

Facilitator Notes for Set Free! – A Study in Romans
Lesson 1 – paul@slaveofjesus.com – Romans 1:1-17

PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.
HEARING GOD FOR YOURSELF IS WAY BETTER THAN MY COMMENTS!

Questions

Read Romans 1:1-7

1. What three phrases does Paul use to identify himself to the Romans (1:1)?

Servant of Jesus Christ – Jesus Christ's slave

Called to be an apostle – chosen by God to be an apostle

Set apart for the gospel of God – sent out to preach the Good News

apostle (1:1) – a messenger, representative or ambassador, sent out for a purpose, acting with the full authority of the sender. Jesus personally trained and sent out the first apostles (Matthew 10:1-8). The qualifications for an apostle was that the person had been a disciple of Jesus during his earthly ministry and had witnessed his resurrection (Acts 1:15-26). Even though Paul did not meet these original requirements, he claimed *apostolic authority* equal to that of the original Twelve (1 Corinthians 4:9; 9:1-2; Gal. 2) because he, too, had seen the risen Christ (Acts 9:1-6; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8) and was also directly commissioned and sent out by Jesus (Acts 26:15-18; Gal. 1:1).

- ♥ From these phrases, how would you describe Paul's view of himself?
- ♥ If you were writing a letter to introduce yourself to a group of Christians, what **words or phrases** would you use to describe your **relationship** to God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit?

Some translations of the Greek word *doulos* in 1:1 read "servant" or "bond-servant," but the most literal translation of this word is *slave*, meaning "to belong completely to a master with no freedom to leave."

- ♥ What do you think of when you hear the word "slave"? Does the word cause a positive or negative reaction in you? Why?

2. Can you think of some reasons why Paul would call himself a "slave" of Christ Jesus (1:1)? (Acts 26:1-5, 9-19; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and Act 20:28 may help you with your answer.) **If you read these scriptures in your small group – for the sake of time, you might want to summarize Acts 26 rather than read the whole story.**

In Paul's mind, he owed everything to Jesus Christ because of what Jesus had done for him. First, Jesus dramatically saved him from sin and death and turned his life around to live in a whole new way with a new purpose. Jesus had given Paul a new vision and mission and he saw himself as "under orders" from Jesus. Secondly, Paul saw himself as a slave of Jesus because he knew that he had been "bought back" or redeemed from sin and death. Jesus paid Paul's ransom price (and ours) with his own blood. Paul realized that he was a temple or dwelling place of the Holy Spirit who now lived in him (and every person who belongs to Jesus.) Paul knew and lived the truth that he was not autonomous; rather, he belonged to Another – bought and paid for!

In ancient Rome, there were basically two classes – upper and lower and slavery (the ownership of person of another) was common. A slave was the possession, property, or commodity of someone else. Slaves were not usually treated badly or considered chattel, but they were regarded as inferior beings, destined for servitude. In referring to himself as a slave of Jesus Christ, Paul did not mean to conjure up wretched connotations like subjugation, drudgery, and cruelty. His intention was to assert his exclusive allegiance to God's authority. Paul belonged to God and Paul did not determine what he, himself would say or do. God's claim on Paul was total; Paul's loyalty to God was final. Slave was a title of great humility. It expressed Paul's sense of personal insignificance, without rights of his own, having been purchased to belong to Christ.

- ♥ Does Jesus have the same claim on your life as he did on Paul's? Why or why not?
- ♥ What do you think it would mean for you to actually be a "slave of Christ Jesus"? Would anything in your life change? Why or why not?

3. What are some advantages of being a "slave of Christ Jesus" (**Romans 6:16-20; 8:15**)?

Humans are created ("hard-wired") to worship and belong to something or someone. We are called "vessels" in scripture – a hollow container made to hold something or someone. It is also true that humans cannot have two masters. We are capable of only one allegiance. All of this is a fact of our creation that we cannot change. So – the question is – **what or who do we worship, contain or belong to?** If we are NOT of slave of Jesus, then we are a slave of sin which leads to death. If we are a slave of Jesus, we are obedient to him and this leads to righteousness (doing what is right in God's eyes) and holiness. If we are a slave of Jesus, we are **set free** from sin and death. Wonderfully, when we let ourselves become slaves of Jesus, we become children of God and are allowed such an intimate relationship to him that we address him as "*Papa-Daddy*" (*Abba*) and he sees us as loved, special child. We come into our true and full identity when we become a slave of Jesus, finding purpose and fulfillment.

- ♥ What does the phrase "a slave of Christ Jesus" imply about **Jesus'** identity? Does this affect your feelings about being a "slave"? Why or why not? **If we are a slave, Jesus is the Master.**
- ♥ Slaves have masters. Describe "master" Jesus. **If we must have a master, who better than Jesus?**

4. How do we demonstrate that we are truly "slaves" of Jesus (**Romans 6:12-13; 12:1**)?

Just as Paul did, we offer ourselves to God. We give ourselves to him so that he may use us as he desires. This is not something that is automatic. God will not force us and waits for us to open ourselves to Him. Ironically, if we are our own master, we become frustrated and unfulfilled. Giving ourselves to God leads to fulfillment, purpose and satisfaction. God gives us choices and we must choose what or whom we will obey.

