

Session 1: Romans 8:1–17

NOTE TO LEADER

We intentionally created this study guide with more than enough material so that you can pick the questions that work best for your group. Before your meeting, watch the video, read the study guide's corresponding session, and decide which questions you'd like to discuss. For more information on using this guide in your group, click the three lines in the menu bar and select How to Use This Guide. Thank you for choosing this study and for faithfully leading your group.

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: When we surrender to the Spirit, he empowers us to please God with our actions, thoughts, and motivations.

Head Change: To know that, in the Spirit, we have been freed from the law of sin and death because we've been adopted by the Father through Christ.

Heart Change: To feel confident that God will keep us and empower us to live faithfully to the end of our lives.

Life Change: To surrender fully to the Spirit and believe that we are children of God and heirs with Christ.

OPEN

What is the greatest book you've ever read? What makes it great?

Good books have a way of making their mark on us, even transforming us, as the book of Romans most certainly does. In *The Book of Romans: Part 2*, we'll be making our way through the second half of Paul's letter to the Romans, which many consider the greatest book in the Bible. Our study being in the eighth chapter, which is lauded as one of the most powerful chapters in Romans. But what is it about this book and this chapter in particular that makes such a profound impact on its readers?

In session 1, J.D. Greear will introduce us to the “revolutionary, life-defining, and relationship-transforming truth of Romans” — there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

READ

Read Romans 8:1–17.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What are the two things that the gospel's “no condemnation” declaration frees us from?

What are the four components of “fighting in the Spirit”?

What is the central question J.D. says *The Book of Romans, Part 2* will address?

Show Session 1: *Romans 8:1–17* (12 minutes).

DISCUSS

In *The Book of Romans, Part 1*, we discussed Paul's use of the words “for” and “therefore” and how they contribute to the flow of his argument. In Romans 8, Paul opens with one of those words — “therefore” — building on the points he made in the first half of

the book about our ongoing struggle with sin and Christ's power to overcome our sin.

Read Romans 8:1–11.

Romans 8:1 is one of the most stunning statements in all the Bible—a passage that J.D. described as “revolutionary” and “life-defining.” Paul tells us “there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.” In other words, because Christ died in our place, the punishment that we deserve for our sin has been wholly placed upon him—there is no punishment left for those whose faith is in Christ. **In what ways do you struggle with the thought that God has condemned you? How could you use this verse to combat that thought?**

*[For further study on what it means to be “in Christ,” see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

In verse 2, Paul goes on to tell us why there is no condemnation for Christians. “Because,” he says, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.” We who are in Christ have been liberated from our enslavement to sin and death. **Do you feel liberated from the power of sin? Why, or why not?**

What does it look like to remind yourself that the power of sin has been replaced with the power of the Spirit in you? How can that reminder be “revolutionary” in your relationship with Jesus?

God the Father sent his Son to live a life of perfect obedience and to die in our place for our sin. He fulfilled God's law on our behalf and, by our faith, has applied his obedience to our account, which frees us from what J.D. called the “performance trap.” **Why is it**

good news that Jesus fulfilled God’s law? In what ways does it remove your need to “perform” for God in order to obtain righteousness?

Verses 5–6 clearly contrast two ways of living: “according to the flesh,” or in a worldly, sinful way, and “according to the Spirit,” or in a way that is godly. To live in a worldly way leads to death and to live in a godly way leads to life and peace. **Before becoming a Christian, what did your life look like? What was the result of your worldly living? In what ways does your life differ now that you live in a godly way?**

In verses 5–7, Paul fixates on our mindset. What we set our mind on steers our lives. **How would you describe your typical mindset? How does it compare to the two mindsets (mind set on the flesh, mind set on the Spirit) Paul describes in these verses?**

What can we do to keep our minds set on godly things and not on worldly things? What would change about our lives if we kept a godly mindset more often?

*[For ideas on how to keep our minds set on godly things, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

In verse 8, Paul says “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Stated differently, those with their minds set on worldly, sinful things cannot live as God instructs them—they cannot please him. But Paul doesn’t end there. He goes on to encourage his readers in verse 9. While it may be impossible for those who are in the flesh to please God, Paul contends that Christians—those who have his Spirit—*can* please God. In fact, God is already pleased with us. **In what ways does knowing that God is pleased with you change the way you think about**

yourself? What difference does it make to your day-to-day life?

Paul makes a startling claim in verse 11, saying that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now lives in us who are Christians, releasing us from the power of sin. **If the Spirit of Christ lives in you, what does that mean about your ability to obey his commands? Your ability to overcome your sin?**

If God's Spirit lives in you, how certain can you be that you, too, will be raised from the dead? Why?

Read Romans 8:12–17.

It's common to think that we can't help but sin. But in verse 12, Paul states that “we are not obligated to live according to the flesh.” By God's Spirit, we now have the ability to choose obedience instead of sin. **In what ways do you still find it difficult to keep yourself from sin? How would you describe what it's like to choose between obedience and disobedience? How does the Spirit help you in your fight against sin?**

To “live according to the flesh,” leads to death. However, as Paul says in verse 13, if we “put to death the deeds of the body” we will live. The Holy Spirit helps us to overcome sin and leads us to life. **When you consider your day-to-day life, how aware are you of the Spirit's role in guiding you to faithfulness? How can you be more aware of and dependent on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life?**

The idea of “putting to death the deeds of the body” is harsh and violent language, suggesting that we should take fighting sin seriously. **How serious are you about fighting sin in your life?**

In what ways could you take the battle against sin even more seriously?

J.D. shared four ways to fight sin: confession, surrender, submersion in the gospel, and memorizing Scripture. **Which of these four components do you find most challenging? Why? What steps can you take to grow in each of these areas?**

Who in your life could you recruit to help you grow in your ability to fight in the Spirit?

The Spirit we have received does not lead us to fear. Instead, he leads us to the Father: by the Spirit we cry out, ‘*Abba, Father*’ (v. 15). **What would you say are the differences between having a spirit that leads to fear and the Spirit who leads us to the Father? How might the differences you listed play out in a person’s behavior? In what ways do you continue to live under the influence of the spirit that leads to fear?**

*[Note: For further study on the Aramaic term “Abba,” see **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this session.]*

Paul ends this portion of his letter with an encouragement to his readers. In verses 16–17, he writes that God’s Spirit “testifies”—or confirms—with our spirit “that we are God’s children.” And since we’re God’s children, we are heirs of his kingdom right alongside Christ. **When you think of what it means to be an heir, what thoughts and images come to mind? What’s unique about being an heir of God?**

The Spirit of God and the gospel of God always work together. We believe the gospel and receive the Spirit, who over time takes us deeper into the gospel. He makes us children and heirs of God and, as we surrender to him, he comforts and strengthens us

even though we face difficulty and sufferings as Christ did. **In what ways have you suffered due to your faith in God? How has the Spirit used your suffering to remind you that you belong to God? How has God used your suffering to make you more like Christ?**

In what areas of your life do you need to surrender to the Spirit? What could it look like to surrender to God through difficulty?

LAST WORD

In Romans 8:1–17, Paul presents two ways of living: in the flesh or in the Spirit. To live in the flesh is to walk the road leading to death. But to live in the Spirit is to experience true life—life in fellowship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Christians have been welcomed into the family of God. As God’s children, now free from the law of sin and death, we have been filled with and empowered by his Spirit to live according to his ways. Whereas we were once “obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh,” we can now enjoy “life and peace” by his Spirit.

Let’s commit ourselves to surrender to and pursue fellowship with the Spirit this week.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We’ve highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of the book of Romans.

1. *What does it mean to be “in Christ”?*

Romans 8:1 tells us that “there is no condemnation for those *in Christ Jesus*” (emphasis added). But what does it mean to be “in” Christ, how do we get there, and what are the benefits?

Read Galatians 3:23–27 and Ephesians 1:13–14.

To be “in Christ” means that we have been united to him “through faith” in the gospel by the Holy Spirit. **When did your faith in Jesus and his gospel begin? What was your understanding of your relationship with Jesus at that time?**

In what ways do you find it encouraging that our union with Christ comes through faith and not by our efforts?

Read Ephesians 1:3–12.

In this passage, the apostle Paul includes a long list of blessings, or “benefits,” that those who are in Christ enjoy. **When you read this passage, which of these benefits stands out most to you? Why?**

The benefits of being in Christ don’t only consist in what’s been given to us, but also in what’s been taken from us, namely sin and condemnation. We are no longer destined to incur God’s wrath. **Do you ever feel like God is still upset with you or going to punish you when you mess up? How might you confront that thought with the truth of the passage you just read?**

Our union with Christ is one of the most glorious doctrines in the Christian faith. By placing our faith in Jesus, we have been united with him and have been blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” Spend a few minutes reading slowly again through Ephesians 1:3–14. Give thanks that, by his Spirit, God the Father has united you with his Son, Jesus Christ.

2. *The Mindset of the Spirit*

Paul contends in Romans 8:5–7 that what we set our thoughts on dictates how we live. For those with their mind set on worldly things, they live at odds with the way of God. On the other hand, those with their mind set on godly things live with the mindset of the Spirit. Paul’s words here should spark a couple of questions. First, what is the mindset of the Spirit? And secondly, how are we to set our mind on the things of the Spirit?

Read John 16:13–14.

Addressing his disciples, Jesus says that when the Spirit of truth—the Holy Spirit—“comes . . . He will glorify me.” In other words, the Spirit’s primary role is concerned with glorifying Christ. **How often is your mindset focused on glorifying Jesus? What are the things that distract you from bringing him glory?**

According to Paul’s logic, our mindset directly contributes to the way that we live. So, if we are living in the Spirit, we should be thinking about glorifying Jesus. **In what ways does having a mind set on glorifying Jesus help us to glorify him with our actions? What examples do you have from your own life when a godly mindset led to godly living?**

It isn't hard to occasionally set our minds on Christ. But God is not looking to split time with our sins. He wants to be the sole focus of our minds. The natural follow-up question is, "How do we *keep* the mindset of the Spirit?"

Read Colossians 3:1–3; Philippians 4:8; Galatians 5:22–23.

Paul's language in Colossians 3 is active. He charges his readers to "seek" and "set [our] minds on things that are above," meaning that we are to intentionally focus on eternal things—Jesus, his kingdom, the promises of God, etc. fix our minds on. **What are your methods for keeping your mind focused on eternal things? What are some of the distractions that send your mind wandering? What practical changes do you notice in your life when your mind is set on "things above?"**

What one thing can you do differently today that will help you set your mind on the things of the Spirit?

Our minds are an integral part of faithfully following Christ. Where our minds go, our behavior follows. Commit yourself today to set your mind on the Spirit by actively seeking the things that are above.

3. *"Abba, Father"*

In Romans 8:15, the apostle Paul interrupts the letter he's been writing in Greek with an Aramaic term, *abba*. What does the word *abba* mean, and why would Paul use it here in his letter to the church in Rome?

Read Romans 8:14–15.

