



**LEADER'S  
GUIDE**

# **RATIONAL WORSHIP**

**Offering ourselves to the God of mercy**

a study in Romans 11:33-12:2

**Carolyn J. Watts**

## **Leader's Guide**

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

A Study in Romans 11:33-12:2

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# Introduction

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## Purpose and Hoped-for Outcomes

Many people want to offer themselves to God, but are afraid. We do them (and ourselves!) an injustice when we demand a response without adequately exploring the premise on which the response is to be based. Repeatedly throughout Scripture, God reveals something of His nature prior to asking for a response. One such passage is Romans 11:33-12:2 in which several key aspects of God's character are summarized, and then "*therefore. . . in view of*" His character and actions, we are called to offer ourselves to him as an act of "rational worship." The purpose of this study is to help people see that the character of God, as revealed in the Old Testament and then more fully in the coming of Jesus Christ, is such that the only rational response is total surrender of ourselves. The hoped for outcome is that each participant (leaders included) would be brought to a deeper understanding of the character of the Almighty God, and would respond with a more full presentation of themselves to our Lord.

## Course Format and Educational Strategy

Since the goal is not merely knowledge, but life change, educational strategy needs to be directed to this end. The course format is designed around the following principles:

1) **Awareness of need** – The greater the awareness of need, the better people learn. Despite fear which prevents them from moving ahead, most Christians already have a desire to follow Jesus more closely. This intrinsic motivation is key to good learning. The satisfaction of learning and growing and the increased intimacy with Jesus of course provide the ultimate motivation. But a well designed start to the course can further increase motivation, with an initial meeting together raising questions and interest. This informal introductory week, which could consist of a meal, brief introduction including some material from the written introduction to the study guide, and perhaps prayer and worship time together (depending on the group), will also begin to foster community (see #5 below). At this time, the study guides should be given out and participants encouraged to begin the "at home" studies.

2) **Daily exposure to truth** – When the goal is life change, repeated, frequent exposure to truth is more effective than longer, less frequent periods of study. Habits are not created or altered unless the action or attitude under consideration is performed consistently. For this reason, the format of this study includes daily personal immersion in God's word. That said, people work night-shifts, children get sick and life seldom runs according to our ideal. God meets us in our real lives. And the goal is far more about people engaging with God than completing every day of their homework. For this reason, participants are encouraged to stay with a passage as long as they wish – even if it means not getting to the other days' homework.

3) **Active interaction with the text** – Passive absorption of information is unlikely to result in life change. Students are thus encouraged to interact with the text for themselves, to ask questions, and to learn to think critically as a step in the process of integration of truth into their lives. During one or two of the group sessions, there is a greater component of “lecture-style” teaching in order to communicate material which would be difficult for the students to glean on their own. The remainder of the group sessions, like the daily “at home” sessions, are designed to foster individual interaction of the participants with the text.

4) **Application** – Theory, though critically important, unless coupled with action, is useless. Life-changing learning is the result of learning that stresses function and application. Emotions and will must be engaged. The aim of the study is to help participants engage with God. Since the ultimate purpose is entry into deeper relationship with God, worship and prayer are key aspects of the course, as is intentional community.

5) **Intentional community** – This study is designed to be used in small groups. When the ultimate goal is relationship (with God, self, and others), we can only learn by participating in relationship. Community of some form, with its opportunities for modelling, accountability, and helping each other identify the themes and discern the stories in our lives, is invaluable. *It is critical that the group be a place of safety.* Some questions in the study ask about fears and other potentially sensitive issues. Participants must feel safe if they are to be willing to share. They must know that they will not be condemned, and that what is shared will remain within the group.

Time allotted for the group studies will depend on the group, but would ideally consist of two hours, allowing an hour for study as well as time to share and pray for each other. If the study group is larger than five or six people, the group should divide themselves into groups of three or four people for sharing and prayer. These groups should remain the same throughout the course to allow increased depth of relationship and accountability to develop.

#### 6) **Flexible format**

This study is designed to offer maximum flexibility for use by a wide range of groups and individuals. Each week’s study consists of five daily studies intended for individual use.

Two possible group study options are provided:

- 1) *Group Study* – a full (hour-long) study of a passage not previously studied by the students which relates to the verse under consideration that week
- 2) *Review* – a selection of questions relating to the passages studied at home, and the personal impact of the study in each member’s life.

