



# RATIONAL WORSHIP

Offering ourselves to the God of mercy

a study in Romans 11:33-12:2

Carolyn J. Watts

# **Rational Worship: Offering Ourselves to the God of Mercy**

A Study in Romans 11:33-12:2

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## The Journey

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*I didn't understand.* I had just returned home, too sick to continue my work in the small mud-brick hospital high in the mountains of Afghanistan. Twelve years of medical study and four years of investment in the people I loved had unexpectedly come to an end, leaving me with a host of burning questions.

Hidden amidst the questions of future health and career was a larger question. It came to the fore when a mentor asked me to pray through Romans 12:1-2. The verses invited full-bodied surrender, boldly declaring that to offer my body to God was my “logikos” - logical or rational - act of worship. But it didn't feel rational. I had offered my body. And had come home broken. I thought God had promised to “satisfy [my] needs in a sun-scorched land and [to] strengthen [my] frame” (Isaiah 58:11). It looked like God's promises had failed. Why, in the face of apparently broken promises, why, when it seemed I had nothing left to give, was it rational to offer myself again to God?

I set aside a weekend to pray through the two verses, but discovered that before I could again offer my body as a living sacrifice, I had to spend time being reminded of the qualifications of the one to whom I was to give myself. These verses do not come out of the blue. They follow 11 chapters describing God's incredible plan, his mercy, his love, his wisdom. God does not expect us to randomly give ourselves to someone else - even to Himself. He tells us enough about Himself to show us that the only rational thing to do is to give ourselves fully to Him. Every bit of his character not only demands that response but facilitates it.

Maybe, like me, you long to have God at the center of your life, but struggle to overcome the fear that tugs at your heart and drags you away from surrender. What will it cost? Maybe you feel you have too much to lose. Or nothing to give.

*May I invite you to join me on a journey deeper into the heart of God?*

I've written the study to be done with a group over a six-week period. I think we gain most when we learn together. (You can learn more about the various group options in the Leaders' Guide available at [hearingthehearbeat.com](http://hearingthehearbeat.com).) But you're also welcome to dig in by yourself. And if a particular passage grips you, feel free to camp there as long as you want before moving on. I spent many months soaking in these passages. *This is a place for you to meet with God. There are no rules. Just show up with your questions (you might want to journal them) and expect to be met by the One who longs to be known.*

## Week 1

# Mercifully Wise

*“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgements; and his paths beyond tracing out!”  
Romans 11:33*

### Where we’re going

Day 1 – **Overview** – Romans 11:33-12:2  
Day 2 – **Deep Wisdom** – Job 38  
Day 3 – **Intimate Wisdom** – Psalm 139  
Day 4 – **Rich Wisdom** – Isaiah 55  
Day 5 – **Right-side-up Wisdom** – 1 Corinthians 1:18-31  
Group study – **Sovereign Wisdom** – Romans 9  
Review

### Day 1 – Overview

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1. Read Romans 12:1. How does it make you feel to be urged to present your body as a living sacrifice to God?
2. Read Romans 11:33 – 12:2. What is your initial reaction to this passage? (Panic? Praise? Confusion?)

Many of the phrases in Romans 11:33-36 are direct quotes from the Old Testament. From the beginning of Scripture, these truths about God have been celebrated: his incomprehensible wisdom, his holy “otherness,” his lavish generosity, his centrality in the universe. Each of these aspects of God’s character is revealed more fully in the incredible plan of the Gospel - a plan which no man ever could have dreamed up. As Paul writes

about this amazing truth, these verses burst forth - an uncontainable outpouring of praise in response to who God is and what he has done.

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgements, and his paths beyond tracing out!  
Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?  
Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?  
For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

And then, in light of those truths, Paul continues:

*Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy,  
to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -  
this is your spiritual act of worship.  
Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.  
Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -  
his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

3. What do you learn about God from Romans 11:33?

4. In light of your current life situation, what does Romans 11:33 make you want to pray?

## **Day 2 – Deep Wisdom**

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1. Read Romans 11:33. How does the word “depth” make you feel? Are you facing any situations in your life that make you feel like you’re “in over your head”?

Job 11:7-9 *Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens - what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave - what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea."*

Although these verses were spoken by one of Job's friends, who turned out to have a lot of wrong ideas, God himself confirms the truth of these particular verses, and in fact, elaborates on them, giving multiple examples of His wisdom and power in Job 38-41.

Read Job 38:1-21 (or the whole chapter, if you want!)

2. What do you learn here about the scope of God's wisdom and knowledge?

3. How might the knowledge of God's deep wisdom help you in situations where you feel "in over your head"?

4. Read Romans 11:33 several times aloud, slowly, and begin to memorize it.

*"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" The depths - the places of confusion and despair and darkness and aloneness. But you, Almighty God, are there. There is no place so deep that it exceeds the depth of your wisdom or of your love. "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens - what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave - what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea." Your provision is perfect. Your knowledge is intimate and detailed, your creating and sustaining power complete. You are the one who, in perfect wisdom and creativity, allots different strengths and weaknesses to different ones of your creations "Will the one who contends with the*

*Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" . . . "I am unworthy - how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth."  
(Psalm 139:7-12; Romans 8:28; 38-39; Ephesians 3:18-19; Job 11:7-9; 38:39-41; 39:1-2; 38:4-11, 31-33; 39:13-18; 40:4)*

### **Day 3 – Intimate Wisdom**

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Read Psalm 139

1. What do you learn here about God's knowledge of us and his interaction with us?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Which aspect of God's knowledge of you is the most comforting to you today? Most frightening?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What sort of conversation would you like to have with God about this?

### **Day 4 – Rich Wisdom**

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1. Many of us feel God's commands as oppressive. "Be holy" translates to "don't do anything fun." "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices" translates to "Oh great. This is gonna kill me!" Which of God's commands runs through your head most often? What belief about God do you think underlies your choice of God's "favorite" command?

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:8-9*

Isaiah 55:8 begins with the word “for,” reminding us to look for the preceding truth upon which those verses are built. Read Isaiah 55.

2. What do you learn from Isaiah 55 about the character and passions of God? (You might find it helpful to notice what command or invitation words (eg. “come,” “listen”) are repeated most frequently.)

3. What is the most encouraging or exciting piece of good news you just read?

*“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God.” “Riches” seems to imply not only a large amount of wisdom, but lavishly positive outcomes from the wisdom. This wisdom and the results of its working are highly desirable. I can be certain, Abba, that because you are at work, you in your wisdom directing all that happens to me, the ultimate outcome will be desirable - for my good and your glory. But I wonder, Abba, do I really believe in the depth of the riches of your wisdom and knowledge? Do I believe enough in the riches of your wisdom to celebrate each day regardless of what it holds, confident that the situation you have given me for today is the perfect place for the next step of the growth of Jesus’ character in me, the best place to get to know you more? Do I believe that You really want the best for me, want to give yourself to me, want me to be truly satisfied and filled and delighted in You? Teach me to live in the truth that your wisdom is rich and beautiful even when I can’t understand how! In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

*(Romans 11:33; 8:28-29)*

## Day 5 – Right-side-up Wisdom

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The Old Testament is full of examples of God’s wisdom and knowledge. He has created and sustains everything perfectly. He knows us intimately. His ways are far above ours, and He acts in great wisdom and kindness even when we do not understand. But the wisdom of God, and the extent to which God’s wisdom is superior to ours, is revealed even more fully in the Gospel.

One definition of “wisdom” is “insight into the true nature of things.”<sup>12</sup> Here we glimpse the relation between the “wisdom” of Romans 11:33 and the “mercy” of Romans 12:1. If wisdom is insight into the true nature of things, mercy gives the ability to truly see. True wisdom – God’s wisdom – truly perceives reality. God’s mercy invites us into that reality. And the invitation comes in a surprising way, a way that makes clear the nature of the reality into which we are invited.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

1. What do you learn from this passage about the nature of the reality into which we are invited?

2. In “The Message,” Peterson paraphrases 1 Corinthians 1:19 this way: *“I’ll turn conventional wisdom on its head.”* Why did God do things in a way that showed how up-side-down the world’s do-it-yourself wisdom is?

3. *“Isn’t it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these ‘nobodies’ to expose the hollow pretensions of the ‘somebodies’?”* (1 Corinthians 1:27 The Message) What emotion does this statement raise in you?

4. In light of this, how would you like to pray?

## **Week 1 Group Study – Sovereign Wisdom**

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*“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgements; and his paths beyond tracing out!”  
Romans 11:33*

1. As we have studied God’s wisdom this week, what has most stood out to you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. In your current life situation, where do you experience the greatest tension between what you see and feel and what we have been reading about God’s wisdom?

This week we’ve seen that God’s wisdom is deep enough for whatever situation we find ourselves in. It’s rich - not merely plentiful but also desirable. Today we’re going to look at Romans 9, a wonderful example of God’s wisdom, and see how His wisdom is so much higher than ours.