In this verse, Paul places an Aramaic word and a Greek word—both of which mean “father”—side-by-side: *abba* (Aramaic) and *pater* (Greek). While *pater* is somewhat of a formal term, *abba* has more of an intimate connotation. In each case, Paul, like Jesus, is inviting readers to cry out to God their Father. **To what extent do you find it difficult to address God as your Father? Why?**

While the gospels were recorded in Greek, scholars generally agree that Jesus’s native language was Aramaic. So, in Matthew 6:9, where Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, it’s likely that he would have used *abba* to address God. In that sense, Paul is inviting us to address God with the same level of intimacy as Jesus. **What would change in your life if you fully accepted that God is your Father and you are his child? How might your prayers to him change?**

The most appropriate response to learning that we can cry out to God as our Father is to cry out to him in prayer. To that end, consider closing this session by reciting the Lord’s prayer from Matthew 6:9–13.

“Our Father in heaven,
Your name be honored as holy.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.”

Amen.

Session 2: Romans 8:18–30

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: We can faithfully endure suffering because we know that God will use it to make us more like Jesus.

Head Change: To know that the glory that awaits us will far exceed the sufferings we experience now.

Heart Change: To feel confident that God will use our trials for our ultimate good.

Life Change: To wait patiently for the return of Jesus and the redemption of our bodies, clinging to him by faith as we wait.

OPEN

When have you had to wait for something important? Would you say that your waiting was marked by patience or impatience?

Each of us at some point has had to exercise patience—we've all waited for things both large and small. From test results to job promotions to important packages, waiting is part of the human experience.

Christians, likewise, are no stranger to waiting. We wait—in hope, with patience and groaning—for Jesus to come back and free us from the pain that marks our lives. Paul addressed our present pain and the frustration of waiting in Romans 8:18–30. In this

session, J.D. will help us make sense of the topic that confounds so many of us: suffering.

READ

Read Romans 8:18–30.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What are the three myths about suffering J.D. addresses in this session?

What part of Romans 8:28 do we tend to overlook?

According to J.D., why does Paul address the topic of predestination in verse 29?

Show Session 2: *Romans 8:18–30* (12 minutes).

DISCUSS

Session 1 ended with Paul dipping his toe into the topic of suffering, which is right where Session 2 picks up. **Have you heard the mistaken belief that becoming a Christian will ensure that you have a life free from suffering, trials, and hardship? Where have you heard this myth taught? Do you feel the teaching helps us prepare for suffering? Why or why not?**

Read Romans 8:18–25.

Paul is not one to downplay the significance of suffering: he suffered a great deal himself. He puts our difficulties in perspective in verse 18 by comparing “the sufferings of this present time” with the glory that awaits Christians. **Why is it important for us to remember the glory to come when we’re**

experiencing hardship now? How can reflecting on future glory help us to endure faithfully today?

*[Note: To learn more about Paul's sufferings, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

J.D. said that this passage helps dispel several myths we sometimes believe about suffering. We might assume that if we live well, we can avoid suffering, or that suffering indicates we're in sin. We may even think finding the silver lining in our suffering will make things easier. **Which of these three myths are you most prone to believe? Why? How does this passage help to correct your thinking?**

When we are suffering, we tend to look for a quick way out. But Paul blends the ideas of suffering and waiting in this passage. In verses 19–25, we are said to wait alongside creation for the redemption of all things. **Are you good at waiting? Why, or why not? Why do you think we struggle to be patient in suffering?**

*[Note: For further study on the biblical concept of waiting, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

Paul says in verses 20–22 that the whole creation “groans” because of its bondage to decay and futility. All of creation—plants and animals and everything in between—cries out for and longs for the return King Jesus who will renew the world. **What are some of the ways you have seen creation “groan”?**

Paul goes on to highlight our own groaning, or longing, in verse 23. Alongside creation, we experience the brokenness of the world and long for the day Jesus will make it right. **What are the things that cause you to groan within yourself? Where do you turn in response to these longings?**

In what ways could your longing serve as prompts that lead you back to the gospel?

In verses 24–25, Paul brings up the topic of hope, which is the discipline of waiting patiently for that which we’ve not yet seen. The focus of Christian hope is the return of Christ, but our hopes can be misplaced in worldly things. Whatever you think will deliver you from groaning is your hope. **What are you hoping for? In what ways are your hopes connected to the hope Paul commends in this passage? In what ways are they disconnected?**

We may struggle to fully trust Christ because we don’t feel like he will deliver us from our suffering. So, instead of waiting for him, we turn to money, affection, acclaim, or materialism to give us peace in chaos. **What behaviors would change if your hopes were fully fixed on Christ and his return?**

*[Note: For further study on biblical hope, see **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this session.]*

Read Romans 8:26–30.

In verse 26, we see that the Spirit also groans, but not in pain. As he prays for us, he “intercedes for us with unspoken groanings.” We don’t always know what to pray, Paul says, so the Spirit helps us, yearning to connect our hearts to God. **How often do you find yourself wanting to pray but not knowing what to pray for? In what ways does it encourage you to know that, in those moments, the Spirit himself prays for you?**

Not only does the Spirit pray for us, but he prays for us “according to the will of God.” **What does it look like to pray according to the will of God?**

In what ways does having the Spirit intercede for us “according to the will of God” remove the pressure we might feel to be perfect in our prayer life?

Romans 8:28 is one of the most quoted verses in all the Bible. And while it is a heartening verse, it’s also frequently misused or taken out of context. It is often misunderstood to mean God will only give us good things, instead it means that God will use all things—good and difficult—for our ultimate good. **What changes about your reading of Romans 8:28 when you consider that God uses every situation for our eternal good? In what ways can difficult situations be used for our good?**

In verse 29, Paul brings up what J.D. called the “p-word”: predestination. While some regard predestination as a controversial or alarming concept, J.D. argued that Paul is trying to give readers assurance that no matter what we face God will keep us to the end and make us like Jesus. **What are your thoughts and impressions of predestination? What is your church’s stance on predestination?**

There are a number of viewpoints on predestination, but the main point is Paul’s intent to assure his readers that none of their sufferings are wasted; God is using them for their ultimate good. **In what ways could the concept of predestination strengthen your assurance that you have been adopted by God? How can the doctrine of predestination help you endure the trials you’ll inevitably face?**

In verse 30, Paul takes the concept of predestination and carries it to its logical end. In eternity, we will be with Christ, reigning alongside him forever. If we have been predestined, he implies, we have surely been called and justified, and will one day be glorified. **How can our future glorification help inform the way we live today?**

To be glorified is to be made like Jesus—to be fully conformed to his image—and to reign with him in the new heavens and new earth forever. If God uses all things to make us like Christ, then even our current sufferings—difficult as they are—are preparing us for eternal glory. **In what ways might your current sufferings and afflictions be preparing you for glory? What does it look like for you to trust God in your present disappointment, heartbreak, or pain?**

LAST WORD

Romans 8 is an iconic passage of Scripture. It shows us to the heights of God’s grace and, at the same time, it sobers us to the reality of suffering.

As Christians, adopted by God and filled with his Spirit, we now find ourselves waiting. And while we wait, we “experience the sufferings of this present time,” as Paul says. But even as we suffer, we are helped by God’s Spirit, we are reminded of the glory that awaits us, and we move forward knowing that the God who has called us to himself is using our hardships to make us more like his Son.

So, remember this today: the trials you’re currently facing—whatever they are—“are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.” Our suffering is not meaningless, a sign of God’s absence, or a punishment for unfaithfulness. God, in his majesty, uses the results of the Fall to make us like his son.

If even suffering makes us like Jesus, what can possibly separate us from him?

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of the book of Romans.

1. Paul's Sufferings

The Bible doesn't shy away from the concept of suffering. Jesus himself tells us that we "will have suffering in this world" (John 16:33). Even Paul, one of the greatest apostles, was no stranger to suffering. In several of his letters, he lists the trials and hardships he endured as a follower of Jesus.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:24–28.

In this passage, Paul shares a lengthy list of the trials he endured as a Christian. **What stands out to you about Paul's hardships?**

Paul's list includes unjust suffering (persecutions) as well as self-imposed suffering (hardships from his travels), all for the sake of the gospel. **What were some of the persecutions he faced? What hardships came about due to his missionary lifestyle and the travel it entailed? What can we learn from Paul and his willingness to endure both?**

In what ways have you experienced hardships similar to Paul's?

Amazingly, in verse 28, Paul equates all his sufferings—some of them unimaginable to most of us—with the “daily pressure” he feels for the churches he had planted across the Mediterranean. Paul was so burdened by the love he felt for the churches that he included it in his list of trials. **How would you describe the love and concern you feel for your church? Are you willing to suffer for them the way Paul suffered? Why, or why not?**

Is there anyone outside the church you love so deeply that it pains you? In what ways are you praying or suffering for their sake?

How could you cultivate the kind of concern for them that Paul describes in this passage?

In this life, suffering is certain both for Christians and non-Christians alike. But Christians are called to love God above all and others before self. Jesus laid down his life for those he loved. Therefore, suffering is something that we, like Paul, can embrace. The gospel is worth it. The salvation of others is worth it. Glorifying Jesus is worth it. Spend some time this week reflecting on 2 Corinthians 11:24–28. What can you do to develop the willingness to suffer as Paul did?

2. On Waiting

“Wait for the Lord,” the Bible says. Repeatedly, we are commanded by God to wait. And, if we’re honest, waiting is hard. We don’t like it and, often, we’re not good at it. Nevertheless, it’s often what God tells us to do.

When we consider what it means to wait, we may be tempted to think in terms of inactivity or idleness. But the Bible presents the practice of waiting differently: waiting in the Bible is not passive, but active, eager, and expectant. **When you think about what it means to wait, what ideas and/or images come to mind?**

Read Psalm 27:14; Psalm 130:5–6; Lamentations 3:25–26. **How do your ideas and images of waiting compare to the Bible’s portrayal of waiting?**

In Psalm 130:5, the psalmist paints a vivid picture of what it looks like to wait, saying, “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope.” Waiting on the Lord, more than a stoppage of activity, is a deep expectation for God to move and to act. **When have you experienced the expectation for God to act that the psalmist describes in this verse? In what ways is expectation different from simply sitting around?**

We’re not commanded by God to wait simply for waiting’s sake—there is a purpose in our waiting. The purpose could range from the cultivation of strength to the building up of our faith. But, even more, the purpose of our waiting is this: “The Lord is good to those who wait for him” (Lam. 3:25). In our waiting, God seeks to do good for us. **How has God been good to you in your waiting? In what ways has he met your deepest expectations? How does reflecting on all the ways God has been good to you compel you to adopt an ongoing posture of waiting?**

To be human is to wait. But our waiting as Christians is not pointless, it is part of God’s process for making us more like Christ. Make a commitment today that you will “wait for the Lord.”