The *Group Study* Track provides more opportunity to develop inductive study skills and

dig deeper into Scripture. Since each Group Study passage is from the book of Romans, it also provides more context for the Romans 11:33 – 12:2 passage on which this study is based. The *Review* track provides more opportunity to discuss questions raised by the homework, the impact of the study on the participants, and further steps toward putting the material into practice. Groups of newer believers in particular may prefer the *Review* track.

In some cases, the group may prefer to complete the study over a twelve-week period. If group meetings are held weekly, the *Review* section could be used during one session to discuss the passages studied at home, and the *Group Study* could be used on the alternate weeks. In that case, the homework could be spread out over the two weeks, or individuals could use their homework time during the second week to begin the upcoming group study, review homework sections that were particularly pertinent to them in the previous week, consolidate their Scripture memorization, and complete the *Where We've Been* table at the back of the book.

## Participants

This course is designed for any persons in or beyond grade eleven who want to be intentional disciples of Jesus. It is ideal for those who desire to follow him more closely but who have fears or questions about the rationality of so doing.

It is hoped that the depth of the study will appeal to mature Christians, while at the same time remaining accessible to those earlier on in the Christian life.

## Other Notes

In the following Group Study notes, key points and additional material that leaders may wish to use are given at the pertinent place in a copy of the students' manual. **The questions and notations given in the students' manual are bolded in the leaders' notes.** In some of the group studies these are extensive and in some they are minimal. Week 1 and week 4 are more lecture-style to communicate material that is deemed to be needed to understand the passage, though even in those weeks the intent is that the participants engage directly with the Scripture. In all cases it is essential that the leader study the passage ahead of time to ensure an understanding of the passage as a whole and to plan the details of the session with their particular group in mind. Spiritual growth of the individuals and the group is obviously more important than completing each question.

The NIV is a commonly used version, hence for purposes of ease of use and flow, that translation was chosen for this study. Where other translations seem to provide more accurate translation of important points, an alternate translation is given in the text.

Included near the end of the Rational Worship study book is a list of additional resources. Leaders may find it particularly helpful to explore these resources. They're also highlighted in the appropriate weeks of the leaders guide below.

**Leaders may find this resource helpful as they prepare for this and other weeks:**

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. Available for free download at [www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/romans\\_morris.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/romans_morris.pdf), 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.

***"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. See the extensive text in the main study booklet for this question.**

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

The idea is to trace Paul's thoughts as he responds to these questions.

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

Note in verses 4-5 how key each of these points is to their identity. Imagine a young woman who was adopted as a baby and grew up securely loved and knowing that she was chosen. Then as an adult something happens to seriously shake her perception of being chosen and loved. Her whole identity would be upset. This is the level of questioning we're dealing with. "Adoption," "the glory," "the covenants," "the promises" - the Jews have staked their whole identity, their whole future, their whole hope on who they are as God's chosen people. This is what has defined them.

**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?**

The stated argument is that "Israel" (the people God has chosen) does not equate to "Israel" (descendants of Jacob/renamed Israel). The underlying point is that we, with our human perception, have misunderstood from the beginning what God planned and promised in his wisdom. We were thinking and talking about "Israel" as Jacob's physical descendants when God meant "Israel" as "the chosen ones." We thought these two groups, Abraham's descendants via Isaac and Jacob, and God's chosen ones, were the same thing. But God knew that while there was overlap between the two groups, they were not identical.

#### **4. God's wisdom is revealed in three examples.**

The definition of wisdom that we looked at in Day 5 was "insight into the true nature of things."<sup>1</sup> In that sense, God's wisdom is made incredibly clear in the way He chooses to reveal Himself through the history of His chosen people (ultimately revealed to include both Jews and Gentiles). If wisdom is "insight into the true nature of things," and God is at the center of the universe, the core of wisdom is revelation of who God is. As we continue working our way through this passage, keep in mind the questions, "what is revealed here about the character and passions of the Triune God?" and "How does the revelation of God's character in this passage realign my perception of reality?"

