Bible Reading Guide

Feb 7 – Romans 1
Feb 8 – Romans 2
Feb 9 – Romans 3
Feb 10 – Romans 4
Feb 11 – Romans 5
Feb 14 – Romans 6
Feb 15 – Romans 7
Feb 16 – Romans 8
Feb 17 – Romans 9
Feb 18 – Romans 10
Feb 21 – Romans 11
Feb 22 – Romans 12
Feb 23 – Romans 13
Feb 24 – Romans 14
Feb 25 – Romans 15
Feb 28 – Romans 16
Mar 1 – Mark 1
Mar 2 – Mark 2
Mar 3 – Mark 3
Mar 4 – Mark 4
Mar 7 – Mark 5
Mar 8 – Mark 6
Mar 9 – Mark 7
Mar 10 – Mark 8
Mar 11 – Mark 9
Absolute Commitment

STUDY ONE | Absolute Gospel

John Stott writes,

“The cross tells us some very unpalatable truths about ourselves, namely that we are sinners under the righteous curse of God’s law and we cannot save ourselves... If we could have been forgiven by our good works... we may be quite sure that there would have been no cross. Every time we look at the cross, Christ seems to be saying to us, ‘I am here because of you. It is your sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your death I am dying.’ Nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. All of us have inflated views of ourselves, especially in self-righteousness, until we have visited a place called Calvary. It is there, at the foot of the cross that we shrink to our true size.” [J. Stott, The Message of Galatians, IVP, 1968, p.179]

It is at the cross of Jesus that we see ourselves as we really are and humbly bow in humility and worship.

The gospel is good news but unless we recognise our terrible predicament [we are sinners and rebels, God is holy and righteous] then we will not appreciate the value of the gospel nor receive it in repentance and faith.

In the book of Romans, Paul spends the first three and a half chapters proving that we are all morally ruined, that we have no hope, regardless of our efforts, of earning God’s favour.
Getting started

Like prisoners on death row, people are guilty, condemned and awaiting the execution of God’s wrath. They sit silently in the miserable darkness of their cell, all hope extinguished. Then abruptly, the door swings open and darkness becomes light, death becomes life and bondage becomes freedom. “You are pardoned,” a voice tells them.

Reflect on your own conversion to Christ.

In what sense did the gospel seem like a pardon from death row? Briefly share your personal stories.

Read Romans 3:21-31

1. Paul opens this new section of Romans with the words ‘But now’. What shift in emphasis do these words signal?


The late Leon Morris suggests that the six tightly packed verses, v21-26 may be ‘possibly the most important single paragraph ever written”. In verses 24-25 Paul uses three words to describe what Christ has done for us through his death on the cross.
3. **Justified [v24]** – this word is borrowed from the *law court*. The judge declares that the person on trial has no legal charges against him. He is declared innocent.

   a. Why is our justification remarkable, given the background on Romans 1:18-3:20 and 3:22?

   b. How should our complete acceptance by God affect the way we view ourselves?

**Redemption [v24]** – this word is borrowed from the *slave market*. It means to buy someone out of slavery and set them free. It also points us back to God’s work of the redemption of Israel from Egypt.

   c. From what types of slavery has Christ delivered us?

**Sacrifice of atonement ['propitiation'] [25]** – this word is borrowed from the *Old Testament*. Animal sacrifices turned away God’s wrath from the sinner.

   d. Why does Jesus death turn away God’s wrath from us?
e. How should we respond to the fact that Jesus experienced God’s wrath for us?

4. What does it mean to have ‘faith’ in Jesus Christ [v22]?

5. How would you use verses 22-24 to answer the following common misunderstandings about Christianity?
   a. “There’s no such thing as a free lunch – you can’t be right with God unless you work at it”.
   
   b. “Anyone who is sure they are going to heaven is arrogant and presumptuous.”

6. Some people find it difficult to understand how God can be perfectly just and gracious at the same time. How do the justice and grace of God meet at the cross [v25-26]?
7. How does boasting about ourselves betray a fundamental understanding of the gospel [v27-31]?

Read Romans 5:6-11

9. Describe our state before Jesus died for us [v6-8]?

10. What **has** Jesus’ death achieved for us? What **will** Jesus’ death achieve for us [v9-10]?

11. Why should God’s outpouring of love and his complete acceptance make us rejoice [v11]?

Pray

‘Grace is God loving, God stooping, God coming to the rescue, God giving himself generously in and through Jesus Christ.” [J. Stott, Romans Bible Study, IVP, 1998, p35]

Take time to praise and thank God for Jesus Christ, his sacrifice on the cross and his saving work in your life.
STUDY TWO | Absolute Surrender

‘Surrendering your life is not a foolish emotional impulse but a rational, intelligent act, the most responsible and sensible thing you can do with your life...Your wisest moments will be those when you say yes to God.’ [Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven life, p83]

“The greatness of a man’s power is in the measure of his surrender.” William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army.

