

CHANGE IS GOOD: Building Excitement for Life Transformation

"CHANGE OF SCENERY" ROMANS 1:8-13

This Week's Core Competency

Biblical Community – I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purpose in my life, others' lives, and in the world. Acts 2:44-47 *All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

During the summer of 2003, I received the opportunity to be an STM (short-term missionary) at the Joni and Friends camp for kids with severe physical and/or mental disabilities and their families. My role was to serve a select family by being the guardian of their special needs child. This allowed their siblings to play/interact with others—typical of a more "traditional" camp. And, perhaps more importantly, this gave the parents an opportunity to reconnect with one another, be affirmed and encouraged by other couples as well as to hopefully get reenergized for the year ahead. It was without question one of the most rewarding weeks of my life.

This week's passage and core competency took me back to this memory quite unexpectedly. As I reflect on my experience, I am reminded again of the significance community has on the life/well-being of people—all people. Far too many families with a special needs child often find themselves isolated from some of the day-to-day activities that the "rest of the world" takes for granted. Yet, that

is ANYTHING but the case at this camp. Here each member of the family finds a place of fun, fellowship and solace.

For the kids with special needs, their day is filled with engaging, achievable activities in community with others who struggle/suffer with many of the same debilitating ailments. Even though the pain didn't leave their bodies, you would never know it by the smiles on their faces. They were in their element in community with their peers. Their siblings forged instant bonds with other families' children. The spontaneous camaraderie between these kids signified that they knew each others' story without ever having to say a word. Fun they came for and fun they had. Perhaps most touching though was the support each parent found in community with the other moms and dads. Through the laughter, tears, hugs, testimonies and times of corporate worship, they reawakened to the reality that they were indeed not walking down this journey alone.

In this week's passage, I get the sense, that in some way, this was how the Apostle Paul often felt on his missionary journeys. Sometimes the call of God is going to be fraught with disappointment, heartache and even an extraordinary sense of isolation from others (cf. Acts 20:22-24). Perhaps that is why Paul so passionately communicates the depths of sincerity he has in connecting with this biblical community in Rome. For it is there he would get to connect with other believers charged with a similar calling of gospel proclamation.

Paul's appreciation for the relationship with fellow

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Christians prompted him to pray that it be God's will for him to have a chance to come fellowship with them; and, not just so he could impart "some spiritual gift" (v. 11), but that he and the congregants would be "mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (v. 12).

Truth be known, each of us as Christians should have a desire, and even a sense of responsibility, to build-up and encourage each other in our shared faith. It is in this setting that we more fully realize that our struggle(s) with sin, hardships, painful family dynamics, etc. are not as unique as we trick ourselves into believing. Community connections dissolves away walls of isolation; and in doing so senses of discouragement, despair and/or defeat lesson greatly as well. Just as no one can fully sympathize with the challenges families with special needs children face, no other "community" can provide a Christian with a sense of hope and belonging like a fully functioning biblical community.

For Discussion

Stan and Phyllis are your next door neighbors. Over the years, you've gotten to know them pretty well. They are kindhearted, fairly sociable (as far as the dynamics in your neighborhood will dictate) and always willing to lend a helping hand. Both have openly expressed their Christian faith. They are involved in a Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) class, volunteer several times a year at the Union Gospel Mission in Ft. Worth and have even gone to a Family Life marriage conference with you. However, many years ago, Stan got "burned" (as he calls it) while serving on a committee at the church they had been attending since before they were even married. When you invited him to come to Pantego, he unhesitatingly quirked, "Appreciate the offer . . . but after what happened at our prior church, Phyllis and I came to the conclusion that we're probably not 'organized' church people. Quite honestly, we feel we're doing just fine without it."

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Romans 1:8-15

8First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. 9God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you 10in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

11I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong- 12that is, that you

and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. 13I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

14I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. 15That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Highlight the word "First" in v. 8. In the margin write "above all".
- * Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 8.
- * Circle "all over the world" to note *hyperbole* in v. 9.
- * Box "so that" indicating *purpose* in v. 11.
- * Underline the phrase "some spiritual gift" in v. 11.
- * Circle "mutually encouraged" in v. 12.
- * Underline "have been prevented" in v. 13. In the margin write "See Ro 15:20-24".
- * Box "in order that" indicating desired result in v. 13.
- * Highlight each occurrence of the word "I" along with the verb that follows.
- * Double underline the phrase "preach the gospel" in v. 15.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. What does Paul say about the faith of the Roman believers? Is it meant to be positive or negative? Explain.
2. What character/personality traits of Paul do you see in these passages?
3. Reread vv. 9-10. Do Paul's words express affection, concern or both? Explain.
4. How do you think Paul could speak so personally to a congregation he hadn't originally establish and in fact, has never met?
5. Why did Paul so desperately long to see them? What did he hope to accomplish?
6. While Paul's visit is said to be mutually encouraging (v. 12), make a case for why either Paul or the Roman believers would benefit more.
7. What role does Paul see God plays in his ministry endeavors? How might we model his perspective today?
8. Reread v. 13 followed by Rom 15:20-24. In what sense was Paul "prevented" or "hindered" from coming to the Roman believers prior to writing his letter to them?
9. In what sense do you think Paul was "obligated" (indebted) to the Greeks/non-Greeks; wise/foolish?
10. **Discussion:** Respond to the situation for discussion.

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

During the winter of A.D. 57 in Corinth, the Apostle Paul writes what becomes "the most important theological epistle in Christian history" (Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 20). From the outset of this letter, Paul expresses his longing to see them so that through the impartation of "some spiritual gift", they could be strengthened (v. 11). This begs the question, "Why did they need to be made strong or (lit., "established" (KJV, NASB, NKJV). Answer, up to that point in their relatively young history, they had yet to be presenced by an apostle. "It is clear and evident that none of the twelve apostles, and certainly not Peter, had been in Rome. No man founded the church in that city; it was founded by the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of many believers who were drawn together around their common Lord by the indwelling Spirit" (Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans*, 1:93).

While some might argue that since the Holy Spirit was with them, there should have been no need for Paul, or any other apostle, to come to their "spiritual" aid. However, this underestimates the value of God's calling upon each member within the body of Christ. True God does not "need" any of us to accomplish his kingdom objectives. But, he has chosen to work through those with whom he has redeemed (1Co 12:4-6). The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to each of us (12:11) to employ for the advancement of God's kingdom. Each of us has been called to serve in a unique capacity within the body of Christ. When all of us are serving in obedience together, biblical community is at its strongest. Paul knew that part of his calling was to minister, in some capacity, to the believers in Rome. And it was not just for their gain; Paul would benefit as well by having the Roman church as the starting point of his proposed future missionary journey to Spain (Rom 15:24). A prior relationship with them could only deepen their desire to support his ministry calling in any way they could.

However, before he could attempt a visit to Rome, he had to complete his third missionary

journey; which included a Spirit-led trip to hostile Jerusalem (Acts 20:22). Three years later, Paul was anything but "free" to go to Rome. He would indeed travel to Rome; but under civil arrest and with the unenviable task of defending his right to preach the gospel throughout the Roman Empire (a message the Jews convinced the Romans was "unsanctioned" by their religious ordinances). Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from this passage, in light of the events to follow in Paul's life, is that even our best and most kingdom-of-God-driven intentions are always subject to the controlling power of our sovereign God. Ultimately, Paul made an immeasurable impact on the Roman church. However, it played itself out quite unlike he originally envisioned. And in the end the church in Rome grew to be a bulwark of assurance for all believers throughout the first few centuries of church history.

But, because of Paul's unwavering openness of and submission to the sovereignty of God, he was able to boldly proclaim to the Philippian believers (while under house arrest in Rome): "Now I want you to know brothers that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. [And] because of my chains most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. (Php 2:12-14) I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. (3:12b) For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is like to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (4:11b-13).

The Message of the Passage

Paul's words to the believers in Rome reminds us of the mutual encouragement and support we are to receive from one another as we faithfully seek to complete the calling God has placed upon each of our lives.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Give Yourself Some Good Advice Based on the Message of this Passage.**

- Pick a verse or verses from the passage to memorize or think about this week.

- Relate the message of this passage to any of the following:
 - o Belonging
 - o Becoming
 - o going Beyond

- Journal your thoughts on the passage.

- **Home Group Discussion** (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group)

Think of a time when God gave you a heavy kingdom-driven desire/burden for something that was accomplished in a way(s) you never envisioned? Share the creative manner in which God brought your situation to pass. Or, perhaps your desire/burden has yet to come to pass. Share this with your HG members. Whether you fall into the former or the latter, lift each other up in prayer so that all of you may come away from your time together "mutually encouraged."

“Change of Scenery”
(Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 8 **first** (Lit. "above all" or "from the very outset"). Paul does not include a formal "second" point in the "thanksgiving" portion of his letter. This is not uncommon for Paul. "The use of the same word in Rom. 3:2 and 1 Cor 11:18 [along with this passage] suggests that Paul begins by enumerating his points and ceases doing so after making the first one" (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 59).

v. 8 **all over the world** This phrase requires at least two qualifying comments. First, Paul is clearly using *hyperbole* (see also: Col 1:6; 1 Thess 1:8; 2 Cor 2:14). Even to this day, the "whole world" is not "reporting" of Jesus Christ. Logic simply dictates that Paul is either speaking of the Roman Empire in general or more likely - the communities of believers that exist throughout the empire. Unique to this Christian community: it was not established by any of the apostles. Second, a cursory reading would assume their faith was the envy of all believers. Truth be known, their faith, while alive and growing, was likely in need of an apostolic "booster" shot. "The [exhortation of such letters] normally contains praise to God for something that in fact has been causing difficulties - in this case apparently, the nature of the Roman Gentile Christians' faith" (Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 40).

v. 9, 10 **constantly/at all times** (Lit. without ceasing; ceaselessly/always) Paul's emotive expression in his prayers for/on behalf of the Roman believers possibly communicates some depth of "concern" as well as sincere affection. "The rhetorical force of words like "ceaselessly," to which is redundantly added the words "always," [lit.] "begging," ["I pray" - NIV] and "at last" conveys how very deeply concerned Paul is about the Roman Christians and how very badly he wants to visit them" (43).

v. 10 **by God's will** (See also 15:32) One will not find a servant of God who ran the race of his calling more diligently than the Apostle Paul (2Ti 4:6-7). He strove tirelessly to preach the gospel to a lost Gentile world. Yet, Paul was always aware of God's sovereignty, not only regarding his very salvation (Ac 22:14; as well as all who have been chosen for salvation - Eph 1:3-11) but, in directing all his ministerial steps ("called to be an apostle" - see 1:1 of Ro, 1 & 2Co, Gal, Eph, Col, 1 & 2Ti; God preventing him from preaching in Asia - Ac 16:6-8; etc.) Here, Paul expresses a pure and Spirit-led desire to travel to Rome. However he continues to couch every ministry endeavor under God's sovereign timing and provision.

v. 11 **spiritual gift** "The word represented by "gift" here is used in 12:6 to denote a special gift or endowment bestowed on a member of the Church by God to be used in the service of God and of men" (C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, 13). In this passage, the spiritual gift is intended to be showered upon the entire Roman congregation.

v. 13 **brothers** "The term *adelphos* had nothing to do with blood relationship or kinship; it designates the closeness experienced by those who were followers of the risen Christ and a sense of the intimate [spiritual connection] Paul has with those he so addresses" (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 249).

v. 14 **obligated** (Lit. - a debtor to) This notion of Paul's "indebtedness" could be from more than one standpoint. First, from a practical/cultural perspective, "He has learned and profited from his Hellenistic education and background as a diaspora Jew, from his Roman citizenship." (Fitzmyer, 250) Second, from a spiritual/theological perspective, Paul who described his pre-saved self as "the worst" among all sinners (1Ti 1:15-16), recognized that he had a debt of gratitude to his Savior, Jesus Christ. For Paul, as should be the case for each of us, the only way he could adequately express his gratitude was through unbridled, obedient devotion to the post-conversion ministry to which he had been called; that is, to be the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Ac 9:15). One author aptly puts it this way, "Obligation to him who died produces obligation to those for whom he died" (P. Minear, *Gratitude and Mission in the Epistle to the Romans*, 42).

v. 14 **Greeks** "Since about 700 B.C. the name *Hellenes* denoted Greek tribes and city-states united by speech, culture and religion. After the conquest of Alexander [the Great] the name was used to denote also non-Greek peoples who spoke Greek and shared Greek culture and education" (Fitzmyer, 250).

v. 14 **non-Greeks** (Lit. - *barbaroi*; i.e. - barbarians) This phrase is meant to convey more than a simple distinction between spoken languages. Rather it was an assertion of those who were perceived to be less cultured. Conveniently for the Greeks, this designation included their national enemies such as the Persians and Egyptians.

v. 14 **wise/foolish** Whereas the Greek/non-Greek pairing reflects the two "types" of Gentiles, the pairing of wise/foolish is meant to describe all humanity (i.e. - including Jews). Says one Messianic scholar, "This reflects the traditional rabbinic distinction between "Israel" and the "nations of the world" (Joseph Shulam, *A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Romans*, 39). "The purpose of these classifications is simply that the gospel is for all [peoples] without distinction of nationality or cultural development and that he as the apostle of the Gentiles is under divine obligation to preach the gospel to all" (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 25).

Connect the **FAMILY**. During this series, Bible stories appropriate for children will be used that complement the adult teaching.

Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

At dinner this week have each member of your family talk about a time when they felt like they belonged. This could be in home group, at church, in a school classroom, a scout troop, or anywhere they really fit in. Think of the reasons you felt like you belonged to the group.



Pray it!

Pray God's will for your child by praying scriptures. Insert your child's name in the blanks as you pray.

Father, help _____ to be devoted to others in brotherly love. Thank you that you will teach him to honor others above himself. Ro 12:10

Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

Biblical Community – I spend time with other Christians to help with God's work.

Memory verse – "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." Ecc 3:11

Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

- * Why were Jesus' disciples afraid to return to Judea?
- *What did Jesus mean when he answered his disciples questions in verse 9?
- *What did Thomas mean in his statement in verse 16?
- *Can you think of a time when it was hard for you to decide to stick with Jesus?

Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

Think of one thing your family can change to Belong more to your Biblical Community. Start putting it into practice this week!



Challenge

Kids preschool through sixth grade receive a prize for completing a Connect the Family activity.

My family completed at least one Connect the Family activity this week.

Child's name _____ Parent's signature _____

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.