Now Paul gives us three examples which demonstrate 1) that God's definition of "chosen people" has been clear from the beginning, had we but understood, and hence he has not been unfaithful to his promise but rather we have misunderstood exactly what he had promised, and 2) that God's way of working with his chosen people is designed to reveal his character.

#### **What are the examples and what did God reveal about himself through them?**

**Verses 6-9:** Isaac was chosen over Ishmael - God's promise stands stronger than flesh

Review genealogy - Abraham (& Sarah) → Isaac (& Rebekah) → Jacob & Esau

Abraham got tired of waiting for God to fulfill his promise to give him a son, so had a child, Ishmael, by Sarah's servant, Hagar. In that culture, that was an acceptable practice. It's also important to understand that in that culture, the eldest son was the heir. So by the culture, Ishmael should have been Abraham's heir. But God chose to continue the line of his chosen people through Isaac instead. In so doing, he made it clear right from the beginning that it is his sovereign right to choose people. Mercy is not mandatory (see v. 18).

**Verses 10-13:** Jacob and Esau - God's call is stronger than works (or cultural norms).

**Verses 17-18:** Pharaoh - God's power trumps man's power.

Note the recurrent theme: verse 12 "because of him who calls" → verse 16 "it does not depend on man. . . but on God. . ." This is more fully explored in v. 20 where Paul asks another question: "Who are you, O man, who answers back to God?"

***In case your group asks...***

If a question is raised about God hardening Pharaoh's heart (v.18), it may be helpful to point out that there is both sovereignty and free choice evident in the story. Near the beginning of the story Pharaoh's heart is said to be "hardened" (Exodus 7:14, 22). Repeatedly, Pharaoh is said to harden his own heart (8:15, 32; 9:34). Then, in Ex 10:1; 14:4, 17, God is said to harden Pharaoh's heart so that the Egyptians will know that He is God. In other words, "It is clear that Pharaoh was an unrepentant sinner at the start (chapter 5). It is perhaps enough to point this out and remark that all of God's hardening of an obstinate sinner was judicial and done that God's deliverance should be the more memorable. And this, too, was in God's plan (Ex 9:16), though it is also inexplicably true that Pharaoh sinned freely and was therefore terribly guilty (cf. Acts 4:25-28)."<sup>2</sup>

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

*God* is at the center of the universe, not us. The universe does not revolve around us, but around him. This is key, because it's when we perceive ourselves at the center of the universe that we even ask these questions.

As Ray Ortlund, Jr, notes in his paraphrase of these verses:

But if our spiritual condition is determined ultimately by God's will, I know what you will say next. You will demand of God, "Why do you still hold me responsible? How can you judge *me* for a situation *you* control? After all, who has ever hindered the fulfillment of your sovereign purpose? So if you find me guilty, God, you are a hypocrite!" *Quite the contrary!* How do you, mere man, have the gall to challenge God? The very tone of your question reveals your insolence. Think about it. Does a statue say to its sculptor, "Why did you make me like this? I object!" Who has the right to guide the chisel? Or think of a potter. Is he not entitled to take his lump of clay and make one part of it into a lovely vase and another part into a common pot?<sup>3</sup>

**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.**

As the number of Gentiles grew in the church, the Jews were questioning whether God had reneged on his promises to Israel to be his chosen people. The key question is: *can God be trusted?*

Paul shows how God's choice, his promise, and his power which were demonstrated through those early years of the history of the people of Israel were still consistently being demonstrated in the way God was dealing with his chosen people the church, which included both Jews and Gentiles.

***In case your group asks...***

If people question what v.22 says about God's character (that he prepared some for destruction) and how this fits with the other aspects of his character, the following thoughts may be helpful:

- Paul is raising a question, not making a statement. "What if God. . .?" (v. 22) God has the right to do whatever he wants with his creation. But. . .
- Paul's emphasis throughout is on God's mercy (9:22b, 25-26, cf. Romans 2:4, also 2 Peter 3:9). Those who, according to human rules, should not have been chosen, have been chosen (eg. Isaac). Those who weren't originally chosen have also been welcomed in (i.e. Gentiles. 9: 24-26). But those who assumed they were "in" according to human criteria discovered that God doesn't work this way (9:32-33). He "richly blesses all who call on him" (10:12-13) – but we have to call, not presume. He "has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all" (11:32)

**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?**

The word translated "to hope in" (NIV) or "to wait for" (KJV, NRSV) means "to bind together" (Strong's) or "to wait or look for with eager expectation. . . . It means enduring patiently in confident hope that God will decisively act for the salvation of his

people (Gen 49:18). Waiting involves the very essence of a person's being, his soul (Ps 130:5). Those who wait in true faith are renewed in strength so that they can continue to serve the Lord while looking for his saving work (Isa 40:31)."<sup>4</sup> To hope in God means to have our lives bound together or intertwined with his in the sense of staking everything on the promise of his faithfulness.