Read Isaiah 49:13-15.

### **The Key Question:**

Isaiah 49:13-15 provides a simple framework that is mirrored in Romans 9. God’s character is beautifully declared: “The LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones” (v. 13). But the Israelites look around at the condition of their lives and country, compare it to their hopes, and state their feelings as fact, “The LORD has forsaken me, the LORD has forgotten me” (v. 14). God responds, “No I haven’t. It is an absolutely ingrained part of my character not to forsake or forget you.” In his words, “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me” (v. 15). God says, “Look at the deepest human love you can think of. Even if that love fails, mine won’t.”

The framework that we see here is mirrored in Romans 9. God has declared His promises. Israel looks at her circumstances and asks whether God really is keeping His

promises. And God's promise-keeping character is proven true.

This is the key question: ***“Can God be trusted to keep his promises?”*** It's a question that was relevant to the people of Isaiah's day around 700 BC. It was relevant to the people of Paul's day 700 or 800 years later. And it's the key question for us today, too.

### **Not a Theoretical Question. . .**

In Romans 9, this question, *“Can God be trusted”* is not theoretical. It has arisen in the context of a very practical and specific situation. (That's when our questions arise too, isn't it? When we lose a job or health or a loved one, or when we act in obedience to God and find ourselves struggling with a difficult situation, that's when the question becomes really practical for us. *Can God be trusted?*)

The situation in Romans 9 is taking place within the church. The Jews have long delighted in being God's chosen people. But as more and more Gentiles have come into the church and Jewish involvement has decreased, the question has arisen. Has God abandoned His chosen people? Has He been unfaithful to his promise to them? And if God has rejected His “chosen people” in favor of the Gentiles, what about His other promises? Can He be trusted?

**Read Romans 9** together, one section at a time.

In verses 1-5, Paul is setting up the argument, listing “proofs” of Israel's “chosenness.”

In verse 6, Paul begins his response to the implied question, “Has God forsaken the Jews?” “Can He be trusted to keep his promises?”

3. What key point does Paul make in verse 6?

4. God's wisdom is revealed in three examples. What are the examples and what did God reveal about himself through them?

Verses 6-9:

Verses 10-13:

Verses 17-18:

5. What basic principle is Paul getting at in v. 20-21?

Paul has shown that from the beginning of the history of the people of Israel, God has worked with his people in a way that demonstrated his character - his power, his sovereign right to choose people, and his mercy. Now he poses two more key questions: 1) "Who are you, O man, who answers back to God?" (vv. 20-21) This question reorients us to the reality of who is at the center of the universe. 2) Isn't God right to act in a way that reveals His character? (vv. 22-23)

6. With this second question, Paul brings us back to the current group of people that he is addressing and the current problem at hand. Remind yourself what that current problem was and what the key question is.

Verses 30-33 restate and clarify how and why God has chosen to act among His people as He has. Both Jews and Gentiles are able to be part of God's chosen people, but only if they acknowledge that they have not earned the right to be God's chosen people but have become part of his chosen people by His choice and power alone.

7. Verse 33 is a quote from Isaiah 28:16 and 49:23. "Those who hope in me will not be disappointed." This is a recurrent theme in these chapters of Romans - (9:33, 10:11, 11:29) What do you think it means to "hope in him?" How do we do that?

8. Why do you think those who hope in him not be disappointed? (Hint: see Romans 11:29)

9. Where in your life are you afraid that God will disappoint you? How does Romans 9 speak into those fears?

In light of what we have shared, let's pray for each other.

### ***For Further Exploration***

Leon Morris, "The Theme of Romans," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970), 249–263. This article provides a beautiful overview of the "big picture" of Romans, emphasizing God's character. While Morris refers to Greek words, the sense of the article can be grasped without a knowledge of Greek. Available for free download at [www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/romans\\_morris.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/romans_morris.pdf).

## **Week 1 Review**

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1. What has surprised or excited you most about what you have learned this week?

2. What questions has this week's study raised for you?

3. *God promises to give us His wisdom, but the wisdom that He gives is sometimes more about learning to trust Him with the questions than about receiving specific answers.* What response does this statement awaken in you?

4. Is there an image from one of this week's passages which might help you trust God's wisdom when He doesn't give answers?

5. How might God be inviting you to respond to this week's study?

### **Where We've Been**

Take a moment to turn to the back of the book and record in the chart the most significant things you've learned about God and about yourself this week. If you record them while they're fresh, it will be easier for you to look back and remember what God has been teaching you

## Week 2

# Wholly Other

*“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”  
Romans 11:34*

### Where we’re going

Day 1 – **A Glimpse of “Otherness”** – Isaiah 40  
Day 2 – **What it means to be God** – Isaiah 6:1-8  
Day 3 – **Perfect Goodness** – Isaiah 6:1-8  
Day 4 – **Perfect Goodness in Action** – Numbers 14  
Day 5 – **Given Christ’s Mind** – 1 Corinthians 2:6-16  
Group study – **Sovereign Wisdom** – Romans 9  
Review

### Day 1 – A Glimpse of “Otherness”

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Romans 11:34 is a direct quote from Isaiah 40, a passage which makes many comparisons between God and people. Read Isaiah 40.

1. What do you learn from Isaiah 40 about the character and passions of God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Which of these characteristics do you find most appealing? Surprising? Overwhelming?

3. How might this kind of God want to be with you in your current situation?

4. Is there an image or a phrase from this chapter that you'd like to take into your day with you?

## **Day 2 – What it means to be God**

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God is set apart from humans – and from all other 'gods' – by His holiness (Exodus 15:11; Hosea 11:9; Numbers 23:19). At its root, holiness refers to the distinctness of God from all other things.

1. What emotion do you feel, or what posture do you want to adopt, when you think about God's holiness?

Read Isaiah 6:1-8

In the Hebrew language in which the Old Testament was written, repetition was used to express an extreme quality or quantity (eg. "gold gold" in 2 Kings 25:15 means "pure gold," and "peace peace" in Isaiah 26:3 means "complete peace.") But only once in the Old Testament – here in Isaiah 6:3 - is a word repeated three times as if to say that "the divine holiness is so far beyond anything the human mind can grasp that a "super-superlative" needs to be invented to express it and, furthermore, that this transcendent holiness is the total truth about God."<sup>1</sup> In other words, God's holiness is a sort of "summary statement" of what it means to be God, not merely one of his many characteristics.

2. What details in the passage identify ways in which God is holy – that is, different from all other things?

*“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the earth is full of his glory.”* (Isaiah 6:3) God’s glory is the visible manifestation of his holiness. The holy God fills the earth with his presence. *God wants to be known.*

3. What does it mean to you that this God who is completely beyond anything our minds can grasp wants to be known?

### **Day 3 – Perfect Goodness**

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As we saw yesterday, God’s holiness refers to His “God-ness,” His set-apartness or distinctness from all other things. But God is distinctive not just by virtue of a single characteristic, but by virtue of his perfect goodness in every area. *God’s holiness is his perfect goodness by another name*, perfect goodness that includes perfect purity, perfect truth, and perfect love.

Reread Isaiah 6:1-8

1. Isaiah’s instinct was to assume that God’s holiness would be the end of him. But what happened as soon as Isaiah cried out his awareness of his sin? (v. 6-7)

Isaiah learned that God’s holiness creates both distance and closeness. On the one hand, God’s perfect goodness sets Him apart from us because we are not perfectly good. On the other hand, God’s perfect goodness, which includes perfect love, reaches out to us and creates a way to bring us into his perfect goodness.

Far from being something to dread, God's holiness (his perfect goodness) is the reason we can trust him. As C.S. Lewis wrote of the great lion Aslan in "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe," "Of course he isn't safe. But he's good..."

3. Iain Provan notes, "The holiness of God occasionally breaks out with great destructive power, but more characteristically God's holiness is associated with salvation than judgment."<sup>2</sup> What might it mean for you to discover that this is true?

### ***For Further Exploration***

For the psalmists, God's holiness was good news because they knew God's perfect goodness was *for* them, not *against* them. Pray through a different psalm each day for a month. How did this understanding of God's holiness free the psalmists to pray?

## **Day 4 – Perfect goodness in action**

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Numbers 14 gives a striking example of God's holiness in action. We break into the middle of a decades-long story. In his perfect goodness, God has been setting his people free from the dictator who was oppressing them. He has been leading them by his personal, visible presence. He has provided everything they have needed. After forty years of showing them his perfect goodness in one way after another, now he is in the process of trying to give them a beautiful home for their very own. But most of them are holding back, unwilling to trust that God really is good.

Read Numbers 14

1. What do you see here of the heart of God for his people?

2. What words or phrases are used to show the posture toward God of those who were destroyed? (Don't miss that their attitude continues to the end of the chapter (v.44) even after they acknowledge that they have sinned (v.40). Did they ever really love or trust God?)

