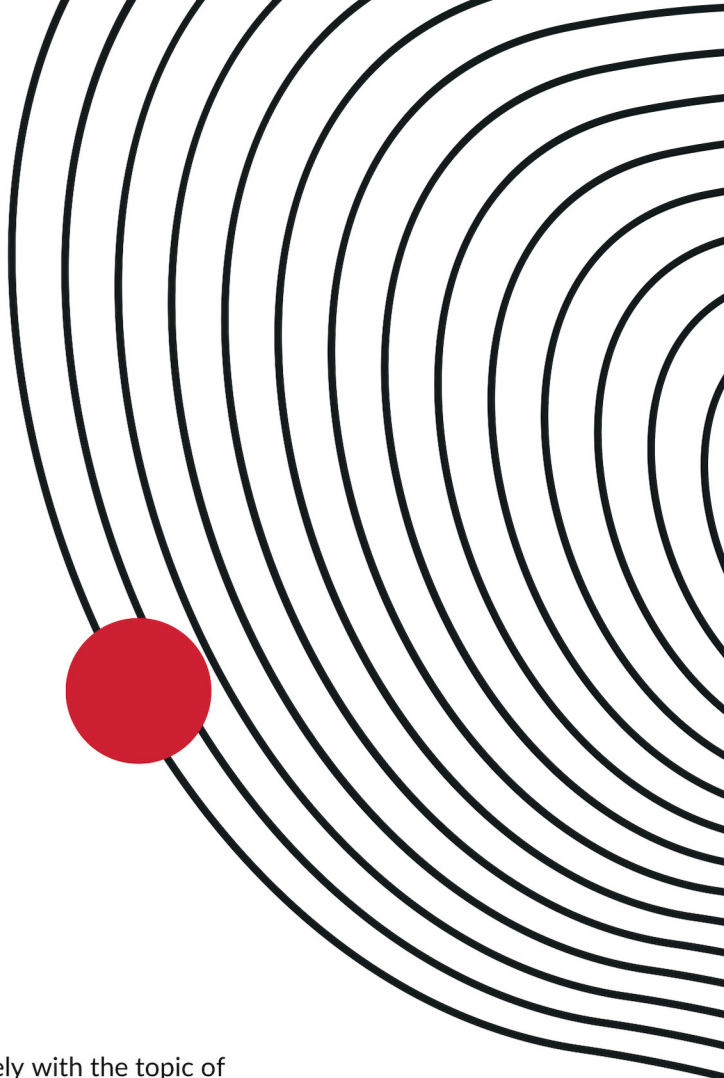


Sexuality AND GRACE



AN INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDY IN ROMANS

Sexuality AND GRACE



FACILITATOR'S NOTES

This Bible study is one of a series aiming:

- To resource local churches and others to engage positively with the topic of sexuality in the Bible.
- To enable the Church to have a more Biblically-resourced conversation about sexuality, including at Conference.
- To model approaches to scripture and good conversations, including good disagreement.

This Romans Bible study has three goals:

- To familiarise us with Romans 1:18-2:4
- To demonstrate the role of paying attention to context and paying attention to emotion.
- To consider how Romans resources our conversations and questions about sexuality.

There are six sections to this study:

- Introduction.
- Background context.
- Romans 1:18-24 and activities.
- Romans 2:1-4 and activities.
- Romans, grace and sexuality.
- Conclusion.

In advance of the study:

- Read the Introduction for Facilitators.
- Look through the materials and make a plan.
- The core activities will take around 60 minutes. Fill the rest of your time by choosing which optional activities will suit your group best.
- Make a schedule for when each activity will begin and end.
- Make a list of what resources you need.

You will need:

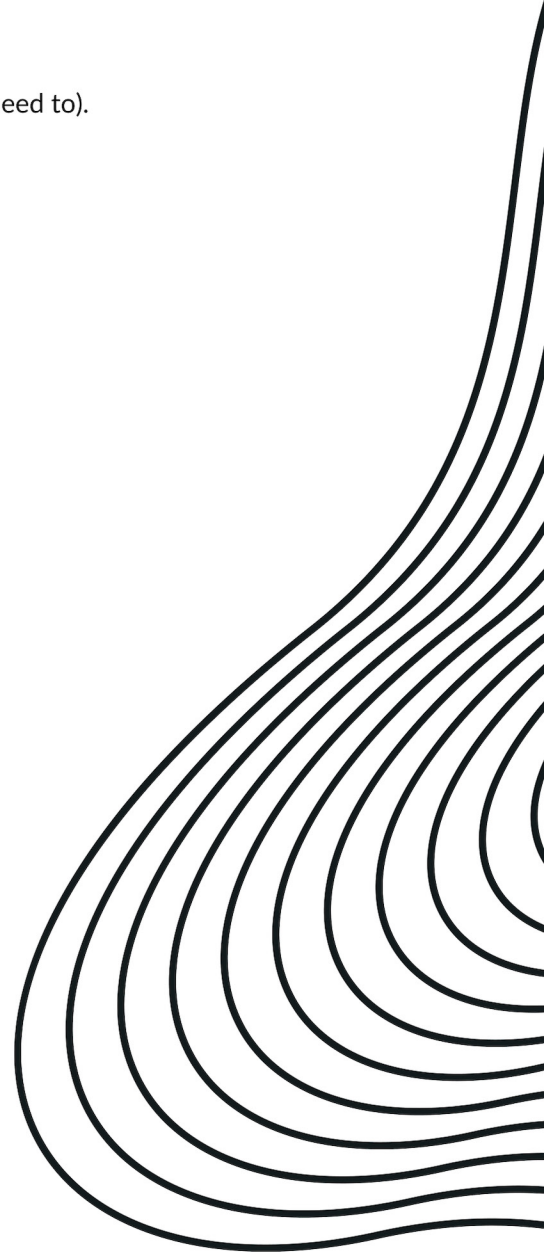
- Water, sweets and fruit for each table.
- A notebook or paper and pen for each person.
- Print outs of the text, A3 or larger (stick two A4 sheets together if you need to).
- Coloured pens.
- A screen with sound.
- A device to play the videos.
- A copy of the videos.

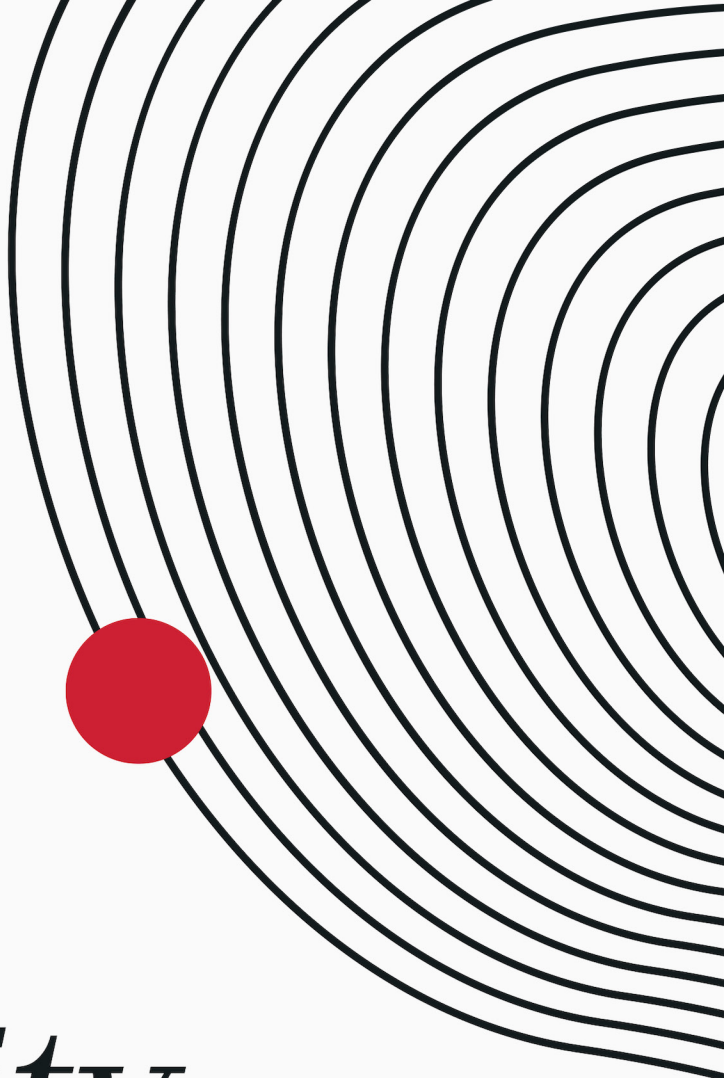
You may need:

- Print-outs.
- Envelopes.
- Internet access.
- Slides at [mentimeter.com](https://www.mentimeter.com) prepared in advance.

Pray:

- For the participants.
- For yourself.
- For good, Spirit-filled conversations.
- For God to be encountered in the words of scripture.





Sexuality AND GRACE



AN INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDY IN ROMANS



1. WELCOME

- *Direct people to tea and coffee facilities if you have them.*
- *Explain briefly how the Bible study will run.*
- *Acknowledge the range of abilities and experiences in the room.*
- *Ask for agreement that we will be sensitive and gracious to one another especially where there are differences of opinion.*

For example:

“You are all very welcome to this Bible study. We’re going to be looking at part of the letter to the Romans and what it has to say to us about sex and sexuality. We have some short videos and activities to help us get in to it and then we’re going to be studying the scriptures together. This means we let the Bible speak for itself and then we bring our questions and our experiences. We discuss, we talk together, if we disagree, then the disagreement helps us understand a different point of view. This is an ancient way of engaging with the Bible and it helps us really get the scriptures into our heads and hearts, and allow it to shape our lives.

There will be a range of experiences in the room. Someone might be reading the Bible for the first time, someone might be an expert – both those perspectives are valuable. There will also likely be a range of experiences and opinions about sex and sexuality. These are important too. There is no pressure for anyone to share anything they don’t want to, but when people do share, and especially if there is a difference of opinions, can we agree that we will model Jesus-like grace for one another as we learn together?

Finally, when it comes to Bible study, and when it comes to sex and sexuality, we are often much more comfortable talking about the experiences of others than about ourselves. The challenge is that I allow the scriptures to speak to me – to shape me and change me.

Let’s get started.”



2. VIDEO 1: INTRODUCTION

This introduction video outlines an approach to scripture and introduces the idea of paying attention to context.

Play the video until the pause sign appears.

3. WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY?

Resources: *Who, What, Where, When, Why sheet.*

This activity gives participants some background on Romans by matching pieces of information to the questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why.

Print out the resource sheet and cut the questions and answers into separate pieces. Depending on your group, you could make the activity much more simple by using different coloured markers to colour-code the questions and answers.

○ TABLE-TOP VERSION

This works well in threes or whole table groups. Mix up each set of printed questions and answers and give each group a full set. They work in their groups to match them.

“We’re going to discover some background context to the book of Romans. Match the questions to the answers. Read the information as you go.”

○ INTERACTIVE VERSION

This involves everyone in the room and gets your whole group interacting. Print one copy of the resource sheet and cut the questions and answers into separate pieces. Give each participant one piece of paper - either a question or an answer. They then have to find the person with their corresponding piece of paper.

“We’re going to discover some background context to the book of Romans. Each of you has either a question or an answer. Move around the room, talk to each other, and try to match the right question to the right answer. When you have found each other, stick together.”

If you have more than ten participants you could get some to work as pairs, or print extra resource sheets. If you have fewer than ten participants you could join in yourself to make up the numbers, or hold back the What and When questions and answers and read them out yourself as examples.

Once the questions and answers have found one another, ask for feedback until all the questions have been answered out loud.

“Can anyone answer the “Who” question?...”



4. QUOTE: N.T. WRIGHT ON THE HISTORICAL OCCASION FOR ROMANS

Resources: Print outs with quote and questions.



Distribute the quote and questions and encourage discussion in threes or larger groups.



Romans “addresses a community in which Christian Gentiles and Christian Jews find themselves in uneasy coexistence.”

They “would now be facing the difficult question of how to live together as one family with those who cherished very different cultural traditions, not least food taboos. Paul knows that this will not be solved overnight and stresses instead a doctrine of adiaphoria: there are some practical things over which Christians can legitimately disagree, and they should not impair common worship.”

N.T. Wright
Romans - The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Abingdon, 2015.

Consider one or two of these questions:

1. How important is it to consider background context like original audience and reason for writing? Why?
2. How much can Paul's approach to the differences between Jews and Gentiles be applied to different approaches to human sexuality within the church today?
3. Aside from differences about human sexuality, what divisions and tensions within the church come to mind? Could these be considered matters of conscience?



5. VIDEO 2: ROMANS 1:18-32

This video introduces the idea of paying attention to emotions and there is a reading of Roman 1:18-32.

Play the video until the pause sign appears.



6. ROMANS 1:18-32

Resources: *Large format prints of Romans 1:18-32*

Distribute copies of the text of Romans 1:18-32. These should be printed in a large format such as A3. Make sure that Romans 2:1-4 has been cut off the bottom of the sheet.

Depending on your group, you may wish everyone to have their own copy, one between two or even one per small group.



7. PAYING ATTENTION TO EMOTIONS - PART 1

“Take a few moments in stillness. Reflect on what you have heard. What words best describe what you feel?”

Allow a few moments of quiet before moving on.





8. NAMING EMOTIONS - PART 1

This activity helps people own their emotions on hearing Romans 1. You can repeat the activity later to see how those emotions have changed.



Introduce this activity:

“What words best describe what you feel hearing this part of Romans 1?”

Choose which version of the activity best suits your group:



O ACTIVE VERSION

Resources: *Thick markers, post-it notes.*

You will need enough post-it notes and thick markers for everyone and a board or wall to stick the post-its that is visible to everyone.

“Think of one or two answers. Write each of them on a post-it note. When you’re ready, come and stick them up where we can all see.”

Depending on your group you may want to add:

“If sticking your post-its up yourself is an issue, someone in your group can do it for you.”

Once everyone’s answers are displayed, give some time for people to glance over them. Read four or five of them aloud, and draw attention to any common answers.



O ONLINE VERSION

Resources: *Internet access. Mentimeter account. Mentimeter presentation prepared in advance.*

- Log on to www.mentimeter.com
- Log In.
- Create “New Presentation”.
- Click “New Slide”.
- Select “Word Cloud”.
- Add the question: “What words best describe how you feel?”
- Display the slide on your screen.

“If you have a device with you, go to menti.com, enter the code and then enter two or three answers. If you don’t have a device with you someone else in your group can enter your answer for you.”

Once everyone’s answers are displayed, give some time for people to glance over them. Read four or five of them aloud, and draw attention to any common answers.



○ ACCESSIBILITY VERSION

Resources: Thick markers, post-it notes.

This version is intended for groups where a significant number will have mobility issues and where the Online version would be impossible or inappropriate. You will need enough post-it notes and thick markers for everyone.

“Think of one or two answers. Write each of them on a post-it note. When you’re ready, hold up your post-its, or stick them somewhere we can all see.”

Once everyone’s answers are displayed, give some time for people to glance over them. Read four or five of them aloud, and draw attention to any common answers.



○ WORD BANK VERSION

Resources: Word bank print out.

“What words best describe how you feel hearing this part of Romans 1? Choose as many words as you like.”