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

God's gifts and his call are irrevocable (11:29). He will never make a promise and then back out on it. He will never give the gift of Himself and take it back. He sometimes takes other things away from us to direct our attention to Himself. But his gifts of commitment to us, of relationship with us, his call to be his, he will never revoke.

9. If there is time, have the group turn back to Isaiah 49 where we started. Verse 23 follows a description of specific ways God promises to come through for the people of Israel, rebuild their cities and their population, etc. Half way through verse 23 we have this wonderful line, "Then you will know that I am the LORD" - Remember that that name for God, "the LORD," is his name "Yahweh" or "I AM." For the Jewish people, that name "I AM" would not have merely meant "I exist" but rather "I am with you and for you."<sup>5</sup> "Then you will know that I AM with you and for you." I am the covenant keeping God, the one who will not break my word. Therefore, because of who I AM, "Those who hope in me will not be disappointed."

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

Be sure to make time to have your group pray with and for one other.

Also encourage your group to take the time to record the most significant things they've learned about God and about themselves this week in the "Where We've Been" chart. Writing down their insights while they're still fresh will help them remember them in the future.

**Leaders may find this resource helpful as they prepare:**

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

- 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.

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

**Read Romans 1:18-32**

**2. This passage provides a shocking picture of people. What is your initial response to this description of the human race?**

Responses here may include discomfort. We don't like being described in these terms in our inclusion as part 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>1</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>2</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>3</sup>

**3. What does this passage say was the initial step in decline into the kinds of attitudes and behavior described?**

(v. 21) the choice not to give God the honor due to him

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

- (v. 18) suppressed the truth
- (v. 21) did not worship their Creator
- (v. 21) their thinking became futile/confused
- (v. 22, 23, 25) worshipped created things
- (v. 25) exchanged God’s truth for a lie
- (v. 28) did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God

**5. What happened as a result of the choice to respond to God in that way?**

- (v. 22) they became fools - ie. they lost touch with reality and their reasoning became nonsense
- (v. 24ff) they followed their own sinful desires
- (v. 28) they did what ought not to be done
- (v. 29-31) they were filled with every kind of wickedness
- (v. 32) they encouraged others in their rebellion

In discussion of above two questions, Ortlund’s paraphrase of v 21-23 may be helpful:

*“The world’s ignorance of God is no accident. They knew him once, but they refused to give him the glory and thanks that, as God, he deserves. And so they have lost touch with reality. Their reasoning is nonsense. Their irrational minds are darkened. Boasting superior wisdom, expert knowledge and advanced degrees, their conclusions are stupid. Look at the record of human religion. People have exchanged the worship of the immortal God in all his glory, for what? Now they bow down before images of mortal man - even worse, of birds, of animals and, as if there were no depth to which they will not stoop, even of snakes! - Romans 1:21-23”<sup>4</sup>*

6. "Exchanged" is a key word in this passage. What things does Paul say people have chosen to exchange for something else?

v. 23 the glory of the immortal God for images

v. 25a the truth of God for a lie

v. 25b worship of created things for worship of the Creator

v. 26 natural relations for unnatural ones (women)

v. 27 natural relations for unnatural ones (men)

7. In Romans 1:23, Paul is quoting from Jeremiah 2:11-13, where God asks,

*"Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the LORD. 'My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.'"* (NIV)

**In what ways is the irrationality, the "upside-down-ness" of people's thinking pictured in these verses (Jeremiah 2:11-13)?**

1) The exchange of their Glory (God) for worthless idols. The very terminology points out how up-side-down and foolish this exchange is – trading something of Ultimate Value, Someone who bestows on them their own value, for something inanimate and valueless.