3. *Biblical Hope*

Hope is a word we hear often today. We hope it doesn't rain. We hope we'll get that promotion. We hope our child isn't getting sick. We typically use the word "hope" akin to wishful thinking. But the Bible's conception of hope is different.

Read Romans 8:23–25 and Acts 24:14–15. **In these passages, what does Paul say he has placed his hope in? In what ways do your hopes differ from Paul's?**

While our definition of hope is more like wishful thinking, the Greek word for hope in both these passages is the word *elpis*, which means something more like "expectation" or "confidence." It is a resting assurance that God will fulfill his promises and work for our good in his timing. **How does the Greek word *elpis* help strengthen your understanding of what it means to practice hope?**

Biblical hope is not a general and undefined practice we are commanded to do. Instead, we are called to place our hope—our expectation, our confidence—specifically in God and his promises. **In the past, where have you placed your hope? Where are your hopes placed now?**

As Paul says in Romans 8, our hope is placed in something we don't yet see—our resurrection and the return of Christ. That may not feel like a powerful anchor in the storms of life. But, when we know how our stories end, we can rest, even when the world is in chaos. **What is causing you anxiety today? How do you try to alleviate that anxiety? What could you do today to better align your hope with the future God promises to us?**

Worldly hope and biblical hope could not be more different. Worldly hope is vague and whimsical, wishing for an imagined future. Biblical hope is a confidence grounded in the certain promises of God. Because the Word of God is sure, we know that our “hope will not disappoint us” (Rom. 5:5). Spend some time in prayer, asking God to stir up your hope—your confidence—in him and his promises.

Session 3: Romans 8:31–39

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: When we remember that God has bound himself to us in love through Christ, we'll be able to face and triumph over any hardship we encounter.

Head Change: To know that Christ's death and resurrection prove God's love for us.

Heart Change: To feel reassured that no hardship we face will ever separate us from the love of God in Christ.

Life Change: To trust that God's love for us is so strong that nothing can take it from us.

OPEN

Have you ever bought or inherited something of high value? What was it? What was required of you to obtain it? What lengths have you gone to keep and preserve it?

When something is important to us, we'll go out of our way to protect it. Like the lengths we take to obtain and keep our own valuables, Paul, in this passage communicates what God has done to secure salvation for those he values. And because God has gone to such great lengths, we can be certain that he will take care of us no matter what we face. In today's session, J.D. will encourage us as he examines Paul's argument for how God causes us to triumph through the work of Christ.

READ

Read Romans 8:31–39.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

How many rhetorical questions does Paul ask in this passage?

According to J.D., what is the primary way our self-esteem is established?

What distinguishes a conqueror from someone who is “more than a conqueror”?

Show Session 3: *Romans 8:31–39* (10 minutes).

DISCUSS

So far in Romans 8, Paul has built an argument on what it means to live as Jesus’s followers. In verse 31, Paul poses a question that builds on what he’s written thus far in chapter 8. **How would you summarize all that he’s discussed thus far in Romans 8?**

Read Romans 8:31–39.

Paul answers the first of several rhetorical questions with another question in verse 31, “If God is for us, who is against us?” It’s an important question to begin with because how we answer it reveals our understanding of God. **When have you questioned that God is for you? What events or circumstances caused you to have those questions?**

In what ways do you still find it hard to believe that God is for you? Why?

*[Note: For a look at the role of questions and catechism in the faith, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

In verse 32, Paul follows his opening question with a resounding answer. We can know that God is for us because God “did not even spare his own Son but offered him up for us all.” **How does the death of Jesus on the cross prove that God is for us?**

J.D. called Paul’s following questions an “eruption of praise” from Paul. Knowing that God is for us, Paul asks, “Who can bring an accusation against God’s elect?” The implied answer is, “no one.” **What accusations do you find yourself having to regularly combat in your life? In what ways does knowing that God has made you righteous shape the way you view those accusations?**

In verse 34, Paul goes one step further, speaking not just of accusations but of condemnation. We no longer experience condemnation because Jesus was condemned in our place. If you are in Christ, sin no longer holds any sway on your life—not even the power of shame or guilt. **Do you ever feel condemned for your sin? What are the sources of these feelings? How could Paul’s threefold response in these verses (Christ’s death, resurrection, intercession) correct your feelings of condemnation?**

For most of us, the question underneath every question is “Does God love me?” Paul addresses this question head-on, starting in verse 35. **To what extent do you wrestle with the question of God’s love for you? What arguments or thoughts bolster your doubt?**

In verse 35, Paul wonders if Christ’s love for us is dependable. He lists several things—affliction, distress, persecution, famine,

nakedness, danger, sword—that might convince us that his love is fickle. He even quotes Psalm 44 to acknowledge our tendency to doubt God’s love. But his answer is emphatic: “No.” Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. **What in your life has proven God’s love is dependable? What could it look like to remind yourself of God’s unchanging love when you face doubts?**

*[Note: For further study on Psalm 44, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

J.D. asked, “If nothing can separate me from the love of Christ, is there anything in the universe left to fear?” **How would you answer his question? What situations in your life cause you to fear? In what ways does the love of Christ embolden us to live without fear?**

Paul says in verse 37 that “in all these things we are more than conquerors *through him* who loved us” (emphasis added). To be “more than a conqueror” is not only to defeat our enemy, as J.D. pointed out, but to make the enemy serve our purposes. **How can we use what our enemy means for evil—like suffering and affliction—to serve the purposes of God in our lives?**

Paul closes this chapter by doubling down on everything he’s just written. He says he is “persuaded” (some translations use the word “convinced,” some use “sure,” but the sentiment is the same) that what he’s about to write is true. He firmly believes in God’s love for him. **What words would you use to convey your belief that God loves you? Do you believe as firmly as Paul did or is your belief more of a work in progress? What would it take to convince you that God’s love for you is immovable?**

Paul ends chapter 8 with a famously bold claim: “Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” **What item(s) from this list still make you question God’s love for you? Are you afraid that there’s something you can do to fall out of God’s love? Based on this passage, what do you think Paul would say to your questions or objections?**

*[Note: For a different look at Romans 8:38–39, see **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this session.]*

Doubt is normal, especially when we feel alone or like our prayers aren’t heard. But you don’t have to live unsure of God’s love. Jesus is God’s living proof of his love. If God would send his own son to die for you, how much must he love you? If you feel far from God, anchor your heart to the truth of Romans 8:38–39. **How might your life change if you made Romans 8:38–39 your foundation? How could you remind yourself of God’s love for you in moments when you are prone to doubt?**

LAST WORD

God loves you. No matter what trials, afflictions, or hardships you face, he loves you. He’s proven his love by sending Jesus to die in your place. Because Jesus died, rose from the dead, and intercedes for us now, we can be certain that nothing can separate us from God’s love for us in Christ. Nothing now or in the future, nothing you’ve done or will do, not a single thing can ever remove his love from you.

Set aside fifteen minutes this week to sit and meditate on the wonder of God’s perfect, unchanging, immovable love for you in Christ Jesus. Hear and believe these words: God loves you.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of the book of Romans.

1. The Beauty of Questions and Catechisms

As Paul shows in Romans 8:31–39, asking good questions can play an important part in the practice of our faith. Questions cause us to be curious and go deeper into the truths of our theology.

For centuries the church has used formal systems of questions and answers called catechisms as a teaching and discipleship tool to instruct Christians in the faith and its practice. But some traditions used it more than others. **Did you grow up with catechism in church? Does the church where you belong now use catechism?**

If you're familiar with catechism, what's been your approach to it in the past? How do you feel about it now?

There are several well-known catechisms that Christians have used for centuries—the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism are great examples—and a more contemporary option that has grown popular is the New City Catechism.

Read the following excerpt from the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Question 1: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Question 2: What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

Answer: The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

Question 3: What do the Scriptures principally teach?

A. The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism consists of 107 total questions and answers, which walk people through the major doctrines and beliefs of the Christian faith. **In what ways do you think it would be helpful to utilize catechism as a teaching/learning tool? Who in your life would benefit from the practice of catechesis?**

What's clear, regardless of how long we've been following Jesus, is that we are in continual need of instruction in the teachings and practices of the Christian faith. **How could you integrate catechism into your own daily or weekly routine? What might change about your practice of the Christian faith by reciting questions and answers like these regularly?**

Whether we know it or not, we are all being catechized—discipled—by something all the time. We must consider who or what is discipling us, and what kind of person is it forming us to be. With Christian catechism, we can be sure that we're being discipled in the faith and formed into the image of Christ. Consider today how

you might integrate the New City Catechism (or some other option) into your regular routine. **Whether you use a formal catechism or not, how could you be intentional about asking and answering thoughtful questions as a discipleship practice?**

2. *Psalm 44*

In the middle of Paul's emphatic declaration that God loves us, he interjects a passage from Psalm 44, a psalm that wrestles with God's love. So, what can we learn about Romans 8:35–39 from Psalm 44?

Read Psalm 44; Romans 8:35–39.

In Psalm 44, the psalmist is trying to make sense of what God is allowing to happen to the Israelites. They have been told of God's faithfulness and have been faithful to him, yet they find themselves being severely oppressed. **What parallels do you see between Psalm 44 and Romans 8:35–39? In what ways are the psalmist's questions like the ones we ask when we suffer?**

Why do you think afflictions cause us to question God's love so quickly?

In Psalm 44:22, the psalmist writes that they are being put to death *because of God*. While we may not experience this level of oppression and persecution, we certainly encounter trials and hardships that confound us and even cause us to accuse God. **Have you ever blamed or faulted God for your hardships? How did those trials and hardships make you feel toward God? What were your prayers like during that season?**

The psalmist is desperate for God to “rise up” and “help.” In our moments of trial, we’re often desperate for God as well. Maybe we’re desperate for him to move on our behalf. Or maybe we’re just desperate for him to show us that he loves us. **When have you been desperate for God? How did he prove to be faithful to you in your desperation?**

In a sense, Romans 8 is Paul’s declaration that the closing plea of Psalm 44 has been fulfilled. While the psalmist pleads desperately with God to “redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love,” Paul asserts that, in Christ, our desperate cries have been heard and redemption has been accomplished—God’s steadfast love has been set upon us, never to be removed. **In what ways can remembering God’s faithful love carry us through times of trial and hardship?**

As Christians, we can know that whether we’re on the mountaintop or in the valley, God’s love for us doesn’t waver. He has set his faithful love upon us, and nothing can separate us from it. Spend some time in prayer, asking God to deepen your belief that he loves you.

3. Another Look at Romans 8:38–39

For Christians, reading the Bible can sometimes become routine. When that happens, it may help to shake up some of our Bible reading habits—like trying another translation or listening to an audio Bible, for instance. Today, we’ll do that by supplementing our Bible intake with a reading of Romans 8:38–39 from *The Message*.

The Message sometimes gets a bad rap, often because of a misunderstanding of what it is. Rather than a word-for-word translation of the Bible's original language into English, *The Message* functions more like a paraphrase, and it can be a helpful supplemental resource.

Read Romans 8:38–39 (CSB):

“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Now, read Romans 8:38–39 from *The Message*:

“I’m absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely *nothing* can get between us and God’s love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.”

How does the language used in *The Message* differ from what we find in the CSB translation? What similarities do you see?

Some of what makes *The Message* a helpful tool is the way it contemporizes the Bible’s language, using words and imagery that we’re more accustomed to. **How do the different word selections in *The Message* help you to make more sense of the original text? How does it help you make fresh observations or insights from the passage?**

Romans 8:38–39 is a passage that is squarely about the love of God that is fixed upon us in Christ. **What people do you know that exude the kind of confidence in God’s love that Paul**

has? How could you spend more time with them and learn from them? What else can you do to become “absolutely convinced,” like Paul, of the love God has for you?

Believing that God loves you, especially with the fervency that Paul conveys here in this passage, has life-transforming implications. Make a commitment to spend more time with people whose life has been transformed by the love of God and pray that he would continue to transform you by his love as well.

Session 4: Romans 9:1–33

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: Our salvation was an act of God’s mercy that should humble, comfort, and embolden us to share Christ with others.

Head Change: To know that in Christ we are recipients of God’s mercy.

Heart Change: To feel gratitude that God has chosen to be merciful to us.

Life Change: To share the good news of God’s mercy with those who are not yet followers of Jesus.

OPEN

What’s something awe-inspiring you sometimes wonder about—the expanse of the universe, why people think a certain way, how birds can fly? Have you found answers to satisfy your curiosity?

There are questions we ask regularly, some more answerable than others, that confound us. In Romans 9, Paul asks some of the stickiest questions that Christians and non-Christians alike both grapple with: Who does God’s choose? What does it mean to be chosen by God? Why does God choose some and not others? For that reason, this chapter is often regarded as one of the most difficult to understand in all the Bible.

But in this session, J.D. will show that Romans 9 is written not to confuse or confound us, but to provide the people of God with hope and encouragement and to strengthen our resolve to share Christ with others.

READ

Read Romans 9:1–33.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What objection prompts Paul’s discussion in Romans chapter 9?

What is the ultimate “end” that God pursues in all things?

Salvation is something that God owes to how many of us?

Show Session 4: *Romans 9:1–33* (14 minutes).

DISCUSS

After writing what many consider the greatest chapter in the Bible —Romans 8—Paul turns to address the tension between God’s sovereignty and our free will, making it one of the most difficult passages of Scripture in the Bible. **After reading this chapter and hearing J.D.’s teaching, what were some of the difficulties that stood out to you? What makes them so challenging?**

*[Note: For further study on the concept of God’s sovereignty, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

Read Romans 9:1–5.

Paul opens chapter 9 writing about the sorrow and anguish he feels for his fellow Israelites who don't acknowledge Christ. He even says in verse 3 that he wishes he "were accursed and cut off from Christ" for their sake. **What does it communicate about his love for these people that he's willing to be "cut off from Christ" for their benefit? Are there any unbelievers in your life whom you feel similarly toward? To what lengths are you currently going to share the good news with them?**

Speaking of the Israelites, Paul says that the story of God belongs to them and that from their ancestors "came the Christ." Yet they missed him. It is the same for people around us in everyday life. Many hear about Jesus, maybe even grew up in church, but they do not see him as Lord. **In what ways are we tempted to chastise people for not recognizing Christ? With Paul as our example, what would be a more appropriate response to unbelief?**

What can we do to cultivate compassion for the people in our lives who don't yet believe in Jesus?

Read Romans 9:6–13.

After mentioning and lamenting over the unbelief of many Israelites, Paul addresses a question that he supposes his readers are likely to raise because of the promises God had made with Israel: "Has God failed to keep his word?" **How does Paul answer this question? Have you ever asked a similar question? What answers did you arrive at?**

*[Note: For further study on the trustworthiness of God's Word, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

In verses 6–8, Paul makes a couple of statements that his readers may have found surprising. He says that not all who come from Israel are actually Israelites, because being a member of God’s people is not a matter of physical lineage. In other words, being God’s child is not determined by one’s ethnic identity, but personal trust in God’s promises. **How does this passage help to reassure you that you are God’s child?**

In verses 9–12, Paul, points readers back to the book of Genesis. He recounts the stories of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Esau, highlighting what theologians refer to as the doctrine of election, or God’s freedom to extend mercy to those he chooses. **What thoughts and emotions come to mind when you encounter Paul’s argument for election? In what ways is the doctrine of election comforting to you? In what ways do you find it troubling?**

***Leader Note:** The concept of election can spark strong thoughts and emotions, and that’s okay. Wrestling through difficult topics like this one can be long and hard work, but it’s worth it.*

Read Romans 9:14–33.

Paul assumes some of his readers will object to the assertion that God elects some as his children and not others. But in verse 15 he persists in his argument, pointing back to the Old Testament once again—this time to Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. **What can we learn about God through his interaction with Pharaoh? How can the example of Pharaoh instruct us how we respond to God?**

Commenting on God’s prerogative to extend mercy to some and not others, J.D. noted that mercy, by definition, “excludes any sense of obligation.” To receive mercy is to receive something that

we do not deserve. God owes us nothing, but by his grace, he freely gives us mercy. **Why do you think we sometimes assume that mercy is something we're owed? If we have received God's mercy, in what ways should we respond?**

In what ways does God's mercy embolden us to share Christ with others? What do you do to share God's mercy with those around you?

From Jacob and Esau to Pharaoh, Paul makes his point that God extends mercy to whomever he pleases. But the mercy and hardening he effects naturally leads us to a follow-up question: Why does God still find fault with those who don't believe his promises if God is the one who "wills" their unbelief? **How would you answer this question? How does Paul answer this question?**

J.D. used Pharaoh as an example to help us understand why we are still held accountable for our unbelief. He said that God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart came only after Pharaoh had hardened his own heart. **Have you ever experienced hard-heartedness? How long did it last? What did God use to soften your heart?**

Have you ever considered that it was God's mercy to soften your heart and not further harden it, as he did with Pharaoh?

Paul uses a series of contrasting words and phrases to make clear that God is God (and can do what he wants), and we are not. He contrasts "mere man" with "God," "what is formed" with "the one who formed it," and "clay" with "potter." **In what ways does acknowledging that God is our creator help to correct our objections or discomfort with God choosing who receives his mercy? What are some of the practical effects of**

recognizing the creator-creature distinction between God and us?

In the next few verses, Paul uses several attention-grabbing words like “wrath,” “power,” “patience,” “mercy,” and “glory” to help illuminate what he imagines God is doing in the world. And, before quoting the Old Testament, he ends with the idea of glory. As Paul sees it, the purpose of God extending mercy to us is that we might see and enjoy his glory. **In a sentence, how would you describe the glory of God? In what way can the reality that we are destined for God’s glory change the way we live today?**

*[Note: For further study on Romans 9:22–24, see **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this session.]*

Paul makes it clear that God is calling both Jews and Gentiles to himself and, grounding this assertion in God’s Word, he proceeds to quote from the Old Testament. He tells us that God will welcome people who were once not his people—people like us. **What was your life like when you were not a part of God’s people? How has your life changed since being called to become one of God’s people? In what ways does being beloved by God shape the way you live every day?**

What might your life be like now if God hadn’t adopted you into his family?

J.D. closed this session by reminding us that “salvation is something that God owes to none of us, but he offers it to all of us.” He said that we should respond to that truth in at least three ways. It should humble us, embolden us to share Christ with others, and comfort us. **In what ways have you been humbled by God’s mercy on you?**

Who in your life needs to hear the good news of God's mercy today?

How has God used the reality of his mercy to comfort you personally? In what ways do you need the comfort of his mercy right now?

LAST WORD

The mercy of God is a glorious thing. But, if we're honest, it can be disconcerting to know that none of us are entitled to it and not all of us are destined for it.

For those who have been adopted by the Father, saved by the Son, and sealed by the Spirit, though, the mercy of God is our lifeboat. And because God has shown us mercy, we can be assured that he will keep us and embolden us for our mission to share his mercy with others.

Let's commit ourselves to receive God's mercy with humility and gratitude and share it with those who are "not [his] people" so they can "be called sons of the living God."

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of the book of Romans.

1. *Sovereignty and Providence*

The sovereignty of God—his supreme power and authority—is a big, intimidating doctrine that can be disconcerting. If God is supremely powerful and possesses all authority to do whatever he wills, can he be trusted? The central question beneath all our discomfort with God’s sovereignty is, “Is God good?”

How would you answer these questions? Is God good? Can he be trusted? Why?

Read Psalm 145.

When we think of God’s sovereignty, we should think in tandem with the doctrine of God’s providence—his fatherly care for his creation. God possesses all power and authority to do whatever he wills, but he always acts according to his character. In his sovereignty, God lovingly provides for his creation. **What words and phrases does the psalmist use in Psalm 145 to communicate God’s sovereignty? What words and phrases does he use to communicate God’s providence?**

The psalmist writes of God’s care for his creation in surprising ways. He says God is compassionate, he’s “good to everyone,” and that he gives “them their food at the proper time,” and more. **How does it influence your view of God to read that he “is good to everyone” and that he has compassion “on all he has made”? In what ways do your assumptions about God change when you read that “The Lord helps all who fall”?**

When we hear the word “sovereignty” applied to God, we may imagine him as a cold and disaffected king who exercises his rule from a distance. But Psalm 145 paints a very different picture of God’s sovereignty. God’s rule is not cold and distant; instead, it’s marked by grace, compassion, provision, and goodness. **In what ways can God’s sovereignty and his providence be a comfort**

to you? What could change about your life if you fully entrusted yourself to God's providential care?

God's sovereignty and providence are meant to comfort us, to reassure us that God is good to us, near to us, and constantly working all things together for our good. Spend some time meditating on Psalm 145 and pray that God will use it to encourage your heart.

2. God's Word Can Be Trusted

Have you ever wondered if God's Word is trustworthy? While we may have no qualms about the authenticity of our Bibles—whether it truly is the Word of God (it is!)—we may still wonder if what's recorded in Scripture is good, true, and trustworthy. In Romans 9:6, Paul is emphatic that God's Word does not fail—it is trustworthy. But, what about you? Do you trust what God has written in the Scriptures?

Read Psalm 33:1–5; Psalm 19:7–11.

Psalm 33 opens with a call to worship. The psalmist commands his readers to “rejoice in the Lord,” “praise the Lord,” and “sing a new song to him,” all because God's Word is right and his work is trustworthy. **Do you ever find yourself moved to praise God simply because he has spoken “right” and “trustworthy” words to us in his Scriptures? What could you do to cultivate gratitude for the Word of God which has been recorded for you?**

The psalmist describes God's Word as “right,” which could also be translated as “upright” or “correct.” **In what ways does it comfort you to know that God's Word is correct, especially in**

a postmodern society like ours? When has God proven his Word's correctness to you?

David, in Psalm 19, agrees that “the word of the Lord is right,” but he goes further. He calls the Lord’s instruction “perfect,” his testimony “trustworthy,” his precepts “right,” his command “radiant,” and his ordinances “reliable” and “desirable.” **When you read the Word of God, do you read it as if it is perfect and true? What could change about your interaction with the Bible if you approached it believing that God’s instruction is perfect?**

David also says that God’s Word influences us. He says it “renews one’s life,” makes us “wise,” makes “the heart glad,” and makes “the eyes light up.” **In what ways has God’s Word renewed your life? How has it made you wiser? To what degree does it gladden your heart?**

What could change about your life and your reading of the Bible if you believed and applied the words of the psalmists in Psalm 33 and Psalm 19?

God’s Word is right, it is true, and it never fails—it can be trusted. Open the Bible this week and read it as if God has spoken and continues to speak to you there. He has. He does.

3. Pause and Reflect: Lectio Divina

We can sometimes breeze through familiar or difficult passages of Scripture, speeding over the words instead of letting the truth of Scripture sink into our minds and hearts. Lectio Divina, or prayerful reading, is a historical Christian practice that has helped generations of Christians to pause and reflect on God’s Word.

Below are the four steps of Lectio Divina, which will help you pray and think deeply about Romans 9:22–24. Carve out some time this week to go through this exercise. Take your time with each step. This isn't something to rush through, so make sure you have plenty of time before you start.

Lectio (read): Remove all distractions and quiet your mind before God. Now read Romans 9:22–24 three times slowly. If you can, read it out loud to yourself. Let the message hit you. After reading it three times, find something that stands out to you. Re-read it a couple more times and place emphasis on different words as you read.

Meditatio (meditate): Think about the words or phrases that stood out to you the most. What do they mean? What do they say about God? What do they say about you? How do they illuminate the main idea of Romans 9?

Oratio (pray): Pray through your words or phrases. Ask God to show you what he's saying through this verse. Take the verse and turn it into a prayer. For example, you could pray, "Thank you, God, that you have made me an object of mercy and not an object of wrath," or, "Help me, oh God, to share your mercy with others."

Contemplatio (contemplate): Now that you've read, thought, and prayed through Romans 9:22–24, finish your time in silence. Ask God to speak to you. Pray he'd show you one practical thing you could apply to your life from this passage. Then listen. Write down what he says and then do it.

Session 5: Romans 10:1–21

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: When we believe and confess that Jesus is Lord and are saved, we assume the responsibility of sharing that good news with others.

Head Change: To know that God has appointed us to spread the good news of the gospel to those who haven't heard it.

Heart Change: To feel compassion for those who have not heard and received the gospel.

Life Change: To take the gospel to people who've never heard it, here and around the world.

OPEN

What was the last piece of good news that you shared? On a scale from one to ten, how eager were you to share your good news?

Human beings are creatures that share. We share meals. We share our money. And we share the things that have captured our attention affections—both things of great significance and great insignificance.

But sharing the gospel? That can sometimes be more difficult for us. However, when we realize what's at stake for those who do not hear or receive the gospel, we should be compelled to share it at all costs. In this session, J.D. will remind us that we have a

critical role to play in taking the good news to people who've never heard it.

READ

Read Romans 10:1–21.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What are the two approaches to God?

Approximately how many people in the world are not Christians?

What responsibility do Christians have to those who've not heard the gospel?

Show Session 5: *Romans 10:1–21* (12 minutes).

DISCUSS

In *The Book of Romans: Part 2*, we have covered some of the most encouraging and challenging passages in all of Scripture. And there's yet more to come as we continue this study.

Read Romans 10:1–13.

Paul opens chapter 10 writing about his love for Israel. He says in verse 1 that his “heart’s desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation.” **Whose salvation are you praying for right now? In what ways are you actively seeking to minister the gospel to them?**

In verse 2, he goes on to make a sobering statement about Israel: “they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” In other words, they have a desire for God but they’re ignorant of him—

they don't truly know him. **To what extent is Paul's critique true of our society as well? Why is it a problem if our zeal for God is not based on a proper knowledge of God?**

There is sometimes an assumption that specific theology can dampen our love for God fearing that to study God in an academic way, reading books and refining our theological language, we cause us to lose our zeal for God. On the other hand, there is a fear that expressing passion for God is a sign of ungrounded theology. We need both to ground our faith in understanding and to express our growing love for God. **In what ways should a growing knowledge of God lead to a growing zeal for God? What habits and practices can we develop to grow in our knowledge and love for God?**

Paul says the Israelites are "ignorant of the righteousness of God," and, from their ignorance, are attempting to "establish their own righteousness." Whenever someone is ignorant of what is right—whether with Israel then or with us now—it results in people inventing their own standard of goodness. This self-righteousness is a failure to submit to God's righteousness. **What are some of the ways that you attempt to establish your own righteousness?**

In verse 4, Paul writes that "Christ is the *end* of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." He has fulfilled the law on behalf of those who believe in him. In other words, we don't have to live perfect lives to satisfy God. Jesus has done that for us. **In what ways do we still try to earn God's love with our own righteousness? In what ways does the gospel free us from the pressure of perfect performance?**

*[Note: For further study on Christ being the "end" of the law, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

In verses 5–9, Paul contrasts the righteousness that comes from the law with the righteousness that comes from faith. One is a message of *doing* while the other is a message of *believing* and *confessing*. Paul concludes, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” **In what ways is it good news that the path to righteousness depends on faith and not on “doing” or “earning”?**

*[Note: For further study on the biblical concept of belief, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

Verses 9–10 present confession and belief as being inextricably linked to one another. In fact, Paul asserts that you can’t properly have one without the other: whatever is in our hearts will come out of our mouths. **How would you describe the relationship between confession and belief? In what ways might the act of confession help spur you on to deeper faith in God?**

Paul grounds his argument that righteousness comes through faith in the Old Testament. First, quoting Isaiah, he says “Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame,” or will not be humiliated or disappointed. **Do you ever find yourself worrying that your belief isn’t enough? In what ways do Paul’s words here encourage you?**

In verse 13, Paul goes one step further. Quoting the prophet Joel, he says “For everyone who calls on (i.e., proclaims, confesses) the name of the Lord will be saved.” So, not only will our belief not put us to shame, but the confession of our belief in Christ will result in our salvation. God offers us a secure salvation; all that’s required of us is to call on his name. **How would you describe what it means to “call on the name of the Lord”?**

When did you first call on the name of the Lord? What effect did that confession make on your life?

Read Romans 10:14–21.

Beginning in verse 14, Paul gets on a roll and asks a series of rhetorical questions about coming to faith in Christ. First, he asks, “How can they call on him they have not believed in?” In other words, how can someone confess Christ if they don’t believe in him? **Is belief in Christ necessary for someone to confess him as Lord? Why?**

Paul continues: “And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher?” None of us came to Christ in a vacuum—someone courageously told us about Jesus. **How did you first hear about the good news of Jesus? Who told you about him?**

In what ways have you carried forward the message of Jesus now that you’ve received the gospel?

In verse 15, Paul’s questions turn from emphasizing recipients of the gospel to those who are sent out to share the gospel. We are also sent out to preach the gospel. **Why do we share the gospel with others? Who are the ones that are sent to spread the good news about Jesus?**

In verse 17, Paul says, “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.” Those who don’t know Jesus need to hear the good news about him. **Who are you actively sharing the message about Christ with? How have they responded to the message?**

At the end of chapter 10, Paul presents two different responses to the message about Christ. On one hand, some people find and receive Christ while others remain disobedient and defiant. **To what extent have you encountered people who are eager to receive and believe the message about Christ? To what extent have you encountered those who are defiant and refuse to believe?**

*[Note: For a prayerful reflection on verses 18–21, see **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this session.]*

How do you respond when people reject the message you share with them? What do you do to maintain your motivation to continue sharing the good news?

Whether in our neighborhoods or in unreached places around the world, we have been called by God to take his message of good news to those who haven't heard it. You have been sent to preach the gospel so that others might hear about Jesus and be saved. That is a great mission! **What can you do this week to get the message of the gospel to those who've yet to receive it?**

LAST WORD

The gospel is good news. But not everyone has heard it. Across the world and in our own neighborhoods, there are scores of people who have not been exposed to the gospel. What if God has placed you in your neighborhood to share the good news with them?

We all talk about the things we love. We love God, and talking about the gospel is more consequential than talking about our favorite new TV show. The gospel is the power of salvation (Romans 1:16). Therefore, we have a responsibility to share it with those who've not yet heard it. In fact, God has appointed us

for this very work. Let's commit ourselves today to being faithful messengers of God's good news.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of the book of Romans.

1. Peek at the Greek: End

In everyday English, when we encounter the word "end" we typically presume that it refers to a stopping point. We read "The End" on the final page of a book, for instance, at which point that book is over. In Romans 10:4, the apostle Paul refers to Jesus as "the end of the law." Does that mean Jesus is the "stopping point" of the law?

Read Romans 10:1–4.

In verse 4, the Greek word Paul uses—translated as "end" in our English Bibles—is the word *telos*, which could also be translated as "goal." So, to restate verse 4, "Christ is the goal of the law."

What does it mean that Christ is the goal of the law? How does inserting the word "goal" in place of "end" change your understanding of this passage?

If Jesus Christ is the goal of the law, it means a few things for us. First, it means that instead of a law written on paper we have a living, breathing person who can show us what righteousness

looks like. In Jesus, we see perfect obedience to the letter of the law and the heart of the law. **If Jesus is our model, how can we seek to imitate him?**

Secondly, that Christ is the goal of the law implies that he is the fulfillment of the law. He has obeyed God's law perfectly and met its requirements. **What does it mean for us that Christ has fulfilled the law? Why is his fulfillment of the law necessary for our salvation?**

When we confess belief in Christ, we claim that he has obeyed God's law fully and has imputed (credited) his perfect obedience to us. **What might change about your life if you chose to believe that all of Christ's perfect obedience has been applied to you?**

Who do you know that needs to hear that this same good news can be applied to them?

To place your faith in Jesus and his gospel is to have his perfect obedience irrevocably applied to your account. Set aside a few minutes to simply praise him for the grace he has shown you in applying his faithfulness to you.

2. What does it mean to believe?

In our society, the word "believe" is assumed to mean little more than wishful thinking or intellectual affirmation. So, when we encounter exhortations to believe in the Bible, as we do in Romans 10:9, we're not exactly sure what we're being called to do.

Read Romans 10:9–13.