3. In this story, how is God's perfect goodness experienced by those who trust Him? How is it experienced by those who refuse to be drawn into relationship with Him?

4. In what area of your life do you identify most with the Israelites' struggle to trust that God is good? What would it be like for you to imagine letting God hold that part of your life – your job, your children, your financial security - even for five minutes?

## Day 5 – Given Christ's Mind

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*"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?" (Romans 11:34)*

In its original location in Isaiah 40:13, and when Paul quotes it in Romans 11:34, this verse highlights the "otherness" of God. He is so big and beautiful and different than we are as to be incomprehensible to our small minds. This verse is quoted again in 1 Corinthians 2:16. The "otherness" of God – an "otherness" which makes us unable to understand him or his wisdom - is clearly portrayed in this passage (see v. 7-9, 11, 14). But there's an incredible twist.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.

1. Knowing how God is presented as completely "other" than us in Isaiah 40 and Romans 11:34, what surprises you about the context in which this verse is quoted in 1 Corinthians 2? (see v. 10,12, 15-16)

God in his holiness (his ‘otherness’ or ‘distinctness’ which is his perfect goodness) desires to draw us all the way into His own perfect goodness. He wants us to understand what was previously impossible for us to understand: the nature and extent of His perfect goodness overflowing in extravagant blessing to us (v. 9,12).

2. In light of God’s desire to be known, what do you think God has “freely given us” (1 Corinthians 2:12)?

3. What questions does this raise for you? What sort of conversation would you like to have with God about this?

4. What posture does this make you want to adopt?

*Wow, Father! You who are beyond comprehension, totally “other,” have opened Yourself to me! You have freely given me Your Spirit, Your very Self, the only One who knows Your thoughts. In so doing, You have given me Yourself without limit. You do not pick and choose, occasionally dispensing a bit of information that You feel like sharing. You invite me to come right in, right into the middle of the relationship You have with Your Son. All that You shared with Him He shares with his friends, and Your Spirit continues to reveal You to me. All that You are is in Jesus. And that fullness, that completeness, that “everything” is given to me in him too. Truly **this** is eternal life – knowing you, accepting your invitation to be drawn further and further into the reality of who you are. How incredible! Thank you! Amen.*

*(John 3:34; 15:5; 16:12-15; Colossians 2:9-10; John 17:3)*

## Week 2 Group study – Really Living

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1. Can you think of a choice you made that affected your ability to think clearly about future decisions?

2. Read Romans 1:18-32. In this passage, Paul provides a shocking picture of people. What is your initial response to this description of the human race?

This passage is not so much about any particular sins as it is about the process by which we as the human race came to be in this condition. More specifically, it's about God's perfect goodness which includes his desire to be known (v. 19-20), and his opposition to all that keeps us from living in His love – an opposition which, when we insist on our own way, results in his wrath. We must not confuse God's wrath with human anger which is so often selfish. As Leon Morris notes, God's wrath "denotes not so much a sudden flaring up of passion which is soon over, as a strong and settled opposition to all that is evil arising out of God's very nature."<sup>3</sup> It is "a burning zeal for the right coupled with a perfect hatred for everything that is evil" arising from a love that is jealous for the good of the loved one.<sup>4</sup> God's wrath is inseparable from his love. As Darrell Johnson says, "The nature of God's wrath is letting us have our own way so that we will no longer want our own way."<sup>5</sup>

3. What does Paul say was the initial step in decline into the kinds of attitudes and behaviour described?

(v. 21)

4. In verses 18-32, what else do you learn about how people in their "wisdom" responded to the wisdom of God?

(v. 18)

(v. 21)

(v. 21)



“[Adam] rebelled against his dependence on God. . . . In consequence he became not more like God, but less than the man he was. . . .”<sup>6</sup> But there is hope.

8. In Romans 1:16-17, what is the hope of which Paul speaks?

How does this good news respond to the need that we have seen in verses 18-32?

9. Why is faith necessary to enter back into right relationship with God?

10. How would you summarize in one sentence the key point of Romans 1:18-32?

11. Read Deut 30:19. In what way(s) are you being called to choose life today?

12. In light of this, how can we pray for you today?

***For Further Exploration***

Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965). The sections on the wrath of God in the Old Testament and the New Testament are particularly helpful for understanding how God’s wrath and his love are not in opposition to one another.

## Week 2 Review

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*“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?” (Romans 11:34)*

1. From this week’s study, what would you most like to share? With whom?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What is one area you think you better understand God’s heart and mind after this week? What is one area that still completely confuses you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. After studying these passages, how do you understand God’s holiness? What difference does it make for you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How might God be inviting you to respond to this week’s study? What next step would you like to take?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How can we pray for you?

### **Where We’ve Been**

Turn to the back of the book and complete the table for this week

## Week 3

### Extravagant Giver

*“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?”  
Romans 11:35*

#### Where we’re going

Day 1 – **Nothing Owed** – Romans 11:33-12:2 & Job 41:11  
Day 2 – **Nothing Needed** – Psalm 50  
Day 3 – **Good Gifts** – Matthew 7:7-11 & James 1:17  
Day 4 – **Freely Given** – Ephesians 1:1-14  
Day 5 – **Incomparable Treasure** – Matthew 13:44,45  
Group Study – **Lavish Lover** – Romans 8:28-39  
Review

#### Day 1 – Nothing Owed

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1. Read Romans 11:33-12:2 Do you see a clue in Romans 11:36 about why Romans 11:35 is true?

2. In Job 41:11, God asks *“Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me.”* How does God’s question help you understand Romans 11:35?

Everything given to God comes from God in the first place. *“For from him. . . are all things.”* (Romans 11:36) That is why we can never give anything to God that would put him in our debt or require him to give back to us. As Volf says in *“Free of Charge,”* *“To give to God is to take from God’s right hand and to put that very thing back into God’s left hand.”*<sup>1</sup> God is *always* the primary giver. Even our love is a response to his giving himself to us first. *“We love because he first loved us.”* (1 John 4:19) And because God is always the first giver, he is never indebted to us.

3. In what area of your life are you most tempted to feel like you have accomplished or earned something yourself for which you deserve happiness or success or some other reward?

4. How does it feel to think that God doesn't owe you anything? What kind of conversation would you like to have with God about this?

## **Day 2 – Nothing Needed**

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Read Psalm 50.

1. What do you learn here about the character and passions of the Mighty God?

2. In one sentence, summarize the main point of v 7-13.

3. What things *does* God want from us? (vv. 14-15)

4. What difference might it make in your life to believe that God doesn't need anything from you? What stands in the way of you believing it?

## Day 3 – Good Gifts

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*“Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.”* (1 Chronicles 16:8-10)

1. Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. *Why?* There are *many* reasons. Matthew 7:7-11 gives us two:

First, because of the promise, seek and you \_\_\_\_\_ . (Matthew 7:7-8)

Second, because of the promise that what we find will be \_ \_ \_ . (Matthew 7:9-11)

Which do you find harder to believe – that when you seek God you will find him, or that what you find in him will be always and only good?

Our God is a God who wants to be found! Consider these lines spoken by God to the Israelites who had been exiled in Babylon as a result of disobedience: *“ ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and will bring you back from captivity. . .’”* (Jeremiah 29:10-14)

And when we find him, we discover that everything within him is good. *“Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!”* (Psalm 32:8 NLT) Not only is everything within him good, all that he does is good. *“I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.”* (Deuteronomy 32:3-4) And he is the perfect giver. Everything that he does and gives is good (Luke 11:11-13 and Deuteronomy 32:4). And, though we may be slow to recognize it, every good thing that we receive has come from him. *“Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”* (James 1:16-17)

2. Read back through the verses in the previous two paragraphs and underline or list everything you learn about God’s character.

3. When has it been hardest for you to believe that God wants to be found? That he is good? Can you glimpse any ways, perhaps even in those situations, that God has pursued you with his love?

4. What hopes or longings do these promises awaken in you?

## Day 4 – Freely Given

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*“Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”*  
(James 1:16-17)

We have nothing to give until we receive. This is part of why so many of Jesus’ commands are invitations to receive: *“come. . . take. . . eat . . . be healed.”* (Matthew 11:28; Matthew 26:26; Mark 1:41) Only after we allow ourselves to be filled by Christ, enter his rest, receive his life and refreshment and restoration, do we hear the command, *“Freely you have received, freely give.”* (Matthew 10:8) And this coming closer and being filled is an ongoing invitation: *“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”* (Mark 6:31)

1. Read Ephesians 1:1-14. List everything you find here that God does for us or gives us.

2. From the same passage, list everything we have to do first in order to receive those blessings from God. (If you need a hint, look also at Ephesians 2:1-10, especially v8-9)

3. In what areas do you find it hardest to receive from God? Can you see why?

4. What might it mean for you to be able to receive freely from God?

## **Day 5 – Incomparable Treasure**

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Read Matthew 13:44-46

1. In these stories, what was the attitude of the two men to selling their possessions? Why?

2. The repeated phrase at the beginning of v 44 and 45 tells us what Jesus is equating to the great treasure and the valuable pearl. Why do you think a kingdom – a place of rule of a king – would be such good news that you would want to sell everything you had in exchange for it?