2) The digging of cisterns that can't hold water. Again, the futility of the exchange is clear. Not only is there a trade of fresh, living, life-giving water for the stale ground water of a cistern, but the cistern is even broken and unable to hold water at all.

We have seen in our home studies this week how completely "other" God is than us - how much different and higher His thoughts are than ours. The vast difference between God and us, the total "otherness" of God, becomes even more stark when we choose to step out of God's wisdom into our own. The results of this choice to live in our own wisdom, apart from God, are outlined in the shocking picture in Rom 1. As James Dunn

says, **“Adam rebelled against his dependence on God. In consequence he became not more like God but less than the man he was.”**<sup>5</sup> **But there is hope.** God’s passion to bring us into relationship remains unchanged.

**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?**

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, *‘the righteous will live by faith.’*” (Romans 1:16-17) Eugene Peterson makes clear the understanding of “righteousness” as “right-relatedness” or “right-relationship” when he paraphrases that last phrase, “The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives.” (Romans 1:17 *The Message*) The problem in 18-32 is broken relationship with God; the need is for reconciliation. The hope is the gospel - God’s route to restored relationship.

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

Faith indicates our decision to live in dependence on God. If we are not trusting him, it proves that we are still trusting our own wisdom. Since we were created to live in dependence on God, if we are depending on ourselves rather than on him, we are not in right relationship with him.

**10. How would you summarize in one or two sentences the key point of Romans 1:18-32?**

One option: When we choose to honor God as God, we enter life on his terms. When we choose not to acknowledge God, we cut ourselves off from Life, for God is the source of life.

(ie. The choices we make about how we respond to God cannot be isolated from the rest of our life. In choosing to act as though God is not at the center of the universe, we do not remove Him from His throne. We merely become like the proverbial ostrich, burying our heads in the sand. We refuse to acknowledge reality. As a result, we lose touch with reality. Our thinking becomes muddled. Then we are unable to make rational decisions, for we have lost the framework we need in order to think clearly. God declared this principle from the beginning of the Bible. “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life. . .” (Deut 30:19)

**11. In what way(s) are you being called to choose life today? In light of this, how can we pray for you today?**

Be sure to make time to have your group pray with and for one other.

Encourage your group to take the time to record the most significant things they've learned about God and about themselves this week in the "Where We've Been" chart.

Leaders may find this resource helpful as they prepare:

Darrell Johnson, "All Things?"

- This exceptionally helpful exposition of Romans 8:28-29 is available for audio download for \$3 at <http://www.regentaudio.com/RGDL3057S>

**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?**

Questions may include:

- How can we rightly understand v. 28?
- Is God for us?
- v. 32 What does "all things" include?

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

1) His Son - to have His Son central (v. 29)

2) us/relationship with us - in proper order and unity with His Son

- to make us like Jesus (vv. 29, 30 - "glorification" is ultimately the culmination of being made like Jesus)
- to do good for us (v. 28), lavishly give to us (v. 32)
- to bring us back into right relationship with himself (vv. 32-34)
- loves us passionately, sacrificially, and permanently! (vv. 32,34,35,38-9)

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

See question 2.

## 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?**

- It is clear that we still have troubles (v. 35 - "trouble, hardship. . ."; v. 36 - "face death all day long"; vv. 38-9 "death, life. . .")
- v. 28-9 it doesn't say that everything is good, but that God will use everything in our lives for the ultimate good purpose of making us like Jesus
- v. 32 "all things" is not about "stuff" so much as it is about God's heart for us. God's heart toward us is extravagant generosity. But he is a wise parent, not spoiling us by throwing toys and candy at us but rather lavishly providing the things that are really good for us, and, most especially, giving us himself.

**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?**

God the Father

- ". . .is for us" - v. 31
- loves us so deeply that nothing can ever make Him not love us or not act out of that love v. 38-9
- gave up his own Son - v. 32
- gives us "all things" - what does this mean? Col 2:9-10 "all the fullness of the Deity"; Eph 1:3ff)
- makes us right with himself (justification) - v. 33

Jesus

- gave Himself for us once (crucifixion) - v. 32
- continues to give Himself in an ongoing manner (intercession) - v. 34
- gives us his love from which we cannot be separated - v. 35

Holy Spirit

- gives himself to live in us, transform us, pray through us etc (9, 11, 15-6, 26-7)

**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? See previous answers.**

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

Be sure to make time to have your group pray with and for one other.