♥ **Have you ever offered your body as a living sacrifice to God? How might you do this?**

The subject of the *gospel* or *good news* is a predominant theme in Paul's letter. As an apostle, it was Paul's responsibility to proclaim the **gospel** by *teaching, preserving and defending* it. Paul wants to make sure the Romans know and believe the **true gospel** and not some counterfeit version.

5. The *gospel* is so important to Paul's message in this letter, that he includes a description of it in his greeting. From **1:1-5**, answer these basic questions about the *good news*.

Who is the origin of the <i>gospel</i> (1:1 or 1:2)?	God – the gospel of God, promised long ago by him
What helps validate the <i>gospel</i> (1:2)?	the prophets told about it in the Old Testament scriptures – before it happened
Who is the "heart" or <i>substance</i> of the <i>gospel</i> 1:3,4)?	Jesus Christ our Lord
Who is the <i>gospel</i> for (1:5)?	all people – especially the Gentiles who had not previously received God's promise of the gospel
What is the purpose of the <i>gospel</i> (1:5)?	to call people to obedience that comes from faith; so that people will believe and obey God, bringing glory to his name.

♥ What do you see is the importance of the gospel being **promised beforehand** by the Old Testament prophets and Scriptures (**1:2**)? **What God said would happen (hundreds of years before) – happened! That gives the gospel great credibility!**

♥ Why is the identity of Jesus (**1:3-4**) important as it relates to the *gospel* or *good news*?

The Old Testament scriptures said the Messiah would be a descendent of King David; Jesus is also the sinless, perfect Son of God. He was the only person in all of history qualified to pay the ransom price for our sins.

♥ What connection do you see between **faith** (belief) and **obedience** (**1:5**)? Can you have one without the other? Why or why not? **True faith – what we REALLY believe – always shows itself in actions.**

If we say we believe, but it is not evident by the way we live, we are fooling ourselves. We are giving intellectual assent (agreement), but this is not real faith. **Faith cannot be separated from action.** The evidence of faith is our actions – the way we live. It really doesn't matter what we SAY we believe. (James 2:14-20)

6. As is customary with letters written in the first century, Paul identifies those he is writing to at the beginning of his letter. Make a note of everything you learn about the recipients of this letter in **1:6-7**. They have also (along with Paul) been called to follow Jesus Christ; they live in Rome, loved by God (God loves them dearly) and called to be saints (his very own special people); God is their Father and Jesus is their Lord; Paul extends God's grace and peace to them

- ♥ Read **1:6-7** as if it were written to you, substituting the name of your city for **Rome**. What do you learn about yourself?
- ♥ Where do *grace* and *peace* come from (**1:7**)? **God the Father** Is there something you need to do to experience these qualities? Why or why not? Will you know if you are experiencing them? Why or why not? **These are gifts given God the Father to his children. Certainly we will know if we are experiencing God's grace and peace. There is a difference between having these gifts and not having them. If we find we are not experiencing them (and the feeling of them may come and go depending on our circumstances), we certainly have the right to ask for them as we believe that they are God's will for us.**

7. What do you think it means to be "called by God" (**1:6-7**)? Do you consider yourself "called" by God? Why or why not?

No "right" answer. Encourage discussion. You will come back to this question after you answer Question 8. At first, some may think that only "special" people are called by God.

8. What do you learn about "God's call" in the following verses? (In the *New Living Translation*, "called" is sometimes translated "invited.")

The purpose of this question is to show what it means to be called by God. It is an honor to be called and we should see it as a privilege to live up to our call!

1 Corinthians 1:9 - God calls everyone into fellowship with Jesus Christ; some have accepted the call and others haven't

Colossians 3:15 - If we belong to Jesus, we are members of one body and called by God to peace

1 Peter 2:20-21 - we are called to suffer for Jesus, just as Jesus suffered for us

Galatians 5:13 - We are called to freedom in Christ – and to use this freedom in the right way

1 Thessalonians 4:7 - called to be holy and not live impure lives

Romans 11:29 - God's call to us is never withdrawn! It does not depend on us or our "performance."

- ♥ Did what you learned about "God's call" change your answer to **Question 7**? If so, why?
- ♥ Which one of the above verses is most meaningful to you? Why?
- ♥ How did God call you to belong to himself? How is your life different because of God's call?
- ♥ In what areas of your life are you living up to God's call? In what areas of your life do you need to hear his call again?

Read Romans 1:8-15

9. Count the "I" statement in these verses. What are several different ways that Paul shows his great **affection** and **concern** for the Roman Christians?

The purpose of "counting" the "I" statements is to see how many of them there are and to notice all that Paul is doing for them.

Paul thanks God for all of them; He constantly remembers them in his prayers (day and night); he prays he will be able to go visit them; he wants to share spiritual gifts (blessings) to them to make them strong; he longs to be encouraged by their faith so that they can be a blessing to each other; he planned many times to visit them so that he can have a spiritual harvest among them; he has a

great sense of obligation to them – and to all people whether they be of Paul's culture or other cultures and whether they are educated or uneducated; he is eager to go to Rome to preach the Good News to them.