<p>What words best describe how you feel hearing this part of Romans 1? Choose as many words as you like.</p> <p>Gratefulness. Anxiety. Conviction. Awe. Anger. Comfort. Overwhelmed. Confusion. Joy. Fear. Relief.</p> <p>Other:</p>

Ask:

“Would anyone like to share what words they chose and why?”

Allow a few responses.



9. QUOTE: BEVERLY ROBERTS GAVENTA ON ROMANS

Resources: *Print out of the quote and questions.*

Distribute the quote and questions and encourage discussion in threes or larger groups.

Romans has surprises for its careful readers. And some of those surprises may even be offensive. Despite the innocuous way in which Paul's letters are often read and interpreted, they are far from innocuous. They usher us into a gospel far more vast than we usually imagine, and that gospel may well take us places we would prefer not to go.

Beverly Roberts Gaventa
When in Romans, Baker Academic, 2016

Consider one or two of these questions:

1. How much have you found that Paul's letters are interpreted in an "innocuous way"?
2. Was there anything in the reading from Romans 1 that you found surprising or offensive?
3. When Gaventa says "that gospel may well take us places we would prefer not to go", what might she have in mind?



10. DISCUSSION TOPICS - PART 1

Resources: *Topic print outs.*

This activity works well in threes, or as a whole table. Distribute print-outs with the topics.

Choose one or two of these topics and share your thoughts and questions with one another.

1. What parts of the text do you find encouraging?
What parts of the text do you find challenging?
What parts of the text do you find uncomfortable or difficult?
2. If this was the only part of the Bible you ever had, what would you think about God? Why?
3. How do you feel hearing the parts of Romans 1 that refer to sex?
What questions do you have about it?



11. CONTEXT – PART 1

Resources: Print outs. Envelopes. Pens.

In this activity participants work in groups of around three to discover different pieces of context and connect them with the text.

Print the resource sheets, cut out the sections, and place them each in a numbered envelope. If you can't source envelopes you could simply fold the paper in half. Depending on your group size you may want to print extras.

○ TABLE-TOP VERSION

Place the envelopes in the middle of the table.

“We’re going to discover some context for the scripture we’ve heard and see if that changes how we understand it or how we feel about it. On your table are 5 envelopes. Choose one, open it, read and discuss the questions. Then move on to the next envelope.”

○ WHOLE ROOM VERSION

Hide the envelopes around the room, on shelves, behind curtains taped under chairs and tables.

“We’re going to discover some context for the scripture we’ve heard and see if that changes how we understand it or how we feel about it. Hidden around this room are 5 envelopes. When you find one, bring it back to your group, read it and discuss the questions. Then, once you’ve finished swap envelopes with another group.”

○ QUICK VERSION

Give each group one envelope each.

“We’re going to discover some context for the scripture we’ve heard and see if that changes how we understand it or how we feel about it.”

After about 5 minutes, ask them to pause their conversation and ask each group to briefly feed back what they discovered. Ask each group:

“Can you summarise the context that you discovered? Did it change how you understood the scripture? Did it change how you felt about it?”

● PAUL'S PURPOSE

In his introduction, Paul tells us part of his purpose for writing this letter to the Romans:

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. 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.”
(Romans 1:16-17)

The word gospel is the Greek word euangelion εὐαγγέλιον. It means “good news”.

Discuss:

- Does the scripture we heard read (Romans 1:18-32) sound like good news or bad news?
- What is the good news that Paul is talking about?

● SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE ROMAN WORLD

Attitudes to sex in 1st century Rome were different to our time and place.

Self-discipline was considered a virtue, and men and women were expected to marry and have children, but it was considered acceptable for married men to also have sex with unmarried women, teenage boys, and male and female slaves. Slaves were the property of their masters and could be used sexually by their masters, or sold to others to make money.

Draw a box around any parts of the text you think this is relevant to.

Discuss:

- How would a slave who had been sexually exploited by their master feel hearing the words from Paul's letter?

