

Week One

Conversations with God

ROMANS 1–2

***Reminder: The daily rhythm of READ-MEMORIZE-MEDITATE is not new to this module. This highly personalized approach to engaging God through Scripture and meditation was introduced and practiced in Morph: Love God. If you have not experienced Morph: Love God, or if it has been awhile, you are encouraged to read the Week Two section in the Love God Primer before beginning these exercises. The Love God Primer is downloadable in the Morph: Build Character online group.

READ

Two metaphors are used in this week's *Morph* Reading and *Morph Me* exercise: a house and its foundation, a tree and its fruit. The two metaphors display Scripture's passion for God to be our God. If God is our foundation, the house need not groan. If the Spirit of God is in our root system, healthy fruit will grow on the tree. Now we turn to Romans.

Romans is raw.

Yes, illustrations and metaphors are used along the way, but it is in Romans where we get the raw truth of the gospel—the *euangelos*—the good news. This raw truth goes deep, very deep, but to get there one must unpack the language and concepts of this letter. In these opening chapters, for example, we come into two words critical to understanding Romans: faith and righteousness. At first glance, many assume to know the meaning of these words, and in truth, many do. But words are slippery and assumptions are dangerous. Context shows that the word *faith*, for example, when used by Paul, is slightly different than his contemporary James' use of the word. Discerning these differences will greatly enrich your reading of Scripture.

Let's start with righteousness.

Righteousness

Righteousness is a loaded word in our day. Most commonly, it is used to describe the self-righteous, the arrogant, those who lack self-awareness but are overly aware of the problems in others. If not that, righteousness is commonly considered to be synonymous with morality. If you play by the rules, you're considered righteous. Neither of these influences makes the concept of righteousness particularly inviting. We don't like words that sound self-righteous, even if they're not, and we're not overly excited about a list of rules.

Righteousness in Romans, though, is most emphatically not self-righteousness. Even more, to say righteousness in Romans is synonymous with morality is an understandable perception, but only partially true. This limited definition of righteousness lacks the heart, soul, and gravity of the concept. Righteousness in Romans is seen from several vantage points which gives depth and breadth to our understanding. Interestingly, though, the initial vantage point is not a description of what righteousness is, but in the first several chapters Paul describes the opposite of righteousness: unrighteousness. It is in this description that we get to the heart of both righteousness and unrighteousness. Very early,

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before we get any specific descriptions of sin, Paul goes deep. Consider the following statement carefully.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles (Romans 1:21-23, TNIV).

So “they knew God” existed, but they did not “glorify him as God.” Instead, they worshipped gods. They “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images” of other things. If this sounds familiar, it should. It is this exchange from God to gods we carefully consider throughout the *Morph* experience. In this week’s *Morph* Reading, you read (or will read), “To love another above God is to make that other into a god. The other may make a great gift, but the gift was never intended for godlike status. Let gifts be gifts and God be God. To worship the gift not only endangers the gift, but it robs us of life.” Through Romans, you will see the implications of the exchange of God for gods, the problems this has created for us, and the astounding solution offered in Christ. This leads to a clearer picture of righteousness in Romans.

In Romans, we don’t just discover the problem—that we have exchanged God for gods, but we discover the solution. How can we be righteous when we’re not? It’s this question Paul sets up in these first two chapters and then addresses in the chapters that follow. To get there, though, a second concept must be carefully considered.

Faith

In the opening chapter of Romans we read this:

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, TNIV).

Righteousness, we are told here by Paul, comes “by faith.” The righteous will “live by faith.” Clearly this is an essential concept in Paul’s letter. What is meant by the word *faith*?

English translations commonly use two words, belief and faith, to translate one word in Greek, *pisteuo*. The English words *belief* and *faith* are commonly understood to mean that a person believes in the existence of God or believes a certain set of doctrines are true. *Pisteuo* in Romans is much more than this.

Another translation of *pisteuo*, one with greater depth but a bit more clumsy, is the English word *trust*. Trust is more than belief. People can *believe* an airplane can fly, but it is when they step onto the plane that they are *trusting* in it. It is this kind of *trust* that puts God at the center of a person’s life, and as we will see in Romans, is the impetus for bringing full righteousness to those who lack it.

As you talk to God this week, consider the relationship between an authentic trust and fruit of the Spirit. How might God be calling you to trust him more deeply? How might this trust manifest itself in fruit of the Spirit?

MEMORIZE

This week’s memory verses:

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Ezekiel 36:26-27, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized. Carefully consider the passages, but don't *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.



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