrate the impact of Gods peace in your own life.*

2. Grace

"Therefore...we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."

KEY POINT Grace is "God's free and unmerited favour". So if we have faith in Jesus we've got this too. "We have gained access" means it has been accomplished by Jesus for us.

Ask yourself what difference your "state of grace" before God really makes. Share a personal example, for example: guilt-free living, confidence therefore no intimidation, security therefore no insecurity.

3. Joy and Hope

“And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

KEY POINT The object of our hope is the glory of God. We now see it only in part. But we'll know it in all its fullness in heaven.

BUZZ GROUPS WHAT DOES GOD'S GLORY REFER TO? WHAT IS IT? WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE TO YOU?

According to verse 21 the answer is: (i) that Jesus Christ will appear; (ii) we'll be changed into the full glory of what we were created to be; and (iii) the universe / creation will be renewed.

APPLICATION

Write down what you hope for in the future (short, medium and long-term)?

4. Perseverance and Character

³*Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

KEY POINT God wants to mature us, even when life hurts.

- “Rejoice” is not pleasure in pain but at the divine purposes/rationale in suffering
 - “suffering is the best context in which to be assured of God’s love. Many people will immediately assert the contrary, since it is suffering which makes them doubt God” (J.Stott)
- It’s a choice whether to persevere or give up/resign yourself to failure
- Character is the fruit of the Spirit that God grows in us (Gal 5:22-3)
- By persevering through suffering we can become more like Jesus.

ILLUSTRATION

Share a personal example of when you persevered through a difficult time, and rejoiced not just because it ended, but also because your character and sense of hope improved as a result.

BUZZ GROUPS WHEN LIFE GETS TOUGH, WHAT THINGS HELP US TO PERSEVERE, AND HELP OUR CHARACTER TO BE SHAPED IN POSITIVE WAYS?

5. Love that delivers

⁵*And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*

KEY POINT Hope is anchored in God's steadfast love for us

- We all need love. *Illustrate with a cultural reference (e.g. song lyrics, a press story, or quote).*
- Parental love is widely regarded as essential for children's healthy emotional development. A spouse's or peer's love promotes our fulfillment. But God's love surpasses all of those.
- "In alert expectancy...we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary – we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit" (*The Message* translation of Romans 5)
- "Such hope is no fantasy" (Revised English Bible translation of "hope does not disappoint us") We can be sure that God loves us by receiving his Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit is God's gift to all believers
- The Holy Spirit pours God's love into our hearts

ILLUSTRATION

To encourage others, share a story in your own life about a hopeless situation that was turned around by God's love.

IDEAS FOR MINISTRY

Ask the Holy Spirit to:

- Show everyone Jesus' words in Luke 11:9-13 by repeating v13. Then pray and ask Him for the Holy Spirit.
- Help the group to anchor their hope in God's love
- Ask the Holy Spirit to bring revelation and to encourage each person. Pray into any words or pictures before splitting into the same pairs as earlier to pray into each other's hopes. Listen to what God ("the God of hope" – Romans 15:13) might be saying in response.



When in Rome..?

Session 4: “Soul Rehab” Romans 8 : 1-2

TIMING 30-45 minutes, then leading into ministry

BUZZ GROUPS Pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

ILLUSTRATIONS We have some ideas, but your own ideas/stories work better

FOCUS Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

Amy Winehouse famously sang “They tried to make me go to rehab, but I said no, no, no....”

ICEBREAKER If you could change one personal habit, what would it be?

Introduction to session 4

Romans 8:1–2 “ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”

These verses are one of Paul’s clearest summary statements about what Christ accomplished on the cross. They’re the jewel in the crown of Romans.

There are two ways to live. Get a big piece of paper and draw two spirals for the group to see and describe them. Then put the labels “sin” and “spirit” on the spirals.

Say how each spiral feels. The shame, empty effort, lack of satisfaction and frustration of self-ward living. The freedom, goodness, adventure and fulfilment of God-ward living, even in times of real struggle and suffering. Illustrate both with stories from your own experience

Explain that doing God’s will (being righteous, as we looked at in session 2) involves not just the right outward actions, but the right inner motivation.