● IDOLS

Almost every culture, other than the Jews, made images or objects to represent gods. These were sometimes directly associated with sex like the Roman goddess Venus. Sometimes sex acts were part of rituals to worship the gods. Temples had both male and female prostitutes.

Circle the part of the text that talks about people worshipping images instead of God.

Discuss:

1. Do you think people in our time and place worship images associated with sex?
2. What things do people in our time and place worship other than God?
3. Can you think of any other ways that sexuality and worship are connected?

● WRATH

The letter to the Romans was originally written in the Greek language. The word “wrath” in verse 18 is the Greek word *orge* – ὀργή. It means anger, hostility, agitation of the soul. Aristotle defined it as “desire, accompanied by pain.”

- Underline the word “wrath” in verse 18.

Discuss:

1. How do people feel about the idea of God’s wrath?
2. Can you think of a time you felt desire accompanied by pain?
3. What is God’s wrath against in verse 18?

● DOWNWARD SPIRAL

Romans 1:18-28 describes a downward spiral of human behaviour. This is a pattern that appears in other books of the Bible like Genesis, Judges, Samuel and Kings.

- i. Paul begins by talking about creation;
- ii. then people worshipped things other than God (‘idolatry’) - so God “gives them over” to their desires, including lust.
- iii. Finally there is a list of destructive behaviour that results from worshipping other things.

- Draw lines to separate the text into these three sections. Label them: ‘Creation’, ‘Idolatry’ and ‘Destructive Behaviour’.

- Look at the list of destructive behaviour in verses 29-31. Are you surprised by what is included?

- In Romans 1, all destructive behaviour comes from worshipping something other than God. Is that true of destructive behaviours you see around you?

- Notice that “sexual impurity” is mentioned in the middle of this ‘downward spiral’, alongside idolatry, and before the long list of other destructive behaviours. Does this mean that other sin is considered worse than sexual sin? Does it mean that sexual impurity and idolatry are the root to all other destructive behaviours? Does it highlight a unique connection between sexuality and spirituality?



12. VIDEO 3: ROMANS 2:1-4

This video explains reading scripture in the context of the whole chapter, the whole book and the whole Bible. There is a reading of Romans 2:1-4.



Play the video until the pause sign appears.



13. ROMANS 2:1-4

Resources: Large format prints of Romans 2:1-4

Distribute copies of the text of Romans 2:1-4 from the large format print.



Depending on your group, you may wish everyone to have their own copy, one between two or even one per small group.



14. DISCUSSION TOPICS – PART 2

Resources: Topic print outs.

This activity works well in threes, or as a whole table. Distribute print-outs with the topics.



Choose some of these topics to discuss:

1. Do you think this twist in Paul's letter came as a surprise to the listeners?
2. Romans points out that some of the listeners were being judgemental. What are the problems with being judgemental? Have you heard people being judgemental about the sexual behaviour of others? Can people be unfairly considered judgemental because of their views on sex?
3. "We're all in the same boat. All equally in need of turning our lives around, and all equally experiencing the kindness of God." What do you think about this description of Romans?





15. CONTEXT – PART 2

Resources: Print outs. Envelopes. Pens.

In this activity participants work in groups of around three to discover different pieces of context and connect them with the text.

Print the resource sheets, cut out the sections, and place them each in a numbered envelope. If you can't source envelopes you could simply fold the paper in half. Depending on your group size you may need to print extras.



○ TABLE-TOP VERSION

Place the envelopes in the middle of the table.

“We’re going to discover some more context for the scripture we’ve heard, how it fits in to the rest of Romans and how it fits in to the rest of the Bible. On your table are 3 envelopes. Choose one, open it, read and discuss the questions. Then move on to the next envelope.”

○ WHOLE ROOM VERSION

During the previous video, hide the next three envelopes around the room.

“We’re going to discover some more context for the scripture we’ve heard how it fits in to the rest of Romans and how it fits in to the rest of the Bible. Hidden around this room are 3 envelopes. When you find one, bring it back to your group, read it and discuss the questions. Then, once you’ve finished swap envelopes with another group.”