Getting started

What things hold us back from total surrender to God?

How have you seen God at work when you said yes to God?

In the first eleven chapters of Romans Paul described God’s gift of righteousness. In Christ we who were condemned are justified. We who were sinners are sanctified. And we who had no hope will be glorified. In chapter 12 Paul calls us to a radical response to God’s mercy, love and grace. A response of absolute surrender to his will, his plans and his purposes in the world.

Read Romans 12:1-2
1. Our call to absolute commitment is in response to God’s mercy [v1]. Briefly note how God’s mercy has been demonstrated in Romans 1-11?

2. Why do you think Paul uses the imagery of living sacrifices to describe our proper response to God’s mercy?

3. How and when do Christians worship? [v1]

4. What are some practical ways you could offer your body as a living sacrifice to God?

5. J.B. Phillips paraphrases verse 2 as, “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould.” In what ways are we influenced and pressured to conform to the world?
6. Verses 1-2 speak of both mind and body. Why are both of these important in our relationship with God?

7. What are some steps you have taken [or could take] toward the renewing of your mind?

8. Christians who are concerned with things like justification by faith are sometimes accused of opting out of living in the real world, e.g. “You’re too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use”. How could you respond to this using Romans 12:1-2?

Read Romans 12: 3-8

Our renewed mind which is capable of discerning and approving God’s will [v2], must also be active in evaluating ourselves, our identity and our gifts.

9. Why is it important to have an accurate, balanced and sober self image? [v3]
10. In what ways is a group of Christians like a single body and why is it important to recognise this? [v4-5]

11. As you think “with sober judgement” about yourself, what gift [or gifts] do you think God has given you [v6-8]? How are you using these gifts to benefit the body of Christ? Or, where would you like to begin using these gifts in 2011?

Share with your group some of the joys you have experienced in using your gifts and talents to serve Christ.

* Our Discovering your SHAPE for Ministry Seminar including a Questionnaire to help you discover your spiritual gifts will be held on Monday night, February 21st at NBC Basement, 7.30pm- 9.30pm.

Pray

Ask God to show you your gifts. Name the gifts you are aware of, giving thanks to God for them. Take time to use your “renewed mind” to think and consider how God wants you to put these gifts to use. Ask God to show you ways to offer them, surrender them, as a “living sacrifice” for his glory and for the strengthening of his people.

11
The Christian faith is founded on love – the love of God for his people and the love of his people for each other. Christians are called to imitate Christ’s grace filled, costly and sacrificial love.

Jesus said,
"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." [John 13:34-35]

Getting started
When and how have you experienced this Christ-like love through the local church [eg in personal relationships, church services, ministries and home groups]? Share this with the group.

Read Roman 12:9-16
John Stott writes in relation to Romans 12:9-21,
‘Without doubt agape-love now dominates the scene. So far in Romans all references to agape have been to the love of God – demonstrated on the cross [5:8], poured into our hearts [5:5] and doggedly refusing to let us go [8:35, 39]. But now Paul focuses on agape as the essence of Christian discipleship. Romans 12-15 are a sustained exhortation to let love govern and shape all our relationships.’ [John Stott, The Message of Romans, IVP, 1994, p330]
1. What expressions of love do you find in verses 9-16? Make a list.

2. Explore how the components of love discovered in Question 1 play a part in building a Christlike community.

3. Many of the statements of how to express love also include a negative [eg. ‘do not curse’ v14, ‘do not be conceited’ v16] – what not to do. What can you learn from each negative?

4. Thoughtfully consider our church, your home group and ministry.
   a. Which of these expressions of love do you regularly see there?
b. Which expressions of love need to be more apparent? What part can you or your group play to see this happen?

c. Hospitality [v13] is a key expression of love necessary to help build deeper connections with people. How can we improve in this area? [Individually and corporately]

Read Romans 12:17-21

When we trust in Christ all our relationships become transformed. We offer our bodies to God [Rom.12:1-2], we develop a sober self-image [Rom.12:3-8], and we love one another in the Christian community [Rom.12: 9-16]. But more, we also serve our enemies [Rom.12:17-21]

5. In Romans 12:17-21 [& v14] Paul uses the words “Do not...” several times. What general themes do you see in what we are not to do?

6. What positive instructions does Paul give us in how to deal with people who seek our harm?
What does ‘you will heap burning coals on his head’ [v20b] mean?

i. Some see it as a symbol of God’s judgment - in the OT God will ‘rain fiery coals’ on the wicked [In Ps.11:6; 140:10]

The context though, overcoming ‘evil with good’ suggests another explanation.

ii. The pain inflicted by the burning coals is a symbol of the shame and remorse experienced by an enemy who is rebuked by kindness.

iii. The coals are a symbol of penitence. Recent commentators draw attention to an ancient Egyptian ritual in which a penitent would carry burning colas on his head as evidence of the reality of his repentance.