Righteousness is right actions flowing out of a right relationship with God. It’s not enough to just have one or other- we must have both.

That’s why faith is crucial – the desire to love, obey and worship God as our core inner purpose. We must do the will of God from the heart. Unless that’s our motivation, we’ll always experience a negative downward cycle, even if we behave well on the surface, we remain under “condemnation”.

But when we receive the Holy Spirit, we experience the reality of what Christ did on the cross – paying the price for sin and removing it from us – and what occurred through the resurrection – a new cleansed life and victory over the power of sin.

Paul is saying we can experience that now (v.1). What can we experience?

1. No Guilt

If “there is now No Condemnation” because of what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross, then our sin and shame has been removed. There’s nothing for us to feel guilty about. We need the Holy Spirit to transform our life towards this state. Healing from guilt is a common Christian experience.

ILLUSTRATION

Share a personal story of freedom from guilt, or ask someone else in advance. Coco Chanel said “guilt is perhaps the most painful companion of death”.

Elsewhere it has also been said that “sin, guilt, neurosis; they are one and the same, the fruit of the tree of knowledge”. In other words our ‘original sin’ (see Genesis 3) – our rebellion from God – is the core issue. When that’s fixed, life gets better.

APPLICATION

Name those past sins you continually revisit and continue to feel guilty about. Write a letter to God asking for freedom from that condemnation because of his forgiveness, say it to him as a prayer, then put it in a post-box marked for “God”.

2. No Death

We are now “free from the law of sin and death”. Verse 11 also tells us, “And if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”

Orthodox Christian theology on healing is that ultimately, everyone in Christ gets healed. Some get healed now, as a foretaste, a sign that our hope is correct, in response to the prayers of God’s people.

ILLUSTRATE

Tell 2 stories. The first is a real-life story of healing, where someone’s body, mind, emotions or practical life situation was ‘healed’, or repaired, set right, in response to prayer. The second is of unanswered prayer where there hasn’t yet apparently been healing – but crucially, share what difference having a secure hope of God’s ultimate healing on that issue makes now, so that you can rejoice even while there’s still suffering, ahead of having received an answer.

APPLICATION

Make it your aim to share this hope with a friend or colleague tomorrow, and offer to pray for them in whatever difficulty they’re facing.

3. No Limit

“Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free”

BUZZ GROUPS WHAT HOLDS US BACK FROM LIVING FULL, UNRESTRAINED, FRUITFUL, SPIRIT-FUELLED LIVES?

Get brief feedback, perhaps write the responses on a flipchart.

At the root of, or behind many of the responses will be fear, not practical barriers. John Wimber famously preached that “faith is spelled R.I.S.K”. We should “feel the fear, but do it anyway.” We no longer fear death, so we needn’t fear anything less than death either.

The Holy Spirit, who pours the love of God into our core being (Romans 5:5) offers an alternative basis for living. Freed from the fear of death, we are freed from every other fear too. As I John 4:18 says, God’s “perfect love drives out fear”.

ILLUSTRATE

Tell an inspiring story about someone who fearlessly pursued God’s purpose for their life, e.g. Jackie Pullinger’s story in “Chasing the Dragon”.

APPLICATION

This will look different for everyone. But show here, how as a result of preparing an evening on this scripture, you are going to put it in to practice. How you are going to live differently, receiving God's love afresh by the Holy Spirit, to face your fears and take practical steps to life change.

IDEAS FOR MINISTRY

Ask the Holy Spirit to:

- to show people in their own hearts any areas where they sense guilt or a vague notion of condemnation. Invite people to say out loud one word connected to that thing to signal their request to God to remove that from them.
- ask people to share scriptures, pictures, or words of knowledge that might encourage others to face their fears, or confront them that God understands and wants to strengthen them.

When in Rome..?

Session 5: "The Ultimate Trust Fund" Romans 8 : 13-17

TIMING 30-45 minutes, then leading into ministry

BUZZ GROUPS Pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

ILLUSTRATIONS We have some ideas, but your own ideas/stories work better

FOCUS Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group



ICEBREAKER If you had a large, secure, trust-fund income, what would you do with your time?