- ♥ How does remembering someone in prayer (1:9,10) help him or her? What friend or family member needs your prayer support right now? How faithful are you in remembering them in your prayers?
- ♥ Who has been a "Paul" to you in your life – praying for you, encouraging you and sharing themselves with you? How can you be a "Paul" to someone else? Ask God to bring someone to mind.
- ♥ In what ways have you **been encouraged** when you took the time to **encourage** someone else?

Read Romans 1:16-17 in both the NIV and NLT versions.

Romans 1:16-17 is considered to be the "thesis statement" of Paul's letter to the Romans. These verses state the reason why Paul wrote this important letter and they sum up the essence of the message that is to come. We will revisit these themes often in this study.

10. In what ways is the gospel **powerful** and how is its **power** released (1:16-17)?

The gospel or good news is powerful because it IS the power of God at work saving those who believe. The power of God to **save** and **change** us is released by faith – when we believe in our heart its truth. When we believe, we move from death to life and from darkness to light. The gospel changes everything! (2 Corinthians 5:17; Col. 1:12-13; 1 Pet. 2:9-10)

- ♥ What are some specific ways the power of the gospel has been displayed in your life?
- ♥ Why might Christ-followers who lived in the Roman Empire, be ashamed of the gospel?

For starters – that an unknown Jew who suffered a disgraceful death on the eastern fringe of the great Roman Empire was being proclaimed as God in human flesh, as well as the only way to God and the only way of salvation from sin. (Try telling that to your best friend -- sounds rather absurd!) The Romans were known for their tolerance of all religions and it was offensive to suggest that there was only one God, one Way, one "religion."

♥ For what reasons and in what situations might a Christ-follower today be ashamed of the gospel? For basically the same reasons: Perhaps we don't want to "push" the good news because it makes us different from others and we may even invite **ridicule** or be thought of as narrow-minded and unsophisticated. We may not want to **offend** the one we know or love by telling them there is only one way – and their way isn't it! We, too, are very tolerant in this culture and intolerance is severely looked down upon. The one thing we don't tolerate is intolerance! Read **1 Cor. 1:23, 27-28** to see what more Paul says on this subject. The cross is an offense to many when we claim it is the only way of salvation (**Gal 5:11**).

What is the solution to this dilemma? The solution is to focus on the POWER of the gospel. The good news frees us from sin, death and bondage. The good news makes us new creations. The good news transforms our hearts – forming and shaping us to be like Jesus Himself. You can't argue this kind of power! That is why it is so important to share our stories when we share the good news. What difference has Jesus made in your life? Are you sharing a belief system or are you sharing the power of God? Sometimes the gospel is rejected because others don't see any evidence in our lives that it has made any difference! (Phil 1:20)

Response

What was Paul's purpose in life? Read Romans 1:1, 5 and 14 in the NIV and NLT versions of the Bible and try to answer this question by writing a one sentence, general **purpose statement** for Paul's life.

Paul's purpose or mission in life was to . . . Everyone's statement will read differently, but will probably include that Paul's purpose was to serve Christ as an apostle sent to preach the good news to all people, but especially to the Gentiles. Everything Paul did was driven by this purpose.

BELOW IS THE SUPPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURE FOR THIS LESSON THAT YOU CAN PRINT OUT FOR SMALL GROUP TIME, IF YOU SO DESIRE. (Acts 26:1-5, 9-19 is not included.)

NIV

1Corinthians 6:19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Romans 6:16-20 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. 19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. 20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.

Romans 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Romans 6:12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

1Corinthians 1:9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

Colossians 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

1Peter 2:20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Galatians 5:13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

1Thessalonians 4:7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

Romans 11:29 for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

NLT

1Corinthians 6:19 Or don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, 20 for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

Acts 20:28 "And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his blood—over whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders.

Romans 6:16-20 Don't you realize that whatever you choose to obey becomes your master? You can choose sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God and receive his approval. 17 Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you have obeyed with all your heart the new teaching God has given you. 18 Now you are free from sin, your old master, and you have become slaves to your new master, righteousness. 19 I speak this way, using the illustration of slaves and masters, because it is easy to understand. Before, you let yourselves be slaves of impurity and lawlessness. Now you must choose to be slaves of righteousness so that you will become holy. 20 In those days, when you were slaves of sin, you weren't concerned with doing what was right.

Romans 8:15 So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family—calling him "Father, dear Father."

Romans 6:12 Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to its lustful desires. 13 Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God.

Romans 12:1 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?

1Corinthians 1:9 God will surely do this for you, for he always does just what he says, and he is the one who invited you into this wonderful friendship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Colossians 3:15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

1Peter 2:20 Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing right and are patient beneath the blows, God is pleased with you. 21 This suffering is all part of what God has called you to. Christ, who suffered for you, is your example. Follow in his steps.

Galatians 5:13 For you have been called to live in freedom—not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love.

1Thessalonians 4:7 God has called us to be holy, not to live impure lives.

Romans 11:29 For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn.