

Read a CHAPTER a Day

SMALL GROUP LEADERS' GUIDE Fall 2026 | September 8 – October 19

Scripture: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon

Introduction

This leaders' guide is designed for use with the **Fall 2026 Read a Chapter a Day (RACAD) initiative**—a small group Bible study from September 8–October 19 in which participants from around the world are invited to read one chapter of the Bible each day, with the small group meeting in-person or online once each week during the study period.

Reading scripture daily shapes our imagination with the stories of humanity, faithfulness, and God's redemptive plan for the world through Jesus. It connects us to people of the past and to Christians around the world for whom scripture is our common story; cultivates awareness of the Holy Spirit's continuing voice in our lives; and inspires, instructs, shapes, and challenges individuals and communities to mature as followers of Jesus.

The guide can be used during the small group sessions to explore:

- **Key Themes:** What major theological or practical themes emerge?
- **Historical Context:** What was happening in Paul's time?
- **Reflection on Personal Practice:** What have I been learning? How have I experienced God through my daily reading?
- **Spiritual Practice:** Is there a spiritual practice that connects to this week's reading?
- **Application:** How does this apply to daily Christian life?
- **Discussion Questions:** Thought-provoking questions for deeper engagement.
- **Prayer:** A time of opening and closing prayer together.

To learn more about Read a Chapter a Day, and to find additional resources to support your daily scripture reading, please visit: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/read-a-chapter-a-day>

Other Ways to Engage with Read a Chapter a Day

- **Join the Mailing List**

Sign up for our weekly emails to receive a reminder every Sunday about upcoming scripture texts, a common prayer, and resources for further study by visiting our website:

<https://www.UMCdiscipleship.org/articles/read-a-chapter-a-day>



- **Weekly Online Meetings**

Join our weekly Zoom meetings led by leaders' guide authors Rev. Ivan Milosi and Rev. Heureuse Kaj every Sunday between September 13–October 18 from 7:00–8:00 p.m., Central Time:

<https://upperroom-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/yLwzvBVKSySWvID-ONNgNQ>



- **Join the Facebook Group**

Share your reflections and be encouraged by others in our RACAD Facebook Group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/umcreadachapteraday>



Questions? Please contact:

Ashlee Alley Crawford, Director of Adult Discipleship: acrawford@umcdiscipleship.org

Bethany Barnett, Project Manager, Read a Chapter a Day: bethanyrebeccawarne@gmail.com



DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES
The United Methodist Church

About the Authors

Rev. Heureuse Kaj and **Rev. Ivan Milosi** are from the Democratic Republic of Congo. They have degrees from Africa University in Zimbabwe and Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC. They have served in ministry both internationally and within the Great Plains Annual Conference for more than seven years and are currently based in Lincoln, Nebraska. Rev. Kaj serves as associate of congregational care at St. Mark's United Methodist Church, and Rev. Milosi serves as senior pastor at St. Luke United Methodist Church.

As children of clergy, both grew up in homes where daily scripture reading and evening prayer were central to life—a heritage they now pass along to their young children through bedtime hymns and daily Bible reading. They are passionate about the transforming power of God's Word and look forward to journeying through scripture together with our global community.

WEEK 1: September 8–12, 2026

Reading: Galatians 1–6

Principal Chapter: Galatians 5

Spiritual Practice: Simmer

Core Emphasis: Spiritual Fruit from Life with Christ

Read a CHAPTER a Day

SMALL GROUP LEADERS' GUIDE

Leader Preparation Checklist

- ☐ **Read Galatians 1–6.** Mark repeated words and contrasts: faith/works of the law, flesh/spirit, old creation/new creation. Spend some time journaling or reflecting on these themes. You do not need to teach every idea in Galatians during this small-group session.
- ☐ **Review the historical note below.** Be prepared to explain the issue without making Judaism, Jewish people, or the law sound inferior or rejected by God.
- ☐ **Spiritual Practice: Simmer.** Read Galatians 5:13–15 and Galatians 5:22–25 aloud slowly and clearly.
- ☐ **Prepare the meeting space.** If meeting in person, have paper and pens ready for the Scribe/Savor practice. If meeting online, ensure participants have access to a computer or phone and have the link to access the virtual meeting space.
- ☐ **Pray for each person by name.** Ask that God would create honesty, grace, and care for others in the group.

