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

11. Paul shares some reasons why he desired to visit the church in Rome. What he probably had in mind was something like “spiritual insight” for guiding the church in providing what the Roman church lacked. More likely what we are seeing here is Paul’s understanding of the value of face-to-face fellowship. Paul’s writing to these brothers and sisters was a step toward a long time of teaching and dialogue (Acts 28:16-31). The goal of this education was to be the establishment of the Roman church in sound Christian teaching (doctrine) and practice.

12. One of the outstanding aspects of being a Christian is the comfort and joy we find as we share our “precious” faith with one another (2 Peter 1:1). We can encourage each other with stories of our life transformations and our resistance to the sinful influences of the world.

13. Paul preached and wrote expectantly, anticipating that God would use his words as seed to bring about a harvest. He also wanted to preach to the people of Rome because he believed it would result in conversions and changed lives. Paul had already experienced much fruit during his ministry. As he wrote later, people cannot hear and believe unless there is a preacher. Though Paul had long planned to visit Rome, he had been hindered in each instance. Various circumstances and even spiritual directions changed Paul’s plans. And at the time of the writing of Romans, Claudius had died, and Jews had returned to Rome. Within the Christian community, this caused reconsideration of the relationships between Jews, Gentiles, and God.

9-10. Christianity would be blessed by a strong, faithful congregation in the great city of Rome. Its location at the transportation hub of the empire would allow the church’s witness to spread in all directions. Paul valued the advance of the gospel of God’s Son as his primary objective. His relationship with the Christians in Rome was part of his grand vision for bringing the message of salvation to all people. Paul’s desire to go to Rome was tempered by his intent to submit to God’s will. Our greatest plans depend on God’s blessing if they are to be successful. Paul decided to return to Jerusalem before visiting Rome. This delayed his trip to Rome. But spiritual guidance couldn’t wait, thus the need for this letter to serve that church in the interim.

II. Power of Preaching
Romans 1:11-15

11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— 12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. 13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, 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.

10 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. 11 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

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14a. Paul described his relationship with unevangelized people he had never met in terms of owing a debt to them. His spiritual duty could only be discharged by preaching the gospel to the unsaved.

Gentiles could be subdivided as two groups of people. Greeks themselves were Gentile unbelievers in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. These were assumed to be the most civilized and most sophisticated citizens in the Roman Empire.

The non-Greeks were people who lived beyond the regions of Greek influence, who spoke languages other than Greek. In Paul’s day, Greeks had a strong sense of cultural superiority based on their philosophical traditions and refined language. To them, languages other than Greek sounded like babbling nonsense, “bar-bar-bar,” qualifying such speakers as “barbarians.” It’s been said that after the Romans conquered the Greeks militarily, the Greeks turned around and conquered the Romans culturally. The Romans adopted the category of barbarian to refer to people who did not have Greek or Roman heritage.

14b. Paul’s inclusiveness in preaching indicates that knowledge or education levels are not a criterion for Paul’s target audiences (1 Corinthians 1:26). Some students propose that Paul used parallelism to mean that the Greeks were the wise while the barbarians were the foolish.

15. At first glance, this verse may seem strange. Why plan to preach the gospel to the recipients of this letter, who are already Christians? We should realize that preaching the gospel involves more than initial evangelizing.
III. Power of Faith
Romans 1:16-17

16 For 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. 17 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.”

16a. Elsewhere, Paul noted that the message of the cross was a “stumbling block to Jews” (1 Corinthians 1:23). The core elements of Paul’s preaching would not avoid the historical truth that Jesus had been executed like the worst of criminals (2:2). Jesus’ death was easily dismissed by critics as neither heroic nor in obedience to God’s will, but as only shameful.

The shame of the cross was real. But the gospel reveals that shame was not the full story of Jesus’ execution. Therefore Paul was not ashamed of the cross. Rather, he gloried in it (Galatians 6:14).

16b. Not only does the gospel possess the power to save everyone who believes, it also had the power to break down the walls separating Jews and Gentiles. In Ephesus Paul welcomed the uncircumcised who had previously been restricted from full participation in the covenant with Israel (Ephesians 2:11-22).

It is difficult to determine whether the church in Rome consisted mostly of Jewish-Christians or Gentile-Christians. Clearly, both were present. Some believers of Jewish background were likely present in Jerusalem on Pentecost. Those Jews were among the first to hear the good news. But Gentiles also needed to know this power of God that brings salvation. The word salvation can take a broad range of meanings, depending on context. But in Paul’s writings; he uses that word in a spiritual sense.

17. The gospel is the most crucial message ever because there the righteousness of God is revealed. The gospel tells people how to become right with God. Our only hope is to accept by faith the gift of God’s righteousness as provided by him through the death of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Paul concluded this summary of his gospel message by quoting Habakkuk 2:4 for understanding the nature of faith. Habakkuk complained to the Lord about the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous, expecting action from God (Habakkuk 1:12–2:1). God’s final word was that his people must remain faithful, trusting him for the outcome that vindicates righteousness and justice (2:2-19). Our job is to place our faith in God to do the right thing in his timing.

Christ’s death on the cross was the right thing at the right time. It’s what allows people to become justified, to be treated as faultless before God. The price for our sins has been paid. Paul presents this as a revealing of the nature of God, that he both demands righteousness from us and makes this possible despite our sin and weakness. Later Paul will say this allows God to remain holy and righteous himself while working to make sinful humanity righteous too. God is both “just and the one who justifies” those who trust him (Romans 3:26).

The exact meaning of the phrase by faith from first to last has been debated. But the likely intent of Paul is to show that this whole faith agenda is not a new invention by Christians. God’s people have always built a successful relationship with him on faith. Paul later gave the example of Abraham, whose faith was “credited to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3, 22). Trusting in God is not new, but now we are to include faith in Jesus—that his death has the effect of saving us from our sins. It is faith then, faith now, and faith going forward.
Involvement Learning

Power of the Gospel

Into the Lesson
Write a memory of the most important trip you ever took.

__________________________
__________________________

Some trips simply must be taken, regardless of (or because of) circumstances. The same was true in Paul’s day.

Into the Word
Answer the following questions:

Who was Paul?
__________________________

Why was Rome important?
__________________________

When was the book of Romans written?
__________________________

What problems does Paul address in Romans?
__________________________

Read Romans 1:8-17 and answer the following questions for each verse.

Why does Paul desire to go to Rome?
__________________________
__________________________

What does Paul hope to accomplish?
__________________________
__________________________
__________________________

Complete these three phrases:

Why the gospel is important:
__________________________

What the gospel achieves:
__________________________
__________________________

What the gospel reveals:
__________________________

Into Life
The power of the gospel has affected me by . . .
__________________________

Three ways I can better “live by faith” are . . .
__________________________
__________________________
__________________________

My biggest challenge in sharing the gospel is . . .
__________________________

Thought to Remember
The gospel is powerful for all who believe.