

week 12 twelve



I invite you to read Romans chapters three and four as the final sections of scripture for our journey with the church in Rome.





Discover

This week, we explore the final chapters of our unconventional study of Paul's letter to the church in Rome. I was not excited to close with chapter four and preferred a grander crescendo like the words of chapter eight to usher us into our next series. Since reading the words of chapter four, I am thankful for the remembrance of Abraham and Sarah at the close of our study.

Again, Paul invites the Gentile and Jewish believers to be one people but his description of this union is a family. Abraham, the great father of Israel is also the father of the Gentiles. Sarah whose womb bore the promise of God's deliverance, bore this promise for all people. She is the mother of the Jews and the Gentiles. They are our parents. I sense an enfolding as Paul speaks of God's pleasure with Abraham before he accepted the rite of circumcision. I sense an enfolding as Paul reminds us of Abraham's hope against hope that God would prove faithful. I sense an enfolding as God's love and Abraham's belief are arms that embrace two factions and make them family. I am your sister. You are my brother because we share the same legacy of God's presence among us and hope when there seemed no hope at all.

Martin Luther King Jr wrote a letter to the American Christian in the style of Paul's many letters to the church scattered across the ancient world. I encourage you to read MLK's letter because it still speaks so poignantly to us. I want to close our time together in this space by writing a letter to the Tempe Church of Christ. I pray that it is God's voice and intention for our community that will speak through these words. I encourage you to ask God what else God wants to share with our community or with you as an individual.





Discover

To all in Tempe,

You are loved by God and called to be his holy people. When I think of you, I cannot help but marvel at your faithfulness. For ninety years, you listened intently to God's invitation and responded in word and action like Samuel who rose in the night at the prompting of God's voice. You responded again and again "yes, Lord, your servants are listening?" You are a refuge in the desert for the weary. You are a family to college students far from the comfort of home. You are a strange people that welcome those who are not like you, that share a table with those who are not like you, your neighbors, who God longs to enfold into his embrace. Do not grow weary of doing good in your city. Sin's influence attempts to isolate you from one another. Unity among a group of beautifully diverse people is a powerful force that strengthens the power of the Spirit. This is why sin attempts to divide and destroy your relationships and keep you from learning from the experience and wisdom of one another. God is always more than our limited perspective and community expands the scope of our awareness of God's divine attributes and movement in the world. May you be more emboldened to radically welcome one another as Jesus Christ has welcomed each of us into his family. As those welcomed, I pray that you will continue to relentlessly pursue life with God in order that your whole self will be transformed through this sacred relationship. Disentangle yourselves from sin's grasp and align your speech, your attitudes, your actions with the good, perfect, and pleasing will of God, a will that seeks the good of those in the household of faith and our neighbors. May the will of God gently press upon your heart and direct any allegiance into God's faithful care. May the vastness of God's love be experienced by anyone who enters your midst and extend to enfold one another. I pray that the God of peace will empower you to make peace in your relationships with one another and make peace a reality in your city.

May your peace be as God's peace, active and never passive, ensuring the lives of others flourish. We are instruments of peace bearing Christlikeness in this world. I rejoice because I know that the good work God began in the Tempe Church of Christ will continue under God's direction. I thank God for this community and pray you are drawn into the fullness of life with God.

To our God who is able to do more than we ask or imagine, to God be glory and honor forever.

Amen.



Pray

Monday

“What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written: “So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.” Romans 3:1-8

God,

Thank you that you chose the Hebrews as your special people. That through them we could learn of your love, patience, grace as well as your justice. We are grateful that they devoted themselves to the preservation of your ways and history. We learn so much about ourselves in their stories. Like them we fall short of your glory but your grace reaches us, the Gentiles, so that we too can be your children.

Tuesday

“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.” Romans 3:9-20

God,

How do I find the appropriate line between self-condemnation and self-righteousness? There are times when I look at my life and character and I see the hurtful words I say, the deceptive behavior, the hateful thoughts, the self-serving choices and the prideful attitudes and I realize how far I am from the person you called me to be and I feel the shame and guilt of my sin. But you tell me that you don’t condemn me and that your love drives out fear. I can see the transformation that you have made in my life that shows kindness, gentleness, love, patience, forgiveness and joy in places where they have been absent. Please, let me see myself through your eyes

Wednesday

“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 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 3:21-31

God,

It is a mystery to me how Jesus’ death and resurrection give me the opportunity to be right before you. My sense of justice, truth and rightness do not fit with how you deal with me. You have treated me far better than I deserve or than justice would demand. This just shows me how your goodness and righteousness far exceeds what I can understand and imagine. Anything that I do in response to your love is only fitting but so minute in comparison.



Pray

Thursday

“If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about - but not before God. What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Romans 4:1-12

God of Abraham,

The stories of Abraham are such an inspiration to hear and tell. How wonderful it would have been to be alive at the time and see first hand his character, belief, faith and devotion. His belief in your word and promises are truly remarkable and spur us on to have a similar faith that prompts actions of belief and devotion. Thank you that through faith all people can be made right before you.

Friday

“Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring - not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed - the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.” Romans 4:13-25

God of promises,

Thank you that we are heirs to the promises that you made to Abraham. Thank you that through faith all people can count Abraham as their father in faith. As he believed and had hope against hope, we too have hope in your redemptive promises through Jesus who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification.



Reflect

The following questions are designed to help you reflect more deeply on the themes we explore together as we journey through Paul's letter to the Romans. I invite you to make space to sit with these questions without any need for a quick or clear answer. As you settle into a quiet and comfortable space, I encourage you to discuss these questions with God. Ask God to prompt you, to guide your thoughts, or bring up new questions that could be more helpful to you.

- 1 What strikes you most about Paul's expansion of our understanding of Abraham as the father of the Jews and the Gentiles?
- 2 How would you describe the relationship between faith and works described by Paul? How would Jesus dialogue with Paul on this topic?
- 3 If you wrote a letter to the Tempe Church of Christ what would you include to challenge and encourage our community? Why would you choose to emphasize these ideas?
- 4 What do you believe are portions of God's invitation to the global church in this season? How do we more fully embrace Paul's emphasis that we are a family?