David Livingstone, longtime missionary to Africa, commented on the notion of sacrificing for God:

“For my own part, I have never ceased to rejoice that God has appointed me to such an office. People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. . . . Away with . . . such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in and for us. *I never made a sacrifice.*”<sup>2</sup>

Underlying his response is an understanding of God’s generosity. Even when I think I am giving something up for him, it is nothing in comparison to what He has given, and will forever continue to give, to me. When God asks me to give something up, it is not because He needs it, but because He wants to exchange that to which I am clinging for something much better – Himself.

3. What do you most fear that God will ask you to give up? Can you imagine anything you could want enough to be willing to give up that most precious possession to gain it?

4. What kind of conversation would you like to have with God about this?

## **Week 3 Group study – Lavish Lover**

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1. “God is an extravagant giver.” How does your heart respond to that statement?

Read Romans 8:28-39

2. What questions does this passage raise for you?

3. What do you learn from this passage about the passions of God?

4. If you only had this one passage of Scripture, what would you be able to deduce about God’s commitment to you?

5. What is your initial response to Romans 8:28?

6. If this passage is read in a superficial way, it could be interpreted to mean that God will make everything easy for us and give us everything we want. But is this passage actually telling us that God is a giant Santa Claus who doles out everything we ask for? Why or why not?

7. This passage is full of ways that God gives to us. But the central thing that God gives us is *himself*. In what ways does God give us himself?

8. Verse 31 contains the question, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” What evidence have you found in Romans 8:28-39 that God is, indeed *for* us?

9. What emotions does the thought that God is for you raise within you? How would you like to respond?

***For Further Exploration:***

- <http://hearingtheheartbeat.com/2011/02/10/how-he-really-loves/>
- Darrell Johnson, “All Things?” This very helpful exposition of Romans 8:28 is available for audio download for \$3 at <http://www.regentaudio.com/RGDL3057S>

## Week 3 Review

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1. “Many men and women believe that God is almighty and may do everything, and that he is all wisdom and can do everything, but that he is all love and wishes to do everything, that is where they fail.”<sup>3</sup> Do you find this true in your own life? Why do you think it is so?

2. What questions arise for you from this week’s study?

3. Imagine yourself alone with God. What posture do you think God has toward you? What is your own posture toward him?

4. What bit of good news do you most want to take away with you from this week’s study?

5. What might be God’s invitation to you at the end of this week? In light of that, how can we pray for you?

### **Where We’ve Been**

Complete this week’s line in the “Where We’ve Been” chart at the back of your booklet.

## Week 4

### Center of the Universe

*“For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen.”  
Romans 11:36*

#### Where we’re going

Day 1 – **The Unknown God** – Acts 17:22-34

Day 2 – **From Him** – 1 Chronicles 29:10-20

Day 3 – **Through Him** – Colossians 1:9-20

Day 4 – **To Him** – Romans 14:1-18

Day 5 – **To Him Be the Glory** – Revelation 5

Group Study – **The Perfect Center** – Romans 11:33-12:2

Review

#### Day 1 – The Unknown God

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In Acts 17:22-31, Paul speaks to a group of people who have never heard anything about the true God.

Read Acts 17:22-34

1. Which aspects of the character and passions of God (as shown through God’s actions) does Paul think are essential for people to know before asking them to respond to Him?

*“For from him and through him and to him are all things. . .” (Romans 11:36)*

We can think of this verse according to the following framework:

*From him:* God created all things. He is always the Giver.

*Through him:* God upholds, sustains, and is purposefully involved in all things, including enabling our free response to Him.

*To him*: God is moving all of history in the direction he intends – into intimate relationship with Himself and worship of Him. (Isaiah 49:5-7; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 5:9-14)

2. What evidence do you see of these three ‘movements’ (from, through, to God) in Paul’s sermon in Acts 17? (i.e. What has come from God? What exists through his sustaining power? How is He acting to move people toward Himself?)

3. Which word or phrase that Paul used to describe the character of God means the most to you today? Why?

## **Day 2 – From Him**

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David and all the leaders of the people have just given gifts to build the temple. They have given generously (over 300 *tons* of gold, and that’s not counting the silver, gems, and other gifts!) Now David prays.

Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-20

1. What did the leaders understand about God that enabled them to give so freely?

2. How did their perspective that all had come *from* God help them freely give back *to* God?

In knowing that everything had come from God, they knew much more than that they owed everything to God. They knew His character. They understood that God was a generous God, a God who delights to bless. They did not give out of a sense of obligation. Instead, because they knew that God had the resources (v. 11), the power (v. 12) and, based on his past behaviour, the desire (v. 14-16) to care for them, they were free to give not just their wealth but themselves gladly and whole-heartedly to this God whom they loved and trusted (v. 5, 9).

God doesn't always flood us with tons of gold. But perhaps this story helps us glimpse the secret to which Paul referred when he said, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:12-13). Contentment comes through knowing God and trusting His character. God is always the extravagant giver, and when he holds back something we think we would like, he does so only to give us more of Himself.

3. What person, possession or situation do you most fear trusting God with? Is there a picture that comes to mind when you consider the possibility of trusting Him with it?

4. Ask God to show you whether your picture is true to His character, or how He would like to be with you in it.

## Day 3 – Through Him

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Read Colossians 1:9-23

Two days ago, we looked at Paul's sermon in Acts 17 through the lens of Romans 11:36. This verse provides a great framework to use when we're reading any passage of Scripture, so let's try it again here.

1. *"For from him and through him and to him are all things. . ."* (Romans 11:36) What evidence do you see of these three 'movements' in Colossians 1:9-23? (i.e. What has come from God? What exists through his sustaining power? How is He acting to move people toward Himself?)

2. In verse 9, Paul says he hasn't stopped praying for God to fill the Colossians with the knowledge of His will. Based solely on what you learn from this passage, how would you describe what God's will is?

3. What response does this stir in you?

## Day 4 – To Him

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Read Romans 14:1-18

Paul is addressing a dispute in the church about eating meat sacrificed to idols and keeping the Sabbath as a special day. While the surface issues with which we struggle may be different, the deeper point is the same.

1. How would you summarize Paul's central argument? (The repeated phrase in vv. 6-8 might help you.)

There is a lot of good news in this passage for those of us wanting to please God! Take verse 4 for example. *"Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand."* Did you hear the good news? We are responsible to God alone – not to the hundreds of people who would like to run our lives. God alone makes the call whether our service is satisfactory or unsatisfactory. And he will uphold us in such a way as to honor our desire to please him.

(For those who like this sort of tidbit, there's a lovely clue here in the Greek. In the clause, "and he will stand. . ." the verb is in the passive. It might still be translated with the active force, "and he will stand," but it can also be translated "and he will be upheld." In practice, the reality combines both: we stand because we're upheld.)

There is room in God's love for struggle, for different ways of understanding, for different degrees of faith and maturity. Wherever we're at in the process, we share the same single call: to live in love (from God – v. 3; for God – v. 6-8; and for others – v. 15)

2. How might the news of this passage – that it's less about the details of what we do than who we're doing it for – lift the burden of always wondering whether you've got it right?

3. Reread vv 3-4. In what specific area of your life are you being invited to receive the love and acceptance God offers?

4. Where are you being asked to offer love instead of judgment to someone who thinks differently than you?

## **Day 5 – To Him be the Glory**

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Using a number of different pictures, the last book of the Bible vividly portrays Jesus at the center of the universe. In Revelation 5, Jesus is portrayed as a Lamb standing in the center of the throne, surrounded by worshippers.

Read Revelation 5

1. What reasons does John give that the Lamb is worthy to receive glory? (v. 9-10)

2. J.I. Packer says that love is “the resolve to make the loved party great.”<sup>1</sup> In what ways is

God's perfect love revealed in verses 9 and 10? (You can peek at 3:21 if you want another clue for one of the ways.)

The Trinity is and will always be at the center of the universe (Revelation 5:6; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Philippians 2:9-11). But, incredibly, God doesn't want to reign there alone. We often think of how far down God reached to make us His own. We less often think to what incredible height His love raises us: not just into His presence (though that is miracle enough!) but right up onto His throne (Revelation 3:21; 5:10; Ephesians 1:19-23 with 2:6-7; Hebrews 2:5-11).

3. What difference does this make in the way you relate to God? In the way you see yourself?

4. How might this understanding affect your life (choices, attitudes, actions) today?

*Oh, great God, I don't know what to do with this. I feel so. . . little. And yet so. . . loved. So honored. How? How can this be? And how do I live in this place? Oh, teach me!*

***For further exploration***

<http://hearingtheheartbeat.com/2011/11/17/female-sons-and-second-firstborns-when-you-want-the-really-great-news/>

## Week 4 Group Study – The Perfect Center

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Today we'll go on a treasure hunt within Romans 11:33-12:2. God has "hidden" a key truth in a beautiful way in the structure of this passage.

