

When in Rome..?
Session 4: "Soul Rehab" Romans 8 : 1-2

Timing: 30-45 minutes, then leading into ministry

Buzz groups: Suggestions are boxed, pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

Illustrations: Suggestions are noted, but your own ideas and stories are preferable

Focus: Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

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Amy Winehouse famously sang "They tried to make me go to rehab, but I said no, no, no...."

Icebreaker: If you could change one personal habit, what would it be?

Introduction to series

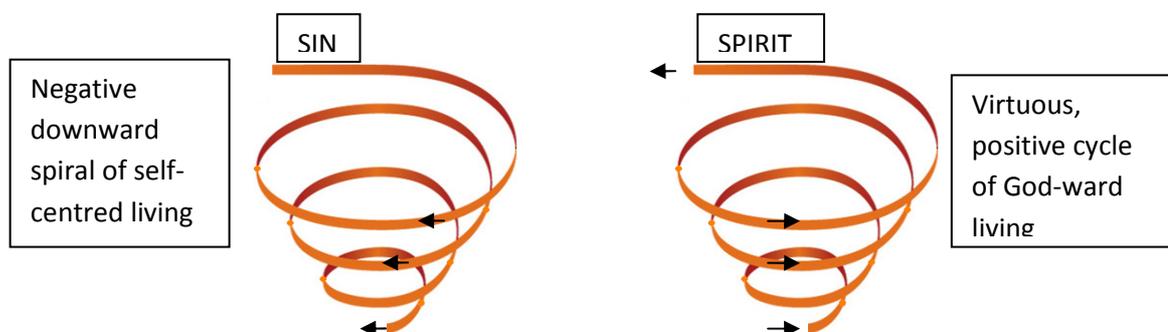
People often think of a journey through Romans as a trek in the Himalayas, or a visit to the Louvre Musee, Paris. In each session we'll go to some of the peak/masterpiece passages. We behave out of what we believe to be true. But are all our own beliefs correct? Is "our truth" *the truth*? In Romans Paul helps us review that. And with changed understanding, we adopt changed attitudes and new behaviours. We become more like Jesus.

Introduction to session 4

Romans 8:1–2 ¹"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."

These verses are one of Paul's clearest summary statements about what Christ accomplished on the cross. They're the jewel in the crown of Romans.

There are two ways to live. Get a big piece of paper and draw two spirals for the group to see and describe them. Then put the labels "sin" and "spirit" on the spirals.



Say how each spiral feels. The shame, empty effort, lack of satisfaction and frustration of self-ward living. The freedom, goodness, adventure and fulfilment of God-ward living, even in times of real struggle and suffering. Illustrate both with stories from your own experience.

Explain that doing God's will (being righteous, as we looked at in session 2) involves not just the right outward actions, but the right inner motivation.

Righteousness is right actions flowing out of a right relationship with God. It's not enough to just have one or other- we must have both.

That's why faith is crucial – the desire to love, obey and worship God as our core inner purpose. We must do the will of God from the heart. Unless that's our motivation, we'll always experience a negative downward cycle, even if we behave well on the surface, we remain under "condemnation".

But when we receive the Holy Spirit, we experience the reality of what Christ did on the cross – paying the price for sin and removing it from us – and what occurred through the resurrection – a new cleansed life and victory over the power of sin.

Paul is saying we can experience that now (v.1). What can we experience?

1. No Guilt

If "there is now No Condemnation" because of what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross, then our sin and shame has been removed. There's nothing for us to feel guilty about. We need the Holy Spirit to transform our life towards this state. Healing from guilt is a common Christian experience.

Illustration: Share a personal story of freedom from guilt, or ask someone else in advance.

Coco Chanel said "guilt is perhaps the most painful companion of death".

Elsewhere it has also been said that "sin, guilt, neurosis; they are one and the same, the fruit of the tree of knowledge". In other word our 'original sin' (see Genesis 3) – our rebellion from God – is the core issue. When that's fixed, life gets better.

Application: Name those pasts sins you continually revisit and continue to feel guilty about. Write a letter to God asking for freedom from that condemnation because of his forgiveness, say it to him as a prayer, then put it in a post-box marked for "God".

2. No Death

We are now "free from the law of sin and death". Verse 11 also tells us, "And if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."

Orthodox Christian theology on healing is that ultimately, everyone in Christ gets healed. Some get healed now, as a foretaste, a sign that our hope it correct, in response to the prayers of God's people.

Illustrate: Tell 2 stories. The first is a real-life story of healing, where someone's body, mind, emotions or practical life situation was 'healed', or repaired, set right, in response to prayer. The second is of unanswered prayer where there hasn't yet apparently been healing – but

crucially, share what difference having a secure hope of God's ultimate healing on that issue makes now, so that you can rejoice even while there's still suffering, ahead of having received an answer.

Application: Make it your aim to share this hope with a friend or colleague tomorrow, and offer to pray for them in whatever difficulty they're facing.

3. No Limit

"Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free"

Buzz groups: What holds us back from living full, unrestrained, fruitful, spirit-fuelled lives?

Get brief feedback, perhaps write the responses on a flipchart.

At the root of, or behind many of the responses will be fear, not practical barriers. John Wimber famously preached that "faith is spelled R.I.S.K". We should "feel the fear, but do it anyway." We no longer fear death, so we needn't fear anything less than death either.

The Holy Spirit, who pours the love of God into our core being (Romans 5:5) offers an alternative basis for living. Freed from the fear of death, we are freed from every other fear too. As I John 4:18 says, God's "perfect love drives out fear".

Illustrate: Tell an inspiring story about someone who fearlessly pursued God's purpose for their life, e.g. Jackie Pullinger's story in "Chasing the Dragon".

Application: This will look different for everyone. But show here, how as a result of preparing an evening on this scripture, you are going to put it in to practice. How you are going to live differently, receiving God's love afresh by the Holy Spirit, to face your fears and take practical steps to life change.

Ideas for Ministry

Ask the Holy Spirit to:

- to show people in their own hearts any areas where they sense guilt or a vague notion of condemnation. Invite people to say out loud one word connected to that thing to signal their request to God to remove that from them.
- ask people to share scriptures, pictures, or words of knowledge that might encourage others to face their fears, or confront them that God understands and wants to strengthen them.