Encourage your group to take the time to record the most significant things they’ve learned about God and about themselves this week in the “Where We’ve Been” chart.

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. See the extensive text for this question in the main study booklet. Make sure you're comfortable enough with the idea of chiasm that you can help your group if they get stuck at any point.

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?

The triune God is central in the universe. All comes from him, through him, and to him.

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?

In Greek, the passage starts with "O, the depth of the riches. And the last word of the passage is "perfect." The one at the center is the only one who is good, pleasing and perfect. A life built with him at the center is the only kind of life that can be good, pleasing and perfect. He alone is the source of deep riches – perfection. Beauty. Riches that go far deeper than we can ever imagine!

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"?

a. "from him . . . are all things." (Remember the quote we saw in Week 3, day 1 "To give to God is to take from God's right hand and to put that very thing back into God's left hand." Miroslav Volf). God is always the initiator. This makes sense of the apparent contradiction at the beginning and end of our passage – at the beginning -

“who has known the mind of the Lord?” – at the end – “then you will be able to test and approve what “God’s will is” – the key here is that God is always the initiator. Unless he reveals his mind to us, we cannot know his mind. But he does initiate. He calls us to himself. He invites us to enter into relationship with him, to share in his secrets and even begin to think like he does. By our own effort, we cannot know his mind. But through his invitation, his gift, we can.

b. “*through* him. . . are all things.” All is through him – which includes our ability to offer ourselves to him, to be holy and pleasing to him. This understanding keeps Romans 12:1 from being unbearably weighty. God is the one who enables us to give ourselves back to him. Philippians 2:12 -13 NLT – “And now that I am away you must be even more careful to put into action God’s saving work in your lives, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him.”

c. “*From* him and *through* him and *to* him are all things.” He is at the center. He has always been at the center. Everything has flowed out from him and has only come into being through him. And he will always be at the center. Everything moves back toward him, finding its culmination and fulfillment in him and bringing glory to him. This truth that God is and was and will always be at the center is communicated to us in the words of this verse, and it is communicated to us in the form in which the text is written. From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

**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?**

Be sure to make time to have your group pray with and for one other.

It might be helpful as part of the response this week to sing together or listen to a song. Some possible songs:

Offering – Paul Baloche

Be the Center – Kathryn Scott

Jesus at the Center – Israel Houghton

I Give My Life Back to You – Stephanie Robinson

Encourage your group to take the time to record the most significant things they’ve learned about God and about themselves this week in the “Where We’ve Been” chart.

You might want to encourage some of your group members to recite Romans 11:33-12:1 at the beginning of this study. By this point in the study members can begin to be consolidating their memorization of the passage.

Read together intro and story from participant's study guide.

Read (or have a group member read) Romans 6:1-14 from handout (this is included in participant's study guide)

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?**

- we die with him (to sin)
- we are raised with him (to life)

### **2. What does Paul say about why we have to die to enter into life?**

- V. 6 - "so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (slavery - key concept in understanding this transition through death to life)

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

Hints:

- At its core, what is sin? An attempt to live in independence from God
- What consequences did we see in Rom 1 of that attempt to live in independence? Not merely a huge list of nasty inward attitudes and outward actions (1: 26-32), but also an inability to accurately perceive reality and live in the light of the truth (1:21-22 - "thinking became futile. . . foolish hearts were darkened. . . became fools. . . exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images. . .")
- So being a slave to sin means not only that we can't resist the urges which drive us, but that we can't even perceive reality accurately to make good decisions about what is right to do in the first place.
- . . .in the story that we started with, if the little boy had chosen to live independently from his father and had run the other direction when he was called or had kept stepping off his father's feet, he would not have been able to stride around the circle but would have kept falling on his face. That insistence on living independently from God is what is called sin - and you can see in that little story how it doesn't work. We need our minds transformed so that we can see the truth - that the only way life can work is to live dependently on God - and live in light of it, our feet constantly on the feet of our Father and our hands held tightly in his.

