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“To God’s Beloved: Paul’s Letter to the Romans”

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## **Introduction**

Hello, I’m Sarah Henrich, a professor at Luther Seminary, and I have had the privilege of writing nine sessions on Paul’s letter to the Romans for you to study together in your congregations this coming year. I would like to tell you that this study of the letter of Romans always opens new avenues for me to perceive what God is doing and has done in my own life and in the lives of those around me, and I think the same thing will happen to you. Why? Because Paul seems to be able to give us new eyes to see when we really pay attention and try with all the patience and discernment we can muster to hear what he is trying to tell us, in a foreign language, in another time and place, but with a power and conviction that emerge, even from his struggling language and certainly from the beautiful poetic passages, some of which I’ll bet you already know.

This letter to the Romans—I’m not making this up—has been powerful through the church for over 2,000 years and has really grabbed people’s attention at times of difficulty and discernment for them. Martin Luther, of course, is the one most of you know best. Paul’s letter to the Romans shaped his ideas about justification by God’s grace through faith more than any other single biblical passage and it may happen also to awaken something new in you as well. This is a wonderful letter and it will come to you looking something like this in the Leader Guide, where you’ll have nine sessions worth of extra information to help work through the rich studies that will occur in the magazine month-by-month. Rich means there’s a lot in there. There’s a lot in Romans, there’s a lot in the studies, you are going to have to choose what to study and what not to, but you know your study group better than anyone else.

We can’t write for one study group and hit everyone, so the goal here is to provide lots of way for all different kinds of people at all different levels of skill and interest and commitment and experience to dig into Paul’s letter to the Romans. Take Paul’s advice: Let the freedom of Christ be yours in how you plan this study, and let the love of your neighbor shape what you think you want to choose to build up your neighbor in each study. There’s more than enough here for

questions, and questions may be directly about the Bible to help those who haven't read it much to dig in a little deeper. There may be questions about people's lives to help folks say this really connects to what I experience, or how in the world does this connect to what I experience?

I encourage you to do two things above all—not to close down people's questions or cause them to be embarrassed by what they don't know, and that includes reading itself. Check with your readers ahead of time. Not everyone's so comfortable reading in public. And secondly, hold yourself in that biblical text all the way to the end. To stop short may be to miss where Paul's argument is really headed and maybe to miss the bigger point that he wants to make. So try to keep moving and keep people engaged so that they feel that for each of them, there's something that can be learned. The Leader Guide will help you on this and so will the studies in the magazine itself.

I hope you have a wonderful nine months studying Paul's letter to the Romans.