The word Paul uses in this passage for “believe” is the word *pisteuo*, which means to actively “put one’s faith in” or “to trust.” In other words, Paul’s conception of belief is not static and intellectual; it is active and dynamic. **How would you describe what it means to believe without using “believe” in your description? What do the words and phrases in your description reveal about your conception of what belief entails?**

Throughout *The Book of Romans: Part 2*, J.D. has used the example of sitting in a chair to describe what it means to “have faith in” or “to believe.” **In what ways is sitting in a chair an exercise of belief? What other illustrations could we use to describe active belief?**

Twice in this passage, Paul says that belief occurs in a person’s heart. In the first century, the heart was understood to be the centermost part of a person, encompassing the desires, intellect, affections, impulses, and conscience—even one’s very soul. **What do we miss today by situating belief in the mind instead of the heart, as Paul does? How might a retrieval of the biblical understanding of belief serve to strengthen our faith in Christ?**

To believe on Christ is, at our very core, to put all of our trust in him—“to lean all our weight on him,” as J.D. has said—and to orient our entire lives around the reality that Jesus is Lord. **In what areas of life are you hesitant to fully rely on Jesus? How might “leaning on” God in those areas of life help you practice your faith?**

As you conclude this Go Deeper, close your time by praying and asking God to move your belief in him from your head to your

heart. Ask him, by the Spirit, to give you a stronger and deeper belief in Jesus.

3. Romans 10:18–21: A Prayerful Reflection

In Romans 10:17, Paul reflects on salvation through the eyes of the Old Testament prophets. While the main subject of these verses is the nation of Israel, we would be wise to reflect on these words ourselves.

Read Romans 10:18–21.

One of the ideas that pervades this passage is some people refuse to believe in the work of Jesus. God calls those people (Israel, in this case) “disobedient and defiant.” **What are some of the reasons people often give for rejecting the message of Christ?**

There’s another group of people who, in this passage, are described as finding God, though they “were not looking for [him].” Instead of being disobedient and defiant, they receive the good news. **Were you looking for God when he came and found you? What does it say about God that he gives grace to people who are not looking for him?**

There is a lot more that can be said about this passage, especially as it relates to God’s dealings with Israel. But instead of dissecting it further, let’s stop here and give thanks to God for revealing himself to those of us who were not asking for him. Consider praying the following prayer:

Father,

I was among those who were not looking for you (Rom 10:20).
I was not asking for you (Rom 10:20).
I belonged to the kingdom of darkness (Col 1:13).
I was your enemy (Rom 5:10).

Yet your message of good news has gone out to the whole earth,
And your words to the ends of the world (Ps 19:4).
And though I lacked understanding, you revealed yourself to me
(Rom 10:20).
By your grace, you have planted faith in me (Eph 2:8).
You have established belief in my heart and drawn a confession
from my mouth:
Jesus is Lord; he is risen from the dead (Rom 10:9).
Make my life to align with this confession.

As you have planted faith in me, so also plant and grow gratitude,
For every good and perfect gift comes from you and you alone
(Jer 1:17).
You are great, Oh God, and greatly to be praised (Ps 145:3).
May the whole of my life be lived in gratitude for the grace you've
given in the person and work of your Son.

Amen.

Session 6: Romans 11:1–27

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: God has promised to save his people and we can be certain that he will never reject those who confess that he is Lord.

Head Change: To know that God always keeps his word.

Heart Change: To feel confident that God will accomplish everything he promised.

Life Change: To persevere in our belief that God is Lord and that salvation is found in him alone.

OPEN

**Have you ever made a promise you were unable to keep?
What promise did you make?**

Have you ever been promised something that never came to fruition? What was that experience like for you?

It's safe to say that all of us have experienced, at one point or another, what it's like to have our trust broken. We may have even been the ones to break another's trust by not keeping our word or making a promise we couldn't keep. But God is not like that—he always keeps his word.

In this session, J.D. will walk us through Romans 11 and help us understand what it means that God always keeps his promises.

READ

Read Romans 11:1–27.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

In Romans 11, what does Paul want to show his readers?

How many answers does Paul give to the question, “Has God failed in keeping his promise?”

According to J.D., how many stages are there to Israel’s response to the gospel?

Show Session 6: *Romans 11:1–27* (16 minutes).

DISCUSS

J.D. opened this session by talking about the promises God has made, both to Israel and to us. He suggested that Paul’s readers may have been skeptical about God’s ability or willingness to keep his promises. **Do you ever wonder about God’s ability or willingness to keep the promises he’s made? When do these questions tend to present themselves? Why do you think we question that God will keep his promises?**

Read Romans 11:1–10.

To begin this chapter, Paul asks a penetrating question: “has God rejected his people?” He answers with a resounding, “Absolutely not!” But while Paul is speaking specifically of Israel here, we may have wrestled with the same question ourselves. **Have you ever worried that you’ve been rejected by God? What led you to those worries? What or whom did God use to minister to you in those moments?**

Paul uses himself—an Israelite—as proof that God has not rejected Israel or failed to keep his promises to them. **In what ways is personal testimony a powerful way to answer questions like the one Paul is addressing?**

Going further, Paul adds Scriptures in verse 3 to prove his point—particularly, the story of Elijah in the book of 1 Kings. Elijah pleaded with God *against* Israel, who had “killed [God’s] prophets and torn down [his] altars.” Yet God refused to reject them because there were still seven thousand faithful men and women in Israel. God is far more patient with us than we are with one another. He is, thankfully, much more willing to forgive others than we are. **In what ways is God’s patience exercised for the good of his people? How has God shown patience to you?**

Speaking of the remnant that God has set aside for himself, he says they were “chosen by grace.” And if they were chosen “by grace,” then it’s not a matter of works, “otherwise grace ceases to be grace.” **How would you define the grace of God?**

*[Note: For a biblical definition of grace, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

Paul goes on to say in verse 7 that “Israel did not find what it was looking for, but the elect did find it. The rest were hardened.” In other words, God’s acceptance, which we’re all longing for, comes not as a result of effort but by grace. **When did you first grasp the goodness of God’s grace? How did your life change as a result?**

The language used in verses 7–8 describes the hardening that set in over Israel. Citing the prophet Isaiah, Paul writes that “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear, to this day.” And lest we assume that these words

only apply to Israel, Paul later warns readers to not follow their lead. **How can we keep ourselves from becoming hardened to the gospel? What are the habits and practices you maintain to keep yourself receptive to God's grace?**

Paul continues to cite the Old Testament in verses 9–10, this time using David's words in Psalm 69 to highlight the condition of Israel's heart. The language David uses sounds like Paul's own words in Romans 1 where he says that "God delivered them over" to their corrupt desires. **Have you ever been given what you desired, only to find that it was not best for you? What did you learn from that experience? How can you apply that lesson to your relationship with God?**

Read Romans 11:11–24.

After detailing the unfaithfulness of Israel, Paul comes back to the question he opened the chapter with. He asks now, "have they stumbled so as to fall?" Emphatically, he replies: "Absolutely not!" Despite their disobedience, no one is beyond God's forgiveness. **When have you experienced a significant stumbling in your faith? Did you ever wonder if you'd fallen away too far? How do Paul's words about Israel encourage you as you consider your own experience with stumbling?**

God welcomed believing Gentiles into his family, which made Israel jealous. Paul, in verse 14, says he tries to draw on their jealousy to "save some of them," which may seem strange to us. But God knows our jealousy and can sovereignly use it for our good. **How do you react to the idea that God can use something negative, like our jealousy, to accomplish good for us?**

*[Note: For further study on jealousy and the sovereignty of God, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

In verse 16, Paul introduces the metaphor of a root. He talks about branches being broken off from the root (Israelites) and branches being grafted into the root (Gentiles) and uses that idea to instruct the Gentiles not to boast as if they are better than Israel. **Have you ever felt better than others because you're a Christian? What would you say led to those feelings? How do we fight against the tendency we have toward pride?**

*[Note: For further study on grafting, see **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this session.]*

One of the ways Paul seeks to keep us away from the boasting is by reminding us of God's response to Israel's unbelief. "If God did not spare the natural branches," he says in verse 21, "he will not spare you either." Their unbelief (i.e., unfaithfulness and pride) led to their removal. **In what ways do you find yourself drawn toward pride or unbelief? What does it look like to put those things to death? How do Paul's words here help motivate you to "remain in God's kindness" (v. 22)?**

After warning his Gentile listeners against going the way of Israel, Paul returns in verse 23 to his fellow Israelites, saying "even they, if they do not remain in unbelief, will be grafted in, because God has the power to graft them in again." Israel had been saved and had fallen away, yet God has the power to bring them back. **Have you ever been in the grips of unbelief, even as a Christian? Are you there now? What was/is that experience like for you?**

In what ways does it encourage you to know that God can and will bring us back from our unbelief?

Read Romans 11:25–27.

In verse 25, Paul tells his readers that a “partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in,” which he calls a mystery. This passage, and the chapter as a whole, is challenging and debated among scholars. Mysteries are all over the Bible and are a critical, and even formative, part of our faith because they humble us and help us to marvel at God’s wisdom. **When you encounter difficult passages like this one, how do you typically respond? What questions do you have about this passage? What could it look like for this group to grapple with this mystery together?**

“And in this way,” Paul says, “all Israel will be saved.” In other words, even when we don’t know what God is doing or don’t understand why certain things are happening, his words always prove true. **Have you ever been confused about or even dismayed by what God was doing (or not doing) in your life? What can you do to remind yourself that he can be trusted to keep his word?**

Paul ends this portion of the chapter by turning to the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, restating promises that God made to his people in the Old Testament. Notice how many times the word “will” is used in verses 26–27. **What do these passages say about the certainty of God’s promises? Who, in this passage, is the one that “turns godlessness away from Jacob”? Who takes away their sins?**

In what ways can the certainty with which Paul communicates these truths encourage us in our daily life?

While it’s deeply encouraging, Romans 11 is a challenging and downright confounding chapter—it has been debated for as long

as it's been around. **What questions did you have about chapter 11 coming into this session? What deeper insights were you able to gain through J.D.'s teaching and through your discussion? What questions do you still have about what chapter 11 contains?**

What can you do to train yourself to turn to God when you're faced with mystery, either in reading the Bible or in your life experience? How can you use his promises as a tool for building trust in him?

LAST WORD

Though Romans 11 is challenging, what's clear from these passages is that God's words to his people are certain. He will accomplish all that he's promised. And because that's true, we can exercise confident trust in him. He is trustworthy. He is faithful. He is good.

As with all the Bible, the continual study of this chapter in the book of Romans will elicit deeper insight, greater understanding, and, by God's grace, increasing conformity to the image of Christ. Feel free to return to this session again to remind yourself of God's faithfulness to his word and to his people.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and day to deepen your study of the book of Romans.

1. *What is grace?*

As with many other words we use today, the word “grace” has become such a normal part of our vocabulary that it’s lost some of its potency. We may talk about someone’s “social graces” or being in a person’s “good graces,” but what does it mean to speak of God’s grace?

Read Romans 11:5–6.