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

Rom 1:32, 6:23 “wages of sin is death” - why? To know God is what it means to really live (John 17:3). And we chose not to live in relationship with God (Rom 1:21-22). In so doing, we stepped into a situation, the natural result of which is death. Our thinking became so distorted that we can't choose to step back into life. That part of us that is so distorted has to be rendered powerless before we can choose to live in the truth.

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

Gal 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

This is not just a “believing that Jesus died for me” and continuing on my way. This is a turning, a forsaking of the lie that we are at the center of the universe and a choice to live according to the truth that God is at the center. Romans 6 spells this out in some detail (next question)

#### **6. What are the results or implications of sharing in Christ's death?**

6:2 no longer live in sin

6:4-5, 8,13 live a new life

NOTE: the purpose is not just absence of sin but entrance into fullness of life

6:6-7,14 freedom! – no longer slaves to sin

6: 8-10 cannot die again

6: 10,11,13 live a life to God/offer ourselves to God – live for God's honor

The word in v. 5 translated “united” (ie. “united with him”) (Gk: *sumphutos*) comes from the verb meaning “grown together.”<sup>1</sup> It can mean “innate” or “congenital.”<sup>2</sup> This is not a one time act of belief and then we go on our way and life is unchanged from previously. This is a growing together, something that affects us as deeply and completely as our genes affect our physical life (hair color, personality etc) (note 6:2 - “we died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”)

#### **7. What characterizes our new life?**

6:4 new

6:9 lasts forever

6:10, 11 lived to/for God

6:13 results in corresponding godly actions – “instruments of righteousness”

#### **8. How do we enter this new life?**

6:5,6,8 through being united with Christ in his death . . . RELATIONSHIP – “. . . In the end, conversion is never simply a matter of believing something to be true; it never comes merely from comparing two sets of belief in order to embrace the one that seems to have the most logical coherence. The heart of Christian conversion is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. It is not merely an encounter with a system of

beliefs or propositions. It is an encounter with a crucified and risen Christ who calls for our worship and submission. From such a beginning, our minds are engaged with truth that forms and reforms our thinking, enabling us to live truthfully."<sup>3</sup>

**9. Can you explain the truth of our passage through death into life 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?**

6:11 "count yourselves" – As John Stott says regarding our all-too-frequent attitude to our flesh, "We keep wistfully returning to the scene of the execution. We begin to fondle it [the flesh], to caress it, to long for its release, and even to take it down again from the cross."<sup>4</sup> This is how NOT to count yourself dead to sin!

6:12 "do not let sin reign"

6:13 do not offer

6:13 offer

**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. Paul - Phil 3:7-8

b. Paul - 2 Cor 4:2 - renounced sin, moved ahead in transparency and truth

c. Joseph running from Potiphar's wife

d. Isaiah 6:8

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

Be sure to make time to have your group pray with and for one other. Are there other ways they can support each other as they make practical changes in their lives? Encourage them to call each other through the week to follow up on how things are going (and of course you may want to set an example in this area yourself.)

Encourage your group to take the time to record the most significant things they've learned about God and about themselves this week in the "Where We've Been" chart.

*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.'*

John 8:31-32

As the study winds down, and you and your group members move forward to application, you may find this resource helpful: Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives For Spiritual Transformation*. (InterVarsity Press, 2006).

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 is a very helpful follow up to Rational Worship.

**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?** In our minds. This is why our minds are so key in the process of sanctification.

**4. Look again at Romans 8 that we studied in week 5. In the three verses, 8:5-7, how often are our minds mentioned?** "mind" mentioned 5x + pronouns for "mind" twice more

**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)**

By the Spirit, to put to death the misdeeds of the body → so that we will live

Read together the excerpt from the article: “Wired for Change” by Laura Barwegen included in the participants’ study booklet)

**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) Two steps – both necessary: Stop using the old paths and start using new ones. Stop feeding the lie, living in the lie, and instead choose to live in and act on the truth. Stop acting like we have an obligation to the sinful nature (8:12) and start living under the control of the Spirit (8:13)

**NOTE: This is not easy – it is a war – see Romans 7:23.**

It can be hard to recognize lies. Adam and Eve were the strongest that humans can be. They were sinless. All their needs were met. They were walking in intimate, unbroken communion with God. Yet Satan deceived them with a few minutes of conversation.