### 1. What is a Chiasm?

In western thinking and writing, we are used to everything building toward a climax at the end. When we outline an essay, we use ascending Roman numerals:

I.

II.

III.

We are accustomed to thinking linearly.

But we seldom stop to ask whether we are doing justice to a text by reading linearly something that was written in a different language and culture.

In the ancient world, the main point was not at the *end*, but in the *center* of the thought. Thoughts on each side were paired, mirror image, so that the first point resembled the last, the second point the second to last, etc.

A.

B.

C. (main point)

OR

B'

A'.

A.

B.

C.

C'.

B'.

A'.

In something written in a chiasmic structure, the main point of the thought is in the center, and the two ends comment on the core in some way to help bring out the main point. This is particularly so when the middle point is unpaired (ie. Just "C" as in the left example, vs. "C" and "C'" as in the right example.) Chiasms were used to help make the point clear, and also as a memory aid.

"Chiasm" is named for Greek letter Chi (X) because when you diagram a portion of text

that is written chiasmically, it resembles the left half of the letter Chi or X.

Here are a couple of simple chiasms, so you can see how this works:

Example 1.

"And so, my fellow Americans,  
ask not what your country can do for you;  
ask what you can do for your country." (John F Kennedy)

**A. Your country**

**B. you**

**B'. you**

**A'. your country**

As D. R. Mardy notes, "The power of this now-immortal line derives not only from *what* JFK was saying, but *how* he phrased it. When great *content* is combined with the intriguing *structure* of chiasmus, the result can be unforgettable."<sup>2</sup>

Example 2.

"The Sabbath was made for man  
And not man for the Sabbath." Mark 2:27

**A. Sabbath**

**B. Made**

**C. Man**

**C'. Man**

**B'. Made (implied)**

**A. Sabbath**

Chiasms occur in single verses (as in the example above), as well as in longer stretches of verses and even whole books.

The passage we have been studying contains a chiasm. It is impossible to know for sure whether Paul had this chiasm in mind or not when he wrote this passage. (Are we always aware that we are thinking linearly, or is it so ingrained in us by practice and experience

that we just do it?) But whether or not Paul consciously intended the chiasmic structure of this passage, looking at the passage through this lens can help us see how the passage fits together, and understand important connections that we might otherwise miss.

Look at the following diagram.

### **Romans 11:33-12:2 Chiasm**

**A – depth of riches 11:33**

**B – can't know his ways (“unsearchable/beyond tracing out”) 11:33**

**C – mind 11:34**

**D – giving to God 11:35**

**E – all things from, through, to him.  
To him be the glory forever! 11:36**

**D' – giving to God 12:1**

**C' – mind 12:2a**

**B' – can know his ways (“test and approve”) 12:2b**

**A' – good, pleasing, perfect 12:2b**

2. What (or who) is the center?

Based on this, what do you think is the main point of the Romans 11:33-12:2 passage?

3. Remember I said that the ends comment on the core in some way. What are the thoughts at the two ends? How do the ends further explain the central thought?

4. How do the two “mind” clauses (D and D') relate to the central clause? (I'll give you a break with this one) We started our study in Rom 11:33 seeing that our human minds cannot begin to comprehend God's wisdom. We can't understand God's mind/thoughts/

judgement/paths until our minds are transformed by receiving his mind. When we correctly see God to be at the center, it turns right-side-up all of our up-side-down understanding and lets us begin to understand his ways. Only then can we see that his wisdom, which to our human minds is incomprehensible and foolish, is rich and beautiful and perfect. Only then – when we begin to see God as the center that he is – are we enabled to give ourselves to him. When we see God as the center that he is, we also see that if we persist in trying to ignore him and running our own life, we are excluding ourselves from the center of life, from Reality, from all that can make sense of the universe.

5. What good news do you see in the central clause: “From him and through him and to him are all things”?

6. In your life or the lives of those around you, where have you seen evidence that life works better when God is at the center?

7. Where have you seen examples of God transforming your thinking and allowing you to see things from his perspective?

8. In what areas of your life have you seen progress in God becoming increasingly at the center? Where is he not at the center but you would like him to be at the center?

Pray together.

## **Week 4 Review**

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1. In the passages we have studied this week, in what different ways have we seen everything coming from God? Being upheld and sustained by Him? Moving toward Him?
2. Can you think of other Bible stories or verses that show how all is from God, through Him, and to Him?
3. How have you experienced these truths in your own life this week? (You may want to ask God to bring to mind other moments in your week where He has been working behind the scenes, giving, upholding, and drawing you toward Himself, even if you have not been aware of Him doing it.)
4. In which area of your life is it most difficult for you to live in the awareness that God is at the center of everything?
5. What might be God's invitation to you? In light of that, how can we pray for you?

### **Where We've Been**

Complete this week's line in the "Where We've Been" chart at the back of your booklet.

## **Extravagance**

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Roadside ditch  
splashed  
with purple irises  
dense woods  
crowned  
with painted leaves  
hidden fields  
blanketed  
with yellow and blue  
wildflowers  
everywhere  
creation replete with  
so much more than  
mere functionality  
glory scattered  
almost wasted  
in its unquenchable overflow  
from its Center  
this is You  
Extravagant Giver  
Lavish Lover  
Enthusiastic  
Celebrant  
of Life and Beauty  
Creator God  
how often do I ask for  
basic sufficiency  
when You want  
to love me with extravagance?

How often do I see  
only utility  
and miss  
celebration  
abundance  
delight?  
Father who dances and sings  
over me  
who lavishes on me  
incomparable riches  
Your own Son  
most precious gift  
and everything else as well  
Oh, how I want to know You  
in Your fullness  
in Your enormity  
as much of You as I can see  
and not be utterly destroyed  
as much as You can pour into  
little me  
The edges of adequacy  
are not enough  
Bring me further into You  
Center of all beauty  
opening my eyes  
stretching my heart  
awakening me  
to Your lavishness  
and enabling me to  
receive and respond  
in extravagance.

## Week 5

# Living Sacrifices

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers [and sisters], in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”*  
Romans 12:1

### Where we’re going

Day 1 – **Rational Worship** – Romans 11:33-12:2  
Day 2 – **In View of God’s Mercy** – Romans 6:1-14  
Day 3 – **Offer Your Bodies** – Romans overview  
Day 4 – **Living Sacrifices I** – Romans 12:1-8  
Day 5 – **Living Sacrifices II** – Mark 8:34-38  
Group study – **Dead and Alive** – Romans 6:1-14  
Review

### Day 1 – Rational Worship

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Read Romans 11:33-12:2 Review your memorization of Romans 11:33-36 and begin memorizing Romans 12:1.

1. As you reread Romans 12:1 and imagine offering yourself to God, what emotions arise for you now?

The Bible is full of stories of all sorts of people responding to God. The ways they respond are many, but the underlying reasons are two: fear and love.

We fear. . . and we run and hide. (There are many ways to do this!)

We fear. . . and our fear takes shape as hate and we spit in the face of the God-man Jesus and kill him to get him out of our lives.

We fear. . . and we fall on our faces in awe. We serve him, but we’re constantly afraid that he’ll be disappointed with us and so we’re always driven to do more.

But the single thing God wants from us is our love – whole-hearted, full-bodied love

which can only occur as a response to God's own love. We can't cure our fear; God does that as we experience His love (1 John 4:18). But we can choose what to do with our fear: run away, or run toward Him; hide, or cry out for Him to help us see His love. God never turns away those who come to Him. (He's been *waiting* to give Himself to us!) And once we receive this gift of God's self, we are no longer slaves to fear (Romans 8:15). That doesn't mean fear disappears. It means fear doesn't have to control us. It means we don't have to wait for fear to be gone before we can offer ourselves, again and again, more and more deeply, to God.

2. The Greek word *logikos* in Romans 12:1 which is translated "spiritual" in the NIV also means "reasonable," "rational," or "carefully thought through."<sup>1</sup> (You can hear echoes of the Greek word *logikos* in our English word *logical*.) From what we have seen in the first four weeks of this study, why do you think it might make sense to offer yourself to God?

3. Which of the characteristics of God mentioned in Romans 11:33-36 is the most comforting to you as you imagine offering yourself to him? Why?

4. Often in spite of plenty of good evidence that God is trustworthy, we still struggle to trust. How does it feel to be in the place of wanting to trust but not being able to do so? What sort of conversation would you like to have with God about this?

***For Further Exploration***

<http://hearingtheheartbeat.com/2011/01/07/when-you-fear-the-cross/>

## Day 2 – In View of God’s Mercy

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1. In Romans 12:1, what three ways does Paul use to direct our attention back to what God has done as the basis for his plea that we offer our bodies to God?