Historical Note on Galatians:

Background: Paul writes with urgency to congregations in Galatia after other teachers have convinced Gentile believers to receive circumcision and take on Jewish practices of the Mosaic law to demonstrate full belonging. Paul explains that his gospel comes from God and insists that Jesus Christ, not ethnic boundary markers, sets people right with God. The promise God made to Abraham now reaches the nations through Christ, and receiving God's Spirit marks the people of God's new creation.

Paul's writing is not permission to indulge ourselves. Freedom in Christ shapes us into loving servants. Life in the Spirit cultivates a community that restores graciously, bears one another's burdens, perseveres in doing good, and boasts only in the cross.

Interpretive Care: Paul's argument is about Gentile inclusion in the first-century Jewish and Jesus-following world. Avoid taking verses in Galatians to demean Judaism or teach that Jewish people need to reject their identity. Stay focused on Paul's claim that Gentiles belong to God through Christ and the Spirit.

Discussions about Galatians may raise sensitive issues related to legalism, shame, spiritual/church performance, freedom, identity, law, and experiences of exclusion in community or church. Listen with care and invite participants to do the same. If necessary, pause and say:

"Thank you for sharing that with the group. Let's take a breath and remember to listen and speak with grace. We're not trying to solve all of life's challenges today, but we can hold one another in these conversations and keep seeking God's wisdom."

Offer to connect privately with anyone who appears particularly distressed or who has more they need to share. Maintain confidentiality as needed except where care or safety requires contacting others.

Opening (8 min)

Welcome & Check-In

Welcome participants warmly by name. Briefly explain the purpose of the gathering, then invite one-sentence responses. Keep responses brief so everyone can speak.

Check-in Question: What word describes how you are arriving today (*curious, expectant, overwhelmed, calm, content, tired, etc.*). What do you need from God in this hour?

Opening Prayer

God of grace and freedom, you called us through Christ and welcomed us into your family. Quiet our hearts as we listen to your Word. Free us from whatever tries to bind us, form us by the fruit of your Spirit, and teach us to love and serve one another. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Key Themes (10 min)

As you read Galatians 1–6 this week, what words, images, or ideas stood out to you? While Galatians explores many powerful ideas, today we will focus on three core themes in Paul's message: faith versus works of the law, flesh versus Spirit, and old creation versus new creation.

Faith & Works of the Law: Paul teaches that righteousness comes from faith in Jesus Christ, not by circumcision or following the rituals of the Mosaic law. God's grace through Christ is enough for us; our religious rituals cannot make us right with God or earn God's love.

- Key Passage: Galatians 5:2–6.
- Which verse in this passage most clearly explains how faith in Christ is enough?

Flesh & Spirit: When Paul refers to “flesh,” he does not mean the physical body. To Paul, “flesh” means human nature that relies on and desires self more than God. Life controlled by the Spirit produces loving service and Christlike character, accomplishing in believers what law and religious effort alone never could.

- Key Passage: Galatians 5:13–26.
- Where do you see differences between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit in chapter 5?

Old Creation & New Creation: The “old creation” boasts about what sets people apart from one another. Through Christ crucified, God initiates a “new creation” (Gal 6:15) where race, class, gender, and citizenship no longer define whether someone belongs. God makes everyone who trusts in Christ an equal heir to God's promise.

- Key Passages: Galatians 3:26–29; 6:14–15.
- Where in these verses do you see evidence of God's “new creation”?

To put it together: Galatians calls us from relying on the “works of the law” to faith in Christ, from living according to our selfish flesh to walking by the Spirit, and from the dividing lines of the old creation into the unity of God's people—God's new creation.