**- 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 Spirit . . . "**

**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. 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?** The truth frees us from lies and their effects – this may seem obvious, but it is key! The *only* way to be free is to live in light of the truth.

Throughout the Bible, the connection between lies and death is clear. In week 2 we saw the beginning of this connection. Satan lied about God's character. Adam and Eve believed the lie and acted on it and as a result experienced death in all the facets of their being – broken relationships with creation, with other people, with themselves, and with God. Jesus reinforces the fact of this connection between lies and death in his description of Satan in John 8:44. “He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for

there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." He is a murderer. He is a liar. The way he kills is through his lies. Lies lead to death.

But it is equally clear that the truth leads to life. *"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free."* *"I am the way, the truth, and the life."*

## **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?**

Practical suggestions:

- small book or envelope of note cards to keep recording and reviewing key verses
- note cards taped to mirrors or fridge or on desk
- creating associations with common objects or actions
- setting watch alarm to certain hours to remind us to stop and remember God's faithfulness
- music – often songs keep going through our heads in ways that words without music doesn't
- habit of Scripture memory – review at consistent times – eg breakfast or bedtime
- listen to recorded Scripture while commuting or exercising
- build intentional community with others – we need to help each other remember and replace lies with truth in our lives!

Saturation with the truth is key. As we hear Jesus speak, we learn to recognize his voice (John 10:4-5). When you recognize the voice of a loved one, for example on the other end of a phone, what kinds of things do you recognize about it? How do you recognize them? (Special nicknames, their tone of voice, the kinds of things they are likely to say, etc) What kinds of things do you recognize about Jesus' voice? He speaks in ways consistent with his character and truth stated in his word (love, gentleness, holiness). He will not contradict himself. His correction brings us to healing grief rather than accusation which brings shame. Etc.

We are commanded repeatedly throughout the Bible to "remember." Remember God's character. Remember how he has acted on your behalf. *"Do this in remembrance of me."*

### **Communion and pray for each other.**

If your tradition permits, consider ending this session breaking bread together in celebration of the life and truth into which God has called us. As we take the bread and the cup, we are affirming the truth – the truth of our sinfulness and need of Christ's sacrifice. The truth of God's wonderful love for us which provided the sacrifice. The truth that all things are from him, and through him, and to him, that he is the center of the universe. That we are his beloved children. Wanted. Delighted in. Welcomed into the inner life of the trinity. Loved by God in the same way he loves his Son. All this and more

we celebrate – the truth of who God is and who we are in him.

And as we eat and drink, we are also making a commitment. We are sharing in Christ's death. Yes, he died for us so that we would not need to die. He took our place, bore our punishment so that we would not need to be separated from God, so that we could enter into the relationship he shares with his Father. In that sense, because he died, we do not die. But in another sense, we share in his death.

We are committing afresh to refuse to live in the lie that Satan presented in the garden and that he still presents today – that God is not good. That he is withholding something from us. We are affirming instead our choice to live in the truth – that God is good beyond our imaginations. That his desires for us are wonderfully, lavishly good. And that it is out of his love that he sends his Son who offers himself, saying, "take and eat. This is my body, broken for you," and "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am" (John 17). We are committing to live in that truth in the only way that makes sense – offering ourselves to God as living sacrifices. Not out of fear or duty, but out of love and thankfulness and worship.

Possible songs to play during communion:

With all my Affection – Brian Doerksen

Reign in Us – Ben Glover, Jon Neufeld, Tim Neufeld

I Give My Life Back to You – Stephanie Robinson

Benediction: Jude 24-25

## 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.

<sup>2</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), . חזק.

<sup>3</sup> Ray Ortlund, *A Passion for God: Prayers and Meditations on the Book of Romans* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1994), 131–132.

<sup>4</sup> Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*.

<sup>5</sup> Darrell Johnson, “Praying By the Book,” 2005, <http://www.regentaudio.com/RGDL3515S>.

### Week 2

<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965), 180.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>3</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>4</sup> Ortlund, *A Passion for God: Prayers and Meditations on the Book of Romans*, 37.

<sup>5</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 5

<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Accordance Electronic Edition, Version 1.0 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> *The KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon*, accessed January 29, 2013, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/sumphutos.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Smith, *Beginning Well* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2001), 164.

<sup>4</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1997), 152.