In the original Greek version of Romans 12:1, “sacrifices” is described by three adjectives following right after the verb:

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy,  
to offer your bodies as sacrifices,  
    alive (or living),  
    holy,  
    pleasing (to God).  
This is your rational act of worship.”*

I think Paul is using these three adjectives to sum up the good news of his letter. Often in translation “living” is separated from the other two adjectives and placed before “sacrifices”: “offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.” This helps us catch other implications such as the contrast with the Old Testament sacrifices of animals and the ongoing nature of our offering. Our worship is to be lived in the daily giving of our bodies to God. But hearing the three adjectives together, “alive, holy, and pleasing to God” helps us see the good news hidden here which we might otherwise miss. As we’ll see, these three adjectives, along with “therefore” and “in view of God’s mercy,” point us back to what God has already done as the basis on which we offer ourselves to God. In particular, Paul seems to be building on the truth he has already written in Romans 6.

Read Romans 6:1-14

2. Compare Romans 6:11-14 and Romans 12:1. What similar words or ideas do you find?

We saw in week 2 that God's "holiness" refers to his "God-ness" which, because of His character, is summed up by "perfect goodness."

Similarly, when the word "holiness" is used of us, it refers not primarily to our moral purity but to our "set-apartness," our "belonging-to-God-ness."<sup>2</sup> Although over time, we become increasingly pure because of the character of the one to whom we belong, the primary meaning of "holiness" is more about Whose we are than what we are like.

3. What does Paul say in Romans 6:1-14 about whether we're dead or alive? What does he say about our "belonging-to-God-ness"? (The words "united" and "with him" might be helpful clues here.)

To understand Paul's writing, we also need to understand the idea of "already-not yet." We are free (8:2) and not yet free (7:25), alive (6:13) and yet waiting to be made fully alive (8:11, 13, 23).

In one very real sense, when we offer our bodies as sacrifices to God, we *already are* alive: God's own life is living in us. We *already are* holy: set apart for God, belonging to Him. And as for "pleasing to God," Paul has just spent 11 chapters preaching this good news in detail: we weren't pleasing to God and we never could be on our own, but now, through receiving what Christ has done for us, we are. We need to know this in order to even begin to have the courage to offer ourselves to Him. Otherwise we cower in fear before this holy God who, on our own, we cannot hope to please.

In another sense, we live in the *not yet*. The process continues. As we offer ourselves to God we move more deeply into what is still to come: becoming more alive with His life, growing into that perfect goodness that makes God God, and pleasing Him more and more as we learn to live deeply in union with Him.

4. What questions would you like to ask God about this?

### Day 3 – Offer Your Bodies

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*Therefore, I urge you, brothers [and sisters], in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as sacrifices, alive, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1)*

Romans is most often described as having main themes of righteousness and justification, sin and faith and grace. But God’s character, and particularly His holy love in action, provides the foundation for the book.<sup>3</sup>

- “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be set apart for him.” (1:7)
- “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (5:8)
- “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. . . neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (8:35,37,39) (See also 5:5; 8:28; 9:13,25; 11:28; 12:9-10; 13:8-10; 14:15; 15:30)

1. How might seeing God’s love at the root of the whole book affect the way you hear Paul’s encouragement to offer your body as a sacrifice to God?

While the Greek word that Paul uses in Romans 12:1 for “bodies” emphasizes the physical, visible matter of the body, it includes the body as the vessel or “container” of the soul including all of our feelings and the non-physical aspects of being human.<sup>4</sup> Thus when Paul urges, “offer your bodies,” he does not mean merely our physical bodies, but our whole selves, including body, mind, emotions, and will. This understanding of how we are to offer ourselves to God is reflected in Jesus’ summary of the law, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*” (Mark 12:30)

2. Why do you think God asks us to love Him with our whole selves?

3. Consider these words of Carlo Carretto: *“God does not want merely to make Himself known to His creature; He wants to give Himself.”*<sup>5</sup> What response does this stir in you?

*“God does not want merely to make Himself known to His creature; He wants to give Himself.”* Giving invites receiving. Receiving requires making space. Making space necessitates letting go of something else. Of *everything* else. And letting go is always a death, a sacrifice, even when it is a death into a much bigger life. Offering our bodies as a sacrifice to God is saying “no” to all other lovers in order to say “yes” to oneness with Him who has loved and pursued us to this end. It is giving ourselves wholly and unconditionally to the One who wants to give Himself to us.

4. What does this mean for you today?

## **Day 4 – Living Sacrifices I**

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Various assumptions may keep us from offering ourselves wholeheartedly to God.

- “I can’t do it well enough.” We feel unable, unworthy. . . and so we put off offering ourselves to God until we can do it better. Except that time never comes. And we’ve seen that we’re already alive, set apart for God, and pleasing to Him, and it is on the basis of what He has already done that we are invited to come closer, giving Him our whole selves. We’re not being called to do something in ourselves so much as to give ourselves to God to keep doing in us what He has already begun.
- “I’m afraid that if I believe I’m already holy, already pleasing to God, I’ll become too comfortable and never move on?” This is a fair concern if that’s where we stop. But if we’re accepting the call to offer ourselves to God, He will keep changing us, teaching us to love Him, and placing His own love for others in us. Learning to love always takes us out of our comfortable spaces. We will move forward. But we will move because of love – because we can’t bear to be away from the One who is moving forward and summoning us to follow – rather than because of fear.
- “What if God calls me to Africa?” Our fear of what God might ask us to do often comes from being unaware of the context in which the plea to offer our bodies is given. We’ve glimpsed God’s character and action that were described *before* the

invitation. Today we'll look at the other half of the context: what comes *after* the command to offer ourselves. But first. . .

1. Which of these assumptions most often holds you back?

Read Romans 12:1-8

2. How would you summarize Paul's main point in verse 3? In verse 4-8?

3. Verse 3 begins with "for," linking verses 1-2 with verses 3-8. What difference does it make that "offer your bodies as a sacrifice" is linked directly to "don't think of yourself more highly than you ought" (or, as J.B. Phillips paraphrases it, ". . . try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities. . .")?

Maybe this is another reason Paul tells us to offer our *bodies*. Not only does God want the whole us, and the real us in our real situations, right where we contact the world, he wants us in our limited human forms. He is not addressing us as disembodied souls, but as whole people who need naps and grapefruit and laughter, people great at math but not at spelling, or better at baking apple pie than at balancing the checkbook. The One who made us this way because He wanted us this way is asking us to offer *this* self to Him – to come and let Him help us be fully and beautifully the person we're made to be, not to try to be someone we're not.

4. Which part of yourself do you find it hardest to believe God could want? What would it be like for you to offer that part of yourself to Him?

***For Further Exploration:***

<http://hearingtheheartbeat.com/2013/01/07/free-to-be-human-without-fear/>

## Day 5 – Living Sacrifices II

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Read Mark 8:34-38.

1. What emotions do these statements of Jesus raise in you?

*“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”* These verses do not make sense apart from the character of Jesus that underlies them. When we give up our lives for Jesus we find them; this can be true only because God is a giver. When we hold tightly to our lives, we squeeze the very life out of them. But when we let Him help us open our hands, releasing control of our lives to the only One who knows how they are meant to work and who is able to fill them with life, He shows us who we are meant to be. He reveals to us – and gives to us – the fullness of who we are . . . because we can only be who we are meant to be when we are filled with Him.

2. Can you see any other connections between the truths in Romans 11:33-36 and these verses in Mark 8?

At the heart of the parallel passage in Matthew 10 is Jesus’ reassurance that those whom he is inviting to take up their cross and follow are intimately known (“even the hairs of your head are counted”), and are cared for, treasured, and protected (not even a little bird falls while God sustains it, and “you are worth more than many sparrows”).

3. What does that mean to you today?

4. At the end of this week, what sort of conversation would you like to have with God about offering yourself to Him?

## Week 5 Group Study – Dead and Alive

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*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual [or logical/rational] act of worship.*  
*Romans 12:1*

The verse that we've been studying this week is Romans 12:1 - "Therefore (in light of all that God is and has done for us), I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual (or logical/rational) act of worship." I hope as we've studied Romans 11:33-36 we've started to see why it's rational to offer ourselves to God. Today I'd like us to think some more about the phrase "living sacrifices." It seems to me such an interesting juxtaposition - *living* and *sacrifice*, *life* and *death*. If you've had a chance to do the week 5 homework, you've read one or two other passages where the mystery of giving up our lives to find them is articulated. And it is a mystery. It's hard to get our heads around how we have to die to enter life. But like so many other things in God's economy, it's true even if we can't quite understand why it "works."