Introduction to session 5

Romans 8:13-17 NIV inclusive version *"¹³For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴because those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption. And by him we cry, "Abba Father." ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*

¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

Romans 8:13-17 Message version *"¹²⁻¹⁴So don't you see that we don't owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent. There's nothing in it for us, nothing at all. The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life. God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go! ¹⁵⁻¹⁷This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike "What's next, Papa?" God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what's coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance! We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him!"*

Bible-scholar J.I. Packer wrote:

"If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new...is summed up in the knowledge of the fatherhood of God. 'Father' is the Christian name for God." *Knowing God*, p.226

So what do we make of the thought of being God's child? In this passage there are 4 characteristics of the children of God.

1. Radical Holiness (v.13-14)

Radical here doesn't mean weird or extreme, but simply "spirit led" (v.14) Radical holiness stops and asks God what he would like you to focus on right now, what he might like you to do or say, or where to go today. It turns holiness from being a dry religious ideal, to a full rich, adventurous life.

Illustration: Try this yourself in preparation for this talk (If you've never done it before) and tell everyone what happened.

2. Fearless Family (v.15a)

We all tend to live as God’s slaves rather than as his children. The great British revival preacher John Wesley longed for people to enter in to “the loving spirit of adoption”, and he preached Romans 8:15 fourteen times from 1739 – 1743. The impact of this verse on our experience of God has lost none of its power or urgency. How does each type of life feel?

Get a flipchart, or a big sheet of paper and prepare it in advance with the following – don’t write on the items in the square brackets []:

SLAVE		CHILD
God as Master		God as Father
Grace Performance		Law
Doing		[Position]
[External Show]		[Being]
by Flesh]	Led by	Internal Reality [Driven
[Love]	the Spirit	Fear
Distance from God		[Intimacy with God]
[Servitude]		Freedom
[Misery]		Joy Insecurity
[Security] [Religion]		
Relationship		

Now ask people to break in to pairs/3s and fill in the gaps. Explain that it’s about identifying the hallmarks of life when lived as “a slave again to fear” or in “the spirit of adoption” (v.15). After a few minutes get feedback and fill in the blanks with their ideas.

ILLUSTRATE

Tell your own story about being a Christian – about how you made (and are still making) the leap from a slave’s to a child’s view of God.

APPLICATION

Recommend two books: “From Orphans to Heirs” by Mark Stibbe (from which the above table is taken); and “The Return of the Prodigal Son” by Henri Nouwen.

3. Intimate Assurance (v.15b-16)

How can we be sure we’re really God’s children? Ask this question and say the following illustration, adjusting it to fit your own life story: “it’s like me with my dad. I’ve never had a DNA test to verify that I am in fact his child. And I’ve got no intention of doing so. Why not? I don’t need to. I know I’m his child because I have a spirit of son/daughter ship regarding my relationship with him. I take it on faith. And I’m really happy with that. If I felt the need to take a DNA test you’d think there was something wrong with my relationship with him. Faith in the reality of a living relationship is of far more worth and strength than scientific fact”.

“by him we cry “Abba, Father.” Verse 15 reminds us of Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14:36 “Going farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. “Abba Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

Likewise for us, our most tangible moments of knowing we're God's children can come at times of great suffering – it's at those times we can become particularly aware of being "in Christ". It's at those times when prayer becomes really important. We can echo Christ's prayer in the Garden, or use the Lord's Prayer "Our Father...your will be done...give us our daily bread...deliver us from evil."

4. Relentless Heirs (v.17)

St Paul concludes with an amazing thought: If it's really true that we're God's children, and that Jesus has died for us, then there's an inheritance for us.

BUZZ GROUPS WHAT IS INHERITANCE? NAME SOME OF THE WAYS WE BENEFIT FROM JESUS' LIFE AND DEATH, FROM FAITH IN WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR US.

So we end up where we started the evening. We are recipients of the ultimate trust fund. We get the Holy Spirit now as a guarantee, a foretaste, an early share of it. We are free to pursue God's purposes with our lives, not our own.