○ QUICK VERSION

Give each group one envelope each.

“We’re going to discover some more context for the scripture we’ve heard how it fits in to the rest of Romans and how it fits in to the rest of the Bible.”

After about 5 minutes, ask them to pause their conversation and ask each group to briefly feed back what they discovered. Ask each group:

“Can you summarise the context that you discovered? Did it change how you understood the scripture? Did it change how you felt about it?”



● ROMANS AND AMOS

The surprise turn that Romans 2 takes is a technique the prophet Amos used hundreds of years earlier. Amos begins by pronouncing God's judgement on the behaviour of seven different nations, before turning the attention onto the listener's own behaviour. Amos spends fifty times longer talking about the destructive behaviour of his audience than about any other nation. But like Romans, the message of Amos is all about hope – a call to turn to God and be transformed.

Mark an * on the Romans text where you think the attention turns onto the listener's own behaviour.

Discuss:

1. Why do you think people like hearing criticism of others?
2. Why do we struggle to hear criticism of ourselves?
3. When can criticism be helpful?

● REPENTANCE

Underline the word "repentance" in verse 4.

Discuss:

1. Where have you most often heard the word "repent"?
2. Does it feel like a positive or negative word?

The word "repentance" in Romans 2:4 is the Greek word *metanoian* - μετάνοιάν.

It means:

- change your mind,
- a change of heart,
- a new perspective,
- an about-turn.

Read the final part of Romans 2:4 replacing the word "repentance" with one of the translations above:

"God's kindness is intended to lead you to..."

- change your mind,
- a change of heart,
- a new perspective,
- an about-turn.

Discuss:

- How does it feel reading each translation?

● GRACE FOR ALL

It's been said that the whole book of Romans can be summed in these two verses:

“For **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

Discuss:

1. What can make people uncomfortable about the idea that all have sinned?
2. What can make people uncomfortable about the idea that all are justified freely?



16. GENESIS IN ROMANS

Resources: *Print outs with quote and questions.*

Distribute the quote and questions and encourage discussion in threes or larger groups.

Morna Hooker detects a “remarkable parallelism” of Genesis 1 language in Romans 1. Tim Mackie explains Romans 1:18-32 as “a long, creative retelling of Genesis 3-11” – the downward spiral of idolatry, sexual sin, and a flood of destructive behaviour.

1. What Genesis language or patterns can you see in Romans 1:18-32?
2. If Paul is using Genesis as a scheme, could the women referenced in 1:26 be a reference to Lot's daughters in Genesis 19?
3. How might a Genesis scheme behind Paul's writing colour our understanding of this text, especially regarding sexuality?

References:

Tim Mackie

Romans 1-4: The Gospel Reveals God's Righteousness

<https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-romans/>

Morna Hooker

From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 1990



17. PAYING ATTENTION TO EMOTIONS – PART 2

“Take a few moments in stillness. Reflect on what you have heard. Does what we have learned about context change how you feel about the text? What words best describe what you feel?”

Allow a few moments of quiet before moving on.

18. NAMING EMOTIONS - PART 2

This activity helps people reflect on how their emotions may have changed.

“What words best describe what you feel now, having listened to Romans in its context?”

Choose which version of the activity best suits your group:

O ACTIVE VERSION

Resources: *Thick markers, post-it notes.*

You will need enough post-it notes and thick markers for everyone and a board or wall to stick the post-its that is visible to everyone.

“Think of one or two answers. Write each of them on a post-it note. When you’re ready, come and stick them up where we can all see.”

Depending on your group you may want to add:

“If sticking your post-its up yourself is an issue, someone in your group can do it for you.”

Once everyone’s answers are displayed, give some time for people to glance over them. Read four or five of them aloud, and draw attention to any common answers.



○ ONLINE VERSION

Resources: Internet access. Mentimeter account. Mentimeter presentation prepared in advance.