Let's start with a story:

"In his sermon, *Why Christ Had To Die*, author and pastor Stuart Briscoe says:

Many years ago when the children were small, we went for a little drive in the lovely English countryside, and there was some fresh snow. I saw a lovely field with not a single blemish on the virgin snow. I stopped the car, and I vaulted over the gate, and I ran around in a great big circle striding as wide as I could. Then I came back to the kids, and I said, Now, children, I want you to follow in my footsteps. So I want you to run around that circle in the snow, and I want you to put your feet where your father put his feet.

Well, David tried and couldn't quite make it. Judy, our overachiever, was certain she would make it; she couldn't make it. Pete, the little kid, took a great run at it, put his foot in my first footprint and then strode out as far as he could and fell on his face. His mother picked him up as he cried.

She said to me, What are you trying to do?

I said, I'm trying to get a sermon illustration.

I said, Pete, come here. I picked up little Peter and put his left foot on my foot, and I put his right foot on my foot. I said, Okay, Pete, let's go. I began to stride one big stride at a time with my hands under his armpits and his feet lightly on mine.

Well, who was doing it? In a sense he was doing it because I was doing it. In a sense there was a commitment of the little boy to the big dad, and some of the properties of the big dad were working through the little boy.

In exactly the same way, in our powerlessness we can't stride as wide as we should. We don't walk the way we should. We don't hit the target the way we ought. It isn't that at every point we are as bad as we could be. It's just that at no point are we as good as we should be. Something's got to be done. Well God has done that something. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

Read Romans 6:1-14 (see context - 5:20-21)

Note key words marked as follows:

**death/dead/died**

sin

*life/live/alive*

Christ

### **Romans 6:1-14**

· What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? · By no means! We **died** to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his **death**? · We were therefore buried with him through baptism into **death** in order that, just as Christ was raised from the **dead** through the glory of the Father, we too may *live* a new *life*.

· If we have been united with him like this in his **death**, we will certainly also be united with him in his *resurrection*. · For we know that our old self was **crucified** with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, [or "be rendered powerless" – NIV footnote] that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has **died** has been freed from sin.

· Now if we **died** with Christ, we believe that we will also *live* with him. · For we know that since Christ was *raised* from the **dead**, he cannot **die** again; **death** no longer has mastery over him. · The **death** he **died**, he **died** to sin once for all; but the *life* he *lives*, he *lives* to God.

In the same way, count yourselves **dead** to sin but *alive* to God in Christ Jesus. · Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. · Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God,

as those who have been brought from **death** to *life*; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

1. What two main things does Paul claim happen to us through our identification with Christ?

2. What does Paul say about why we have to die to enter into life? (v. 6)

3. In v.6, Paul talks about being “slaves to sin.” What do you think it means to be a slave to sin?

4. Why is death necessary to free us from our slavery to sin?

5. What does it mean to be crucified with Christ?

6. What are the results or implications of sharing in Christ’s death?

(v. 2)

(vv. 4-5, 8,13)

(vv. 6-7,14)

(vv. 8-10)

(vv. 10,11,13)

7. What characterizes our new life?

(v. 4)

(v. 9)

(v. 10, 11)

(v. 13)

8. How do we enter this new life?

9. Can you explain the truth of Rom 6:1-14 in a way that someone who has not been to church could understand?

10. What actions are required on our part as we live in this new life?

(v.11)

(v.12)

(v.13)

(v.13)

11. Can you give practical examples of how each of these looks in practice? Can you think of a Biblical or current day example which illustrates each of these steps?

a.

b.

c.

d.

12. What practical step would you like to take today?

## Week 5 Review

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1. Where do you find a cause for hope in the invitation to offer your body to God?
2. What is the question you most want to ask God about offering your body to Him? If you had to answer it, what would you say at this time?
3. Where did you find most joy in offering yourself to God this week? Where did you most struggle to offer yourself to Him?
4. How do you sense God calling you to offer yourself to Him at this time? Does our study from this week offer any help in doing it?
5. How can we pray for you in light of all this?

### **Where We've Been**

Complete this week's line in the "Where We've Been" chart at the back of your booklet.

## Week 6

# Transformed Followers

*“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.  
Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is –  
his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*  
Romans 12:2

### Where we’re going

Day 1 – **Hope in Frustration** – Romans 7:15-25

Day 2 – **Set Your Mind** – Colossians 3:1-17

Day 3 – **Lean Your Mind** – Isaiah 26:3-4

Day 4 – **Invitation to Conversation** – Philippians 4:4-9

Day 5 – **Welcomed In** – John 17

Group Study – **Living in the Truth** – Romans 8:1-17

Review

### Day 1 – Hope in Frustration

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Read Romans 11:33-12:2. (How are you doing with memorizing it?)

1. In Romans 7:15-25, Paul vividly describes the frustration that he faced as he tried to live his deep desire for holiness. What has been your own experience with trying to transform yourself?

2. Read Romans 12:2 again. “Conform” implies outward change, while “transform” implies inner change, change in fundamental character or condition.<sup>1</sup> Why do you think we are told to “be transformed” rather than to “transform yourself”?

3. Ruth Haley Barton notes, “In the end, this is the most hopeful thing any of us can say about spiritual transformation: *I cannot transform myself*. . .”<sup>2</sup> How might our inability to transform ourselves be experienced as a place of hope?

4. Barton continues her thought, “In the end, this is the most hopeful thing any of us can say about spiritual transformation: *I cannot transform myself*, or anyone else for that matter. What I can do is create the conditions in which spiritual transformation can take place, by developing and maintaining a rhythm of spiritual practices that keep me open and available to God.”<sup>3</sup> Can you think of a time you experienced God meeting you and changing you in a way you could not change yourself? When and where do you find it easiest to be honest with God, to hear His voice, to receive his love?

**For Further Exploration:** In *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives For Spiritual Transformation*, Ruth Haley Barton provides a fresh and gentle look at how we can cooperate with God in the process of spiritual transformation. Sensitive, biblical, and practical, this would be a great follow up to Rational Worship. An extensive preview is available at [http://books.google.ca/books?id=\\_vpAVwRIWUsC](http://books.google.ca/books?id=_vpAVwRIWUsC)

## Day 2 – Set Your Mind

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J.B. Phillips paraphrases Romans 12:1-2 the following way:

*With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.*

1. At this point in your life, in what ways do you most sense the world trying to “squeeze you into its mould”?

We have a choice. We can “go with the flow,” letting the world shape us by default, or we can continually offer ourselves to God, letting Him do in us what we can’t do in ourselves. Sometimes we’re tempted to think there’s a third option: shaping ourselves. But we’re created to live in dependence on God, so when we insist on shaping ourselves, we’re lining up with the world’s way of looking at ourselves as individuals independent from God. At the root of all of the Bible’s instructions about how to live is the understanding that the only way we can live them is to make ourselves available to God for him to live His life in and through us.

2. In Colossians 3, Paul gives us a whole list of ways we are to live in light of who we have become and are becoming in Christ. But he also gives us some help in doing so. Read Colossians 3:1-17. Notice how often Paul says “since” or “therefore.” What are the basic assumptions Paul makes with regard to our position in Christ? (There are a lot spelled out here!)

3. What are the instructions Paul gives in vv 1-2? Why might these instructions be foundational for the rest of his instructions?

4. What are some practices you find helpful in setting your heart and mind on things above? (Paul gives a few suggestions in vv. 15-17, but there are many others. The ‘Further Exploration’ section yesterday and on Day 4 give some more ideas.) What one step will you take today to begin to set your heart and mind on God?

### Day 3 – Lean Your Mind

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*“You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD is the Rock eternal.”* Isaiah 26:3-4

The word here translated “peace” is the Hebrew word “shalom,” whose root meaning is completion, fulfilment, wholeness.<sup>4</sup> The phrase translated “complete peace” is actually a repetition of this word – “shalom shalom.” Perfect wholeness.

1. In what area of your life are you presently most aware of a need for wholeness?

2. The word translated “steadfast” primarily means “to lean upon.”<sup>5</sup> *You will keep in perfect wholeness the one whose mind is leaning on you.* . . . What might it look like to “lean” your mind on God?

3. “Keep” means “to guard. . . to watch over, to protect.”<sup>6</sup> There are many references throughout Scripture to God as the one who preserves his people from dangers of all kinds. *You will guard and preserve in perfect wholeness the one whose mind is leaning on you.* . . . What might it mean for you to know that God is constantly looking out for you? How might this knowledge begin to transform you?

4. And finally, the word used in Isaiah 26:3 for “to trust” means “to trust in, feel safe, . . . be unconcerned.”<sup>7</sup> The main emphasis here is not on our thoughtful choice to believe but rather on the feeling of being safe or secure. We only learn to feel safe with someone through spending time with them and getting to know their character. It’s the same with God. *You will guard in perfect wholeness the one whose mind is leaning on you because he feels safe with you.*

What does it mean *“You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you”*? Is peace some sort of a reward for trusting? No. Peace and wholeness are not a reward for trusting but rather the natural overflow of the confident, restful security of our deepening relationship with God. That is the “secret” to peace – a mind fixed on God.