The Greek word Paul uses here, translated as “grace,” is the word *charis*. It’s a word found throughout most of the New Testament. In fact, it occurs more than one-hundred-fifty times, being rendered sometimes as favor, benefit, or credit. **What does the frequency of its use in the New Testament communicate about the importance of this word? How do these other words—favor, benefit, credit—help you make sense of what grace means?**

The central idea that *charis* carries with it is a state of kindness and favor toward someone. So, in verse 5, for example, we could say that the remnant Paul speaks of was chosen because of God’s kindness and favor toward them. God’s grace, then, is not him begrudgingly giving us things. It is his kindness and favor given to us. **How does it enhance your understanding of God’s grace to recognize that it is his kindness toward you? What are some of the ways God has been kind to you?**

In verse 6, Paul pits grace and works against each other because they are opposed to each other when it comes to salvation. If salvation is by grace alone, then not only are works unnecessary but they also undermine God’s free gift. **In what ways do we sometimes undermine God’s grace by assuming we can work our way into his favor? What can you do to remind**

yourself that you don't have to work for what God has already freely given to you?

Putting everything together, we can say that grace is receiving from God, by no merit of our own, that which we don't deserve because, in his kindness, he has freely chosen to show us favor. It's not something we work for; we simply receive it. Thanks be to God.

2. Jealousy and the Sovereignty of God

Throughout Scripture, jealousy is something the people of God are warned against. It's a word that's sometimes used interchangeably with the word envy. So, why in Romans 10 and 11 does Paul speak of jealousy the way he does, even sharing his intent to stir his fellow Israelites up toward jealousy?

Read Romans 10:19; 11:11–14; 8:28; 1 Timothy 2:3–4.

Jealousy seems like an odd thing for Paul, and especially God, to use in the plan of salvation. Isn't jealousy something we're instructed to avoid? **What do you make of God and Paul using the Israelites' jealousy—is it “ethical”? Unkind? Is Paul taking advantage of or taunting Israel?**

In Romans 10:19 and 11:11–14, Paul mentions a couple of times that he and God both make intentional use of people's jealousy. In both instances it is either implied or stated explicitly that they are arousing jealousy for the people's ultimate good—they're using it to bring them to salvation. **Have your experiences with jealousy ever led you to something good? Why, or why not? What does it say about God that even jealousy is something he can use for his good purposes?**

In Romans 8:28, we learn that God works all things together for the good of his people, even, as we're learning, their own jealousy. And the ultimate good that he's leading us to is our salvation, which he desires for all people, as Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:4. **How does it encourage you to know that all things—even jealousy—are under the sovereign control of God and that he weaves everything together for the good of his people? What could change about your day-to-day life if you kept God's sovereignty front of mind?**

The question that lies beneath many of the questions we ask when we encounter difficult passages like this one is: Can God be trusted? While the witness of Scripture is clear that he is trustworthy, it's a fact that is still sometimes hard to believe. **When have you wrestled with whether God can be trusted or not? Are there passages of Scripture you use to remind your heart that he is good and can be trusted? If so, which ones? How can you use these passages—even the hard ones—to help reaffirm your trust?**

Though jealousy is generally something we're called to put away, these passages show us that God, in his infinite wisdom, can use it in a way that brings people to salvation. And because God is good, we can trust that all his ways—even the seemingly odd ones—are good as well.

3. The Imagery of Plant Grafting

The Bible is replete with agricultural metaphors. From farming and livestock to sowing seeds and keeping vineyards, readers are immersed in an earthy narrative. Romans 11 is no different, as Paul uses the imagery of plant grafting to describe how God has

joined Gentile “branches” to the “root” of salvation. And a quick look at what’s involved in this process can give richness to Paul’s words in this passage.

Read Romans 11:16–24.

Grafting is a technique that joins two plants into one. A lemon branch, for example, tied to an orange tree can begin to grow into the tree and become a part of the plant. Grafted branches draw their nutrients from the plant they are grafted to as if they were natural branches. **How does the definition of grafting mirror the language the Bible uses to convey our union with Christ?**

One of the most striking things about the process of grafting is that it requires the plant(s) to be wounded for them to be joined together. Farmers must carve into the bark of a tree, exposing its inner capillaries, so that another branch can tap into its nutrients. Christ was wounded on our behalf so that we could be joined to him and it sometimes takes us being wounded—or made aware of our guilt before God—before we’re receptive to the message of the gospel. **In your experience following Jesus, how have your wounds served to strengthen your union with him?**

Grafting is not an immediate process. Each plant’s tissues grow together slowly. In the same way, while our salvation occurred in a moment, our sanctification is a lifelong process. **How has your understanding of the gospel grown and deepened over time?**

In what ways has your being conformed to the image of Christ been slower than you expected? What can you do to grow more content with the slow nature of sanctification?

Being grafted into Christ means that we depend on him for our life—he is the vine, we are the branches, as Jesus explains in John

15. How can you embrace more deeply your dependence on Christ? What can you do daily to draw the strength that you need from him?

The imagery Paul uses in this passage is a beautiful reminder of our dependence on God for all things. He is the vine; we are the branches. Commit this day to remaining in him and depending on him for all of life.

Session 7: Romans 11:28-36

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: When we understand the wonder of God’s mercy on us, and the depths of his wisdom, we will respond with worship.

Head Change: To know that God is abundant in wisdom, knowledge, and mercy.

Heart Change: To feel gratitude that God has mercy on us.

Life Change: To worship God by marveling at who he is and what he’s done for us.

OPEN

What is the most beautiful place you have ever visited? How did you respond to encountering such beauty?

When we encounter grand things, whether natural landscapes, works of art, or impressive feats of human engineering, we can’t help but respond with awe. We find ourselves overwhelmed, de-centered, and driven to wonder—to praise.

There is no one grander, more beautiful, and more awe-inspiring than God himself. In this session, J.D. will take us into the mind of the apostle Paul, who, when confronted with the grandeur of God’s glory, explodes in praise.

READ

Read Romans 11:28–36.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

According to J.D., how many things does this passage teach us about worship?

What is the ultimate point of all Bible study?

Is the "best" worship of God grounded in who God is or in what he's done? Why?

Show Session 7: *Romans 11:28–36* (13 minutes).

DISCUSS

Since this session begins in the middle of chapter 11, it's important that we not disconnect this passage from what was covered in session 6. **How would you summarize Romans 11:1–27, which we covered in the previous session? What were your main takeaways from session 6?**

Paul continues his discussion of Israel, salvation, and the mystery of God. Read Romans 11:28–32.

In verse 28, Paul pairs together two seemingly contradictory ideas. Speaking to Gentiles, he says, "regarding the gospel," the Israelites "are enemies for your advantage," meaning their rejection of the gospel has resulted in the Gentiles being welcomed by God. **Was there ever a point in your life when you rejected the gospel? What was it that transformed you from an enemy of the gospel to a recipient of the gospel?**

Paul follows that statement with a staggering claim. Despite being enemies of the gospel, he says that Israel is "loved because of the patriarchs, since God's gracious gifts and calling are

irrevocable.” **What does this passage say about the character of God? Since God’s gifts and calling are irrevocable, how committed can we be to trusting him, even when life is hard?**

How does the truth that God’s gifts and calling are irrevocable strengthen and encourage you in your daily life?

In verse 30, Paul highlights the interplay between disobedience and mercy, saying that Jews and Gentiles both have access to God’s mercy even though both have engaged in disobedience. **How can God’s quickness to give mercy inform the way you respond when you have strayed from obedience?**

Paul concludes this argument in verse 32 by stating that “God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may have mercy on all.” Any disobedience is an opportunity to be overwhelmed by God’s mercy. **What does it say about God that his “instinct” is to lavish mercy on disobedient people? In what ways has God been merciful to you?**

As we learned in this session, the mercy of God should spark a strong reaction among those who receive it. **What is our proper response to the mercy of God? In what ways do we sometimes miss or overlook his mercy? How can we get better at recognizing and celebrating God’s mercy to us?**

Read Romans 11:33–36.

As J.D. said in this session, Paul’s turn in verse 33 is like an explosion of praise. **How would you summarize Paul’s argument in verses 28–32? What was it that led him to respond with praise?**

The content of Paul's praise begins with wonder: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God."
When was the last time you were in awe of God's character? How might doing so bring about greater spiritual health and vitality for you?

Further into verse 33, Paul speaks of God's judgments and ways as being "unsearchable" and "untraceable." When we say God works in mysterious ways, we don't mean that his ways are odd or unusual. Rather, his mind and choices are so beyond us that they are beyond comprehension. **Do you ever want to understand why God has chosen to act in a particular way? How did you react when you did not receive an answer? What would it look like to surrender to his unsearchable ways instead of trying to evaluate them?**

Paul proceeds to pose three rhetorical questions, each of which is pulled directly from the Old Testament. First, with the prophet Isaiah, he asks: "For who has known the mind of the Lord?" **In what ways do you sometimes seek to know things that God hasn't revealed to you in his Word? What situations and scenarios lead you to such behavior? Why?**

*[Note: For a reflection on Psalm 131, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

Paul's second rhetorical question comes from the prophet Jeremiah: "Who has been his counselor?" No one can advise God, though we sometimes think we can. **In what ways do you try to "counsel" God on what he should do for you? What are the differences between trying to act as God's counselor and expressing our desires to him? Why do we try and exert our will upon him instead of trusting that he is infinitely wise and good?**

The third and final rhetorical question that Paul poses in this passage comes from the book of Job. He asks, “And who has ever given to God, that he should be repaid?” **What are some of the ways that you attempt to relate to God transactionally? Do you ever try to bribe him with your words or pay him back with your attempts at obedience? Why? How might it affect your relationship with God when you approach him transactionally?**

The assumed answer to each of these questions is “no one.” No one knows the mind of the Lord, no one can serve as his counselor, and no one can give anything to God that he doesn’t already own. He is all-knowing, infinitely wise, and the creator and owner of all things. **What is Paul trying to teach us with these questions? If God is all-knowing, infinitely wise, and the creator and owner of all things, what are some of the implications for us?**

Verse 36 goes a step further. While the assumed answer to each of these questions is “no one,” Paul proceeds to tell us why. Because “from him and through him and to him are all things.” **What does it mean that all things are *from* God? What does it mean that all things are *through* God? What does it mean that all things are *to* God?**

Paul ends this chapter with a statement that shows up several times throughout the Scriptures, “To him be the glory forever. Amen.” As J.D. said in this session, this is the goal of creation—the glory of God. **In what ways does Paul glorify God in this passage? Considering what we read in verses 33–36, why is the glory of God an appropriate place for Paul’s praise to end?**

What does it look like to glorify God? How can you be more active and intentional in the task of glorifying God in your life?

*[Note: For further study on the word “amen,” see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

In this passage we learn four things about worship: God’s works lead us to worship, our Bible study should end in worship, worship is grounded in who God is, and worship doesn’t depend on our understanding. **Which of these four points resonated most with you? Why?**

What can you do this week to worship God using what we learned in these four points?

LAST WORD

When we are confronted with God—his character, nature, mind, and works— the only response we can give is worship. To know God—to *truly* know him—is to worship him. We can’t help it. He is too wise, too powerful, too good, and too merciful not to be driven to worship at the thought of him. All things are from him, for him, and should turn back to glorify him.