- Log on to www.mentimeter.com
- Log In.
- Create "New Presentation".
- Click "New Slide".
- Select "Word Cloud".
- Add the question: "What words best describe how you feel?"
- Display the slide on your screen.

"If you have a device with you, go to menti.com, enter the code and then enter two or three answers. If you don't have a device with you someone else in your group can enter your answer for you."

Once everyone's answers are displayed, give some time for people to glance over them. Read four or five of them aloud, and draw attention to any common answers.



○ ACCESSIBILITY VERSION

Resources: Thick markers, post-it notes.

This version is intended for groups where a significant number will have mobility issues and where the Online version would be impossible or inappropriate. You will need enough post-it notes and thick markers for everyone.

"Think of one or two answers. Write each of them on a post-it note. When you're ready, hold up your post-its, or stick them somewhere we can all see."

Once everyone's answers are displayed, give some time for people to glance over them. Read four or five of them aloud, and draw attention to any common answers.



○ WORD BANK VERSION

Resources: *Word bank print out.*

“What words best describe how you feel hearing this part of Romans 1?
Choose as many words as you like.”

**“What words best describe what you feel now, having listened to
Romans in its context? Choose as many words as you like.”**

Gratefulness. Anxiety. Conviction. Awe.
Anger. Comfort. Overwhelmed.
Confusion. Joy. Fear. Relief.

Other:

Ask:

“Would anyone like to share what words they chose and why?”

“Would anyone like to tell us how their feelings changed?”

“Are anyone’s feelings about Romans 1 the same as before we learned about the
context?”

Allow a few responses.



19. VIDEO 4: RESPONSE AND APPLICATION.

*This video summarises what we’ve heard and a series of interviews explore “what does grace feel
like?”*



Play the video until the pause sign appears.





20. DISCUSSION TOPICS – PART 3

Resources: Discussion topic print outs.

This activity works well in threes, or as a whole table. Distribute print-outs with the topics.



Choose two or three of these topics to discuss:

1. What does grace feel like?
2. "God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance." (Romans 2:4)
Where do you experience God's kindness?
Where have we seen God's kindness modelled by people in the conversations in the Church about sexuality?
How can we model the kindness of God?
3. In what ways does knowing the context of Romans change how we hear the parts about sexuality?
4. What parts of this scripture apply to our lives? How?
5. What can churches that are divided learn from Romans?

References:

Tim Mackie

Romans 1-4: The Gospel Reveals God's Righteousness

<https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-romans/>

Morna Hooker

From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 1990



21. VIDEO 5: FINAL REFLECTIONS

Play the video until the end.





OPTIONAL
ACTIVITY



REFLECTION

22. RESPONDING

Resources: Pens and paper. Prints of Responding resource sheet.

Depending on your group you might want to leave them with more than just the two questions from the video to think about. This list of response suggestions can go home with people, or – if you have some extra time you could do them together.

“There are lots of ways we can respond to what we hear in scripture. Here are a few suggestions that you can use to help get the scripture into our heads, hearts and lives.”

Responding to Scripture.

This week, ask yourself:

- Where have I judged others?”
- Where is God’s kindness leading me to repentance?”

You might want to respond in some more ways. Here are some suggestions:

- Write a personal prayer responding to what you’ve heard in the scripture.
- Create something: a poem; a painting; a list; a sculpture; a meal; a photograph; a wordcloud.
- Read or listen to all of Romans at BibleGateway.com.
- Choose just one word or phrase and think about what it means.
- List some personal commitments that you want to make in the coming week.
- “God’s kindness leads you to repentance”. Repeat these words slowly, emphasising a different word each time.



CORE
ACTIVITY



23. CLOSING

- *Thank everyone for coming and taking part.*
- *Remind people to respect one another by keeping any opinions and stories shared confidential.*
- *Remind people where to find appropriate pastoral support if desired.*
- *Share details of any future Bible studies.*



FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD • LIVING WHOLEHEARTEDLY AS FOLLOWERS

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