The pursuit of God's purposes will involve suffering – indeed, that's often how Jesus' greatest glory is revealed. But our future hope is sure, and we can enjoy the good times too, knowing that even they are a dim, tiny portion of a huge, glorious inheritance that one day we will all experience in full!

IDEAS FOR MINISTRY

- Sing a worship song together that focuses on our inheritance and thanks God for it
- Say the Lord's Prayer together three times allowing a silent pause between each time of 1 minute, to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us
- Break in to pairs/3's to pray for boldness to believe God, receive the Spirit of adoption, and more fully pursue his purposes for our lives.

When in Rome..?

Session 6: "Inseperable" Romans 8 : 35 - 39



TIMING 30-45 minutes, then leading into ministry

BUZZ GROUPS Pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

ILLUSTRATIONS We have some ideas, but your own ideas\stories work better

FOCUS Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

ICEBREAKER The Beatles wrote "All you Need is Love" in 1967. What's your favourite song title or song lyric with "love" in it?

Introduction to session 6

Romans 8:35 - 39 ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We all want to be loved. St Paul says nothing can stop God's love from reaching us. And in the end, nothing can top God's love winning the day.

BUZZ GROUPS WHEN DID YOU FIRST FALL IN LOVE? AND WHAT DID IT FEEL LIKE?

Look at each of the potential problems St Paul lists in v.3. What does each mean for us today? Go through the list giving personal examples for each one.

1. Trouble = stress, things go wrong, frustration, problems we're up against
2. Hardship = lack of time, energy, money, especially if we're "spent" helping others
3. Persecution = trying to do the right thing and only getting hassle in return. Caring for friends and relatives, parenting, refusing to gossip or fiddle work expenses.
4. Famine = emotional starvation, lack of fulfilment, no refreshment, nothing feeding us.
5. Lacking encouragement or support or help when we need it, missing friends, grief, hopelessness, loneliness or depression
6. Nakedness = vulnerability, feeling exposed or weak
7. Danger = fears, threats and risks, that tempt us to fear and turn back.
8. Sword = conflict and hostility, harsh words, disagreements, emotional/physical/psychological abuse by others, separation from those we long to be reconciled to

BUZZ GROUPS WHY DO THESE THINGS MAKE US FEEL UNLOVED? WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT THAT? WHAT IS THE BIBLE'S WISDOM (OR YOURS!) ON HOW TO RESPOND?

We have a choice of two fundamentally different ways to respond to these things:

1. Accept defeat (v36)

Accept defeat. Be pitied or self-pity. Lose hope. Allow ourselves to be put down and devalued until we see ourselves as unproductive and fairly useless all round. Our self-esteem plummets, motivation for life deserts us, and we feel we deserve to be trampled on.

OR

2. Faith: deliberately recall God's love (v37)

Nothing can separate us from God's love. We may be going through hell, but even there God's love is with us. In fact it's there that God's love is especially with us – despite what it feels like, just as the greatest revelation of God's love and glory is actually found in Jesus' suffering and separation on the cross for us.

Tell a personal story of how you faced this choice very clearly in responding to a difficult thing in your own life. How you chose the latter way, and what happened.

“You can think of every terrifying thing that this or any other world can produce, not one of them is then able to separate the Christian from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ, Lord of every terror and Master of every world. Of what then shall we be afraid?” (Theologian William Barclay)

- Jesus' death is the ultimate revelation of God's love for us
- Jesus' resurrection is the ultimate evidence of victory over death and– if we are “in Christ”, we are loved and victorious over death

IDEAS FOR MINISTRY

- This session is deliberately shorter so that there is more time to pray for one another.
- Recap some of the main verses/messages during the series and ask people to pray in 3's for the thing that most stood out to them.
- Read Romans 8:35-39 again and remind everyone of Romans 5:5 – it's the Holy Spirit that pours God's love – that we all desperately crave – in to our hearts. Ask the Holy Spirit to come and do just that. Leave a time of silence for people to focus on God and receive his love.
- End by renewing our commitment to Jesus – to worship him, love him and follow him.