Historical Context (8 min)

Who Is Writing? The apostle Paul wrote Galatians. He makes a strong argument for his apostolic authority in this letter, insisting that he did not learn about Jesus from any other human. Rather, his calling and the gospel he teaches come from encountering Christ through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

To Whom? Paul writes to congregations in Galatia, a Roman province in what is now Turkey. Scholars debate whether these churches were located in northern or southern Galatia, which affects the estimated date of the letter.

What Is Happening? After these believers were introduced to Christ, other Christian workers visited these churches. They likely encouraged church members to receive circumcision and follow Jewish traditions of the Mosaic law. The other teachers may have framed these practices as necessary to belong fully or as a “next step” in the faith journey.

Core Issue: Paul argues that these other workers twisted or misrepresented the gospel. Jewish traditions cannot make us, keep us, or improve our standing with God. Our relationship with God depends solely on the grace we receive through faith in Jesus Christ.

Urgency: Galatians is one of Paul’s most urgent letters. It is the only letter he writes that doesn’t begin with words of thanks to the recipients. Instead, he jumps right into arguing that the Galatians have turned to a completely different gospel.

Why Does This Matter? Understanding this background can help us see why Galatians is about more than circumcision. Paul’s argument touches on grace, identity, who belongs to God, and how the Spirit makes believers God’s new creation.

Paul writes urgently to congregations in Galatia. Jewish leaders came to these churches after Paul introduced them to Christ. Those teachers encouraged church members to receive circumcision and follow Mosaic law. Perhaps they taught that circumcision and traditions were required steps of belonging. Perhaps they taught that these were important next steps in growing people’s relationship with God. Paul argues that we cannot earn or add to our acceptance before God. We are right with God because of our faith in Jesus Christ. We belong to God because we have received God’s grace.

- What part of this historical background explains Paul’s urgent tone?
- What questions do you have about this background?

Paul is not arguing that Jewish traditions do not matter or that Jewish people should abandon their ethnic and religious identity. Paul argues that circumcision and the law cannot make us right with God. This study guide reminds us of that. We don’t need to add anything to the sufficiency of Christ.

Reflection on Personal Practice (10 min)

Invite participants to share their experience of reading Galatians each day. Remind participants that Read a Chapter a Day isn’t about just finishing the reading each day or learning information—it becomes a spiritual practice when we pay attention to God speaking and moving through scripture.

Ask one or both of the following questions:

- What was easy or hard about reading one chapter each day this week?
- Where did you experience God speaking, comforting, challenging, or surprising you through your reading of Galatians?

Leader Note: Affirm a variety of experiences. Some days of reading will be crystal clear and encouraging. Other days, we read and feel bored, distracted, or just don’t understand. Both experiences can be part of learning to pay attention to God through faithful scripture reading. Daily scripture reading isn’t about having an ‘Aha’ moment every day. It’s a spiritual practice of making ourselves available to God. Even when we feel bored or don’t understand what we’re reading, we can trust that God is still at work shaping us through our commitment to returning to the Word.

Spiritual Practice: Simmer (7 min)

This week’s spiritual practice is **Simmer**. Simmer encourages us to be still and attentive to the Holy Spirit before and during our time in God’s Word. Instead of rushing to interpret or know how to apply the text, we allow a word, phrase, or image from scripture to “simmer” in our hearts. For this practice, you will focus on Galatians 5, especially Galatians 5:13–26.

This passage calls believers to live out freedom in love. It contrasts the “works of the flesh” and the “fruit of the Spirit.”

Instruction: Invite participants to get comfortable. If you're meeting in person, encourage participants to put both feet on the floor, rest their hands open, or close their eyes if that helps them feel more attentive.

- Remind participants that they're not trying to do anything. They're creating space to listen.

Scripture Reading: Read Galatians 5:13–14 slowly: “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become enslaved to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

- Pause for a few seconds. Then read Galatians 5:22–23 slowly: “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.”