7. Sometimes as hard as we try some people refuse to live at peace with us. How does Paul’s note of realism in v18 encourage you?

8. Is there a person who has particularly made your life difficult? In light of this passage and Luke 6:27, ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you’ is there something you can do to show Christ’s love to this person?

Pray

Pray for each other that God will show you practical ways to express love to each other and to others within the church. Pray for the capacity to love those who hate you or make your life difficult.
STUDY FOUR | Absolute Dependency

The Christian life is not to be lived in your own strength. It’s not about trying harder to be good. It’s about trusting God and availing ourselves of his grace, his word, his Spirit and prayer.

Getting started

In living life do you find it easier to trust yourself or to trust God?

1. Grace

The grace of God saves, transforms and empowers us to live a God–honouring life. Read the following verses and consider why God’s grace points us towards absolute dependency.

Ephesians 1: 3-8

Ephesians 2:5-10

1 Corinthians 5:10

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

2 Timothy 2:1

Titus 2:11-14
2. Spirit

The Holy Spirit indwells every true believer and works in them to make them like Jesus.

a. In Ephesians 5:18 we are urged to ‘be filled with the Spirit’. It means to be habitually governed and controlled by the Spirit. What will be the effect of being filled with the Spirit? See Eph.5:18-21 & Acts 4:31.

b. Galatians 5:16-25 speaks of a conflict between our sinful nature [‘flesh’] and the Spirit. Read the passage and consider how the Spirit works and what things we can do to ensure that we submit to the Spirit. Have you had a recent victory over the sinful nature by submitting to the Spirit? Share that with the group.

c. The spiritual battle is a life long battle. How does 2 Corinthians 3:18 give us confidence in this battle?
3. Word

A God-dependent believer delights in and submits to God’s word in all things.

a. The apostle Paul urges Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:14-17 to hold onto God’s word despite difficulties and persecution. What reasons does he give for this?

b. What plans have you made to ensure that you are reading and studying the Bible regularly in 2011? Is there someone you can read your Bible with in 2011 for mutual encouragement? How can your home group help one another read and submit to God’s word in 2011?

4. Prayer

God instructs us through his word and we speak to him in prayer. In the very act of praying we express our dependence on God. When we fail to pray we are saying to God that we don’t need him, we can do it on our own.

What do you learn from the following scriptures on how to pray, why pray and what to pray for?
Matthew 6: 5-13

Ephesians 6:10-20

Colossians 4:2-4

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2

1 Peter 3:12

Luke 18:1

1 Timothy 2:1-8

**Pray**

Pray for each other that you will depend on God in 2011 – filled with the Spirit, feeding on his word, praying continually and relying on his grace.
If we are to engage in absolute mission then we will need to promote the gospel in a variety of ways. Of course, we will proclaim or preach the gospel [evangelism]. Evangelism is at the heart of the Bible’s idea of mission but it is not the sum total of the mission.

John Dickson writes,

‘The proclamation of the gospel by no means exhausts the promotion of the gospel. For Christians in general – as opposed to evangelists in particular – telling the gospel to others [evangelism] is the icing on the cake of mission. It may be the most conspicuous and once tasted, it will be the sweetest part; but it is not the bulk of mission. It is not where most of our opportunities to promote Christ will be found.’ [J. Dickson, Promoting the Gospel, Blue Bottle, Sydney, 2005, p15]

In this study we will consider the various ways we can promote the gospel.

**Getting started**

How did you come to hear the gospel? What factors were instrumental in you embracing the gospel?

What do we learn from Jesus about mission?

In what ways can you engage more meaningfully with non-Christian family, friends and contacts in 2011?

2. The apostle Paul sought to promote Christ in all that he did. Read 1 Cor.9:19-22 and 1 Cor.10:31-11:1. What do we learn from Paul about mission?

3. Find below a variety of biblical texts. Read and consider together what they teach us about ways of promoting the gospel. Discuss practical steps you can take to promote the gospel this year.
   a. Matt. 9:35-10:5; Rom. 10:1; 1 Tim. 2:1-4; Col.4:2-4
   b. Phil. 4:14-18; 1 Cor.9:13-14
c. Matt. 5:14-16

d. 1 Pet. 2:12; Titus 2:1-10

e. Ephesians 4:11

f. 1 Pet. 3:13-16; Col. 4:2-6

**Pray**

Pray that God will use you in a variety of ways to promote the gospel in 2011. Pray for people you know and love who don’t know Christ.