Do you sense an invitation here for you? In what way would you like to respond?

## **Day 4 – Invitation to Conversation**

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Being a “living sacrifice” is such an active, ongoing process! We do not simply hand ourselves over to God and then sit back and watch as He uses us; we offer ourselves in active, alive, loving surrender. We struggle and rejoice through the vulnerability of increasing intimacy. God doesn’t just fill and use an empty body; He wants not just our service but ourselves. And so He constantly draws us into conversation in the midst of the messiest places in our lives.

1. Read Romans 11:36 and 12:2. In what practical ways does the statement that “all things are . . . through him” relate to the process of having our minds renewed?

Yesterday we spent time with Isaiah 26:3. Philippians 4:7 echoes the same promise: “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” And, surrounding that verse, Paul gives some specifics of how we might learn to lean our hearts and our minds on God.

2. Read Philippians 4:4-9. How does it feel to be told, “Do not be anxious about anything?” (v. 6)

Thankfully, Paul doesn't stop with that command, which, on its own, is impossible for most of us. He surrounds it with practical ways to be present to God when we find ourselves anxious. We might summarize these verses, "Don't just keep turning things over and over in your own mind. Let God into the conversation. Here's how. . ."

3. What specific advice does Paul offer to help us invite God into the conversation?

4. What are you most often anxious about these days? How will you let God into the conversation today?

***For further exploration:*** Did you notice Paul's emphasis on thanksgiving? Keeping a gratitude journal can help us see the ways God is showing us His love. You'll find a host of resources and an encouraging community on Ann Voskamp's website, [aholyexperience.com](http://aholyexperience.com).

## **Day 5 – Welcomed In**

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In John 17 we are allowed to listen in to Jesus praying for us. As we listen, we discover that the kind of life into which we are called in Romans 12:1-2 is an echo of Jesus' heartbeat for us. We also find in Jesus' prayer a rich resource for having our minds renewed as we hear Jesus speak of who we are and welcome us into astonishing intimacy.

Read John 17.



## **Week 6 Group Study – Living in the Truth**

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John 8:31-32 *“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”*

1. During the six weeks of this study, what key aspects of truth have you learned or been reminded of?

2. In what ways has knowing this truth begun to set you free?

3. Where do we process lies and truth?

4. Read Romans 8:1-8. In the three verses, 5-7, how often are our minds mentioned?

5. The New Living Translation says it this way:

*Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.)* Romans 8:5-9

Note that there are only two options – control by the sinful nature, or control by the Spirit. In the above passage, circle the word “control” or its synonyms (“dominated” etc). Then list what you learn about a mind controlled by the sinful nature and one controlled by the Spirit.

6. With that in mind, *what* is our obligation, and *why*? (Romans 8:12-14)

Laura Barwegan tells this story:

*“My husband and I live in the country close to a large university. We hosted a garage sale where some college students bought a couch. They had a dilemma, though: how to get the couch to their apartment on the other side of a cornfield in only a Ford Focus as transportation. But they had no fear. They simply hoisted the couch on their shoulders like an overturned canoe and made their way across the field. We lived on higher ground and could see the bobbing couch winding through the corn. From our vantage point, the students seemed to be making turns in interesting places.*

*Later that afternoon the young men returned to purchase matching chairs, and they carried them home via the same winding route. The path was easier to traverse this time because it was already slightly beaten down.*

*If the guys had taken this route daily, I imagine they would have straightened the meanderings, and the trail would have widened into a lane – much to the dismay of the farmer! Eventually the path might have become so well worn that people would choose it not out of necessity but because it presented the easiest and most efficient option.*

*Neural connections form in similar ways. The first time we think or act in some manner, electrical impulses jump from one neuron to another, as if trying to find a path across an uncharted field. Like tentacles, dendrites begin to grow from the neuron, seeking out chemical links with other neurons. These initial connections are weak and inefficient. . . . Repeating the thought or action triggers biological processes that form chemical bonds between neurons and make electrical connectivity among them easier and faster. In other words, our brains “smooth out” and “widen” the neural pathways associated with a recurring behavior. Those pathways then become the easiest to navigate and continue to be used the most often.”<sup>8</sup>*

7. God has wired us for change. How do we get rid of old pathways in our minds and create new ones? (See Romans 8:12-13)

This is not easy. It is a war. (See Romans 7:23.)

BUT DON'T FORGET! . . . we are not on our own in this battle. Write out the encouragement you receive from Romans 8:13 “. . . by the \_\_\_\_\_ . . .”

A key point of this passage is that we can't transform our minds on our own. Remember question 5 – there are only two options, control by the sinful nature and control by the Spirit. We might think of the process in terms of “**active dependence**.” The intent is dependence on God, not self-transformation. But God doesn't just take us over and make that happen without our cooperation. That's where the “active” part comes in. We work with him to submit our minds (and whole selves!) to His control and direction.

8. Look back at the verse at the start of this study. (John 8:31-32) What promise does Jesus make?

9. How does the truth set us free?

10. How can we avoid being taken in by Satan's lies every minute of every day? What practical measures can help us learn to recognize Satan's lies?

Communion and pray for each other.

### ***For Further Exploration***

The blog post of this beautiful 26 year old woman with brain cancer provides some wonderful examples of practical measures we can take to avoid being constantly taken in by Satan's lies. Christina Ahmann, “Update Forty-Eight,” *Christina, Cancer and a Walk of Faith*, February 8, 2009, <http://www.christinaahmann.com/?m=200902>.

## Week 6 Review

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1. What was the most hopeful news you read this week?
2. How would you explain our part and God's part in the process of transformation?
3. Where have you seen God at work in you over the course of this study? How have you changed?
4. As we've worked through this study, have you become aware of any deepening longings? Are you able to put them into words?
5. What next step might God be calling you to?
6. In light of all this, how can we pray for you?

### **Where We've Been**

Complete this week's line in the "Where We've Been" chart at the back of your booklet.

## A Note of Gratitude

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In the writing of this study, I have seen more clearly than ever how offering our bodies to God cannot be separated from community. So many people have given themselves to make this dream a reality. To these I offer my special thanks:

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My beloved Lord Jesus who has only ever taken anything away in order to give me more of Yourself. I love being Yours!

## Notes

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### Week 1

<sup>1</sup> W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 678.

### Week 2

<sup>1</sup> Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downer's Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 71.

<sup>2</sup> Iain Provan, "Old Testament Foundations" (Regent College, September 23, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965), 180.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>5</sup> Darrell Johnson, "He Holds the Scroll of History (Revelation 6:1 - 8:5)" (First Baptist Church, Vancouver, BC, January 13, 2013), <http://fbc2010sermons.posterous.com/darrell-johnson-he-holds-the-scrolls-of-histo-78216>.

<sup>6</sup> James Dunn, *Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1989), 101.

### Week 3

<sup>1</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 35–6.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Zwemer, "The Glory of the Impossible," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph Winter and Stephen Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981), 259.

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, trans., *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1978), p.168.

### Week 4

<sup>1</sup> J. I. Packer, *Prolegomena, The Knowledge of God, Revelation and Creation: Systematic Theology A* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1996), Disc 18.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.drmary.com/chiasmus/masters/kennedy1.shtml>

### Week 5

<sup>1</sup> W. Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Accordance electronic ed, version 1.5 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> James Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, vol. 38B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1988), 710.

<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, "The Theme of Romans," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970), 249–263, [www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/romans\\_morris.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/romans_morris.pdf).

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<sup>4</sup> Horst Balz and Gerhardt Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Carlo Carretto, *The God Who Comes*, trans. Rose Mary Hancock (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 41.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Briscoe, "Why Christ Had To Die," *Preaching Today* 163, no. 4 cited in Greg Herrick, "Study and Exposition of Romans 6:1-14," *Bible.org*, accessed January 29, 2013, <http://bible.org/seriespage/study-and-exposition-Romans-61-14>.

## **Week 6**

<sup>1</sup> Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives For Spiritual Transformation*, annotated edition (Intervarsity Press, 2006), 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Laird R. Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Accordance electronic edition, version 1.7 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Laura Barwegan and Dan Hamil, "Wired for Change," *Discipleship Journal* no. 169 (January 2009): 25.

## Where We've Been

Complete the appropriate line in this table at the end of each week.

1. What is the most exciting or comforting thing I have learned this week about God's character?
2. What have I learned about myself this week?
3. What is the next step I will take in light of these things? How would I like to pray?

	1. What I have learned about <b>God's character</b>	2. What I have learned about <b>myself</b>	3. My next step in <b>response</b>
Week 1 <b>Mercifully Wise</b>			
Week 2 <b>Wholly Other</b>			
Week 3 <b>Extravagant Giver</b>			
Week 4 <b>Center of the Universe</b>			
Week 5 <b>Living Sacrifices</b>			
Week 6 <b>Transformed Followers</b>			