Invitation to Silence: Say, “As we invite God to speak to you during this time of silence, notice if any word, phrase, or image stays with you. It may be a word like *freedom*, *love*, *peace*, *patience*, or *gentleness*. Maybe you notice an area of your life where you need the Spirit's help. There's no forcing or accomplishing anything in this time. Open yourself to receive God's words.”

- Keep silence for about one minute.

Response: After silence, say: “Take a deep breath. If you would like to share, what word, phrase, image, or prayer remained with you during the silence?” Invite two or three people to respond.

Application & Discussion Questions (10 min)

Discussion Questions

Invite the group to consider the main themes from Galatians: grace, faith, freedom, life in the Spirit, fruit of the Spirit, and new creation. Encourage participants to keep their responses focused. Allow multiple people to share.

- **Grace:** In what ways does Galatians confront or assure your understanding of God's grace?
- **Faith and Works of the Law:** Where do you see pressures (inside yourself, church, or our culture) to prove your value or earn your belonging? How does Paul's message of faith in Christ respond to that pressure?
- **Freedom and the Spirit:** Paul writes, “For freedom Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1). How might Christian freedom show up in your life this week?
- **Fruit of the Spirit:** Which quality of the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control—do you long to see God develop in you today?

The fruit of the Spirit is not something we produce through sheer willpower. The Spirit produces it in us as we stay connected to Christ and learn to live by love.

If the conversation becomes too theoretical or abstract, ground participants in a specific verse or moment from the week's reading. You may say: “Can you point to that idea in the text? Is there a verse that clarifies what Paul is trying to say?” Explore John Wesley's understanding of grace and why grace is such a foundational component of Methodism.

Application/Invitation/Call to Action

Invite participants to name one faithful response to the week's reading. Allow about ten seconds of silence before asking for responses. You may ask one or both questions:

- Where has the Spirit invited you to live out part of Galatians' message of grace, love, and freedom this week in your home, work, church, or neighborhood?
- What is one tangible way you can respond to what you've read this week?

Examples may include casting off a spirit of religious self-reliance, offering forgiveness to someone who hurt you, practicing patience in a difficult relationship, serving a neighbor, or praying each day for the fruit of the Spirit to grow abundantly in your life.

Conclude this section by saying: “As we pray, bring before God that one area where you sense God inviting you to trust in grace more deeply, walk by the Spirit, or live in the freedom Christ gives.”

Prayer & Sending (5 min)

Shared Prayer

Invite participants to name one brief prayer concern. Prayer concerns could come from participants' personal life, the church, or the wider world. Concerns may also arise from the week's reading.

You can say, "As we prepare for prayer, invite one another to share a one-sentence prayer concern. This could be a personal concern or something the church or world needs. It also might be a prayer that has surfaced while reading Galatians this week."

Allow two to three people to share. If you have time, allow each person to give a one-sentence prayer. If you're a large group, it may be appropriate for the leader to take prayer concerns and incorporate them into the closing prayer.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly God, we praise you for the freedom we have in Jesus Christ. Set us free from trying to earn what you freely give us. Teach us to live by your Spirit, bear one another's burdens, and overflow with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Hear the prayers we've spoken and the concerns we hold silently. Strengthen your church, comfort all who suffer, and use us to build your new creation in Christ. Send us out in the power of your Spirit and love. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Invite the group to pray The Lord's Prayer together.

Reminders

Before participants leave, make sure they know to:

- Continue daily reading with next week's assigned readings: Ephesians 2–6 and Philippians 1–2. Look at the chart that includes the focus scripture for daily readings.
- Plan to join a weekly Read a Chapter a Day small-group gathering.
- Stay engaged with encouragement, resources, and conversations through the Read a Chapter a Day Facebook group and weekly email.

Leader Notes & Reflection

For Next Week

- Which question or activity led to the most meaningful conversation?
- Where did the group require more time or clarity? Where did it require pastoral care?
- What would make next week's gathering more hospitable and fruitful?

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.