So, remember who God is. Reflect on what he’s done through his Son and by his Spirit. And then, like Paul, watch as your heart sings in response to the grandeur of the God who has been merciful to you.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We’ve highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of the book of Romans.

1. *Psalm 131*

In Romans 11:33–34, Paul is taken aback by both the wisdom and the knowledge of God, which leads him to ask a question: “who has known the mind of the Lord?” Though we know the answer to this question—no one—we sometimes try to gain access to things that haven’t been revealed to us; things only fit for the mind of the Lord, not ours. Our society is enamored with information. Because we have access to more information than ever before, we assume we’re built to consume and comprehend all that’s available to us. But we’re not—we are finite creatures with limits.

Read Psalm 131.

In Psalm 131, David is addressing the wisdom and the knowledge of God. In a way, he answers the question Paul poses in Romans 11:34—“who has known the mind of the Lord?”—saying, in effect, “not me.” **What specific phrases does David use in verse 1 to differentiate himself from God? What does verse 1 communicate about David’s posture before God?**

Grasping after the knowledge that only God possesses is not only futile, but it’s also an act of pride. It is an act that says, “God’s mind may be unsearchable for most people, but not for me. I can understand God.” **How can we guard against our tendency to grasp for more than God has revealed? What can we learn from David’s example in Psalm 131?**

Instead of having a proud heart, haughty eyes, and a preoccupation with things “too great or too wondrous” for him, David does something different. **What does it mean to calm and quiet your soul? How do you personally work to calm and quiet your soul? What’s different about you when your soul is calm and quiet as opposed to restless?**

What could it look like for the church, collectively, to have a calm and quiet—i.e., non-anxious—presence in a world that is so anxious and chaotic?

David helps his readers by painting a picture of what it looks like to have a soul that is calmed and quieted. It is like a weaned child—content, trusting—with its mother. **In what ways is it helpful to imagine a weaned child when we think about how we are to relate to God? About how we are to behave in the world?**

The entire psalm is rooted in verse 3: “put your hope in the Lord both now and forever.” **How does our hope in God help to calm and quiet our souls? What other things are we tempted to put our hope in? What can we do to keep our hope anchored in God alone?**

Our society is enamored with information. Because we have access to more information than ever before, we assume we’re built to consume and comprehend all that’s available to us. But we’re not—we are finite creatures with limits. Instead of pursuing that which is beyond our comprehension, we can be content with calming and quieting our perceived need for more understanding and, like a weaned child, trust the God whose riches of wisdom and knowledge are bottomless. Today, “put your hope in the Lord, both now and forever.”

2. *What does “Amen” mean?*

How do you end your prayers? What word(s) do you use to express your agreement with the preacher during a worship service? For most of us, the answer is “amen.” Amen is a word that is widely used within and indispensable to the Christian vocabulary. But have you ever wondered what it means?

Read Romans 11:36; Revelation 22:20–21.

Believe it or not, “amen” occurs about 154 times in the New Testament. It’s used in a variety of ways, from the prayers and praises of Paul to the statements of Jesus. Amen simply means “in truth,” “most certainly,” or “so be it.” **What are we saying, then, when we close our prayers with “amen”? In what ways can we use the word amen flippantly or mindlessly? How can knowing the definition of amen shape the way you pray?**

At its core, amen is an expression of certainty. It is to say “I fully agree” or “may it be so.” In prayer, it’s a statement of confidence, affirming that what we are praying is good, right, and godly. **Are your prayers uttered in confidence? Why, or why not? In what ways does the Bible’s use of the word amen permit us to have confidence as we pray?**

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul, the author of Hebrews, the apostle Peter, the apostle John, Jude, the four living creatures in Revelation 5:14, and the angels and elders in Revelation 7:11 are all recorded as using this word in their prayers and praises of God. “Amen” is a chorus of confidence in God and his promises. **What has God done in your life to instill your confidence in him? How can we grow our confidence in God?**

Amen is also a statement of faith. It is a declaration that we trust the God to whom we are praying. **How can you use amen to stir your faith in God? What might change about your prayer life (or about your life as a whole) if you started ending your prayers with an emphatic and confident “amen”?**

Take a few minutes to practice praying in confidence and faith. As you close, be mindful of what you're saying when you say “amen.” And then, with Paul and Peter and Jude and John, and the angels and elders and creatures around God's throne, end your address to God with a confident statement of your faith in him: Amen.

Session 8: Romans 12:1–8

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: When we are confronted with the mercy of God, we should respond by giving our lives to him and exercising our gifts for the good of others.

Head Change: To know that God has given each of us unique gifts.

Heart Change: To feel excited to use our gifts in our local church.

Life Change: To worship God by practicing our spiritual gifts for the good of our local church and its members.

OPEN

What is the best gift you've ever received? Did you want to share it with others? Why, or why not?

We all enjoy receiving gifts, but we're not always as eager to share them as we are to receive them. When we become Christians, God gives us spiritual gifts, or abilities, strengths, or talents we can share with the church. These gifts are meant for the building up of his body, the church.

In this session, J.D. will show us why the local church is both where we learn what our spiritual gifts are and where we are called to practice them.

READ

Read Romans 12:1–8.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What word does Paul use to mark Romans 12 as the book's hinge point?

What example from nature did J.D. use to describe the word "transformed"?

How does J.D. define a spiritual gift?

Show Session 8: *Romans 12:1–8* (14 minutes).

DISCUSS

J.D. opened this session by discussing the stark turn that Paul takes in chapter 12 from "the theological section" (chapters 1–11) of Romans to "the practical section" (chapters 12–16). **What important word does Paul use to signal the stark turn he's making? Why is that such an important word to pay attention to in our Bible reading?**

Paul first defined the gospel and now he begins exploring how the gospel changes us. In these final chapters, Paul "gets down in the weeds and applies the gospel to different dimensions of our lives." **How would you define the gospel? In what ways is the gospel still changing your life today?**

Read Romans 12:1–2.

Paul starts verse 1 by encouraging us to live, "in view of the mercies of God." The gospel is the foundation for our whole lives. We don't live to earn God's mercy—we live in light of God's

mercy. **How has God been merciful to you? In what ways does his mercy affect your daily habits and decisions?**

Paul writes that we are to respond to God's mercy by offering ourselves as a living sacrifice, a worship offering, to him. **What do you think it looks like to present your body as a living sacrifice to God? What could you do to be more intentional about presenting your body to God for his glory?**

*[Note: For further study on Romans 12:1, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

After urging readers to offer themselves wholly to God, Paul drives his point home further. "This is your true worship," he says at the end of verse 1. So, worship isn't only confined to singing in church like we sometimes assume; it is an ongoing, everyday mark of our lives. **How do you seek to worship God with your whole life? At your job? In your home?**

In verse 2, Paul offers a warning. He says, "Do not be conformed to this age." **What does it look like to be conformed to the age in which we live? How can we guard ourselves against disobeying Paul's warning here?**

Instead of adapting to think, behave, and hope like the popular culture, Paul instructs us to be "transformed by the renewing of [our] mind[s]." J.D. used the example of a caterpillar to help us understand what it means to be transformed, saying we become "changed from within." **In what ways does God change us from within when he saves us? How does this inward change differ from what J.D. called "religious change"? What are some of the ways we can know we've been changed from within?**

We are to be transformed, Paul says, “by the renewing of [our] mind[s].” Real change begins in our minds. **What occupies your stray thoughts, daydreams, and anxieties? Where do you normally focus your attention? What things could you focus on less? What things could you focus on more?**

In verse 2, we learn that we renew our minds *so that* we “may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God,” or, in other words, the way that we are to live. **Have you ever wondered what God’s will is for your life? What was it like for you to wrestle through that question? What conclusion(s) did you arrive at?**

*[Note: For further study on what God’s will is for your life, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

Paul calls the will of God “good,” “pleasing,” and “perfect.” **How can we trust that God’s will is good, pleasing, and perfect? In the moments when you wonder what God’s will is, how can these three words encourage you?**

Read Romans 12:3–8.

In verse 3, Paul urges readers not to think of themselves more highly than they should. **What are some of the characteristics of someone who thinks more highly of themselves than they should? How can we guard against proud behavior?**

In the next sentence, Paul offers an alternative. “Instead,” he says, “think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.” Paul calls us to think about ourselves wisely, humbly, and with prudence. **In what ways is sensible thinking a healthy alternative to thinking too highly of oneself?**

Paul introduces readers to an important metaphor that's used in multiple places in the New Testament. He says, just like our own body, Christians are members of one body in Christ, with each member having its own unique function while still belonging to the one body. **How does Paul's metaphor help you understand your own place in the body of Christ? In what ways does Paul's metaphor apply to the local church where you belong and your contribution there?**

J.D. applied Paul's metaphor to the local church—especially as it pertains to spiritual gifts—saying the local church is where you learn and exercise your spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are abilities, talents, and strengths God gives us to help the church. **Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? How do you exercise those gifts within your local church?**

*[Note: For a list of the spiritual gifts, see **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this session.]*

In verse 6, Paul wades directly into the topic of spiritual gifts. He introduces them this way: "According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts." **Have you ever thought of your spiritual gifts as gifts of God's grace? What changes about the way you use your gifts when you remember they're a gift from God? In what ways can this verse help us guard against jealousy or envy of someone else's gifts?**

Paul then lists seven different spiritual gifts: prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, and showing mercy. **Which of these gifts stands out to you? Why? Do you know anyone who possesses one or more of these gifts? Have you ever complimented them or given them specific encouragement for the way they exercise their gift?**

J.D. gave us a helpful tool to help us think through our spiritual gifts. He discussed our ability, affinity, and affirmation—where those three categories overlap is typically a spiritual gift. Spend some time discussing your spiritual gifts as a group using the Venn diagram that J.D. discussed. **What do you think your spiritual gifts are? What gifts are represented in the room? In what ways are those gifts being exercised?**

Paul attaches a quick instruction on how to use our gifts appropriately. For example, with giving he says to give “with generosity”; with leading, he says to lead “with diligence”; and with showing mercy, he says to do it “with cheerfulness.” **Why do you think it is important to consider our hearts when we practice our gifts? Why do you think we should hold ourselves to a high standard when we lead, give, or show mercy?**

In this session, J.D. emphasized the importance of belonging to a local church. He said that the local church is where we go to discover and exercise our spiritual gifts. **How has the local church helped you discover and exercise your spiritual gifts?**

Do you currently belong to a local church? Where are you serving within that church? How can you use your gifts even more at your local church?

LAST WORD

When Christ saves us the Spirit gives each of us spiritual gifts. Some of us are gifted with mercy, others with the ability to teach, and some with the gift of leadership. No matter who we are, if we have been saved then we’ve been given a spiritual gift that God calls us to use to serve others and build his kingdom.

One of the best ways for us to discover how we’ve been gifted is to be active in a local church—the living expression of the “one

body in Christ” of which we’re “members.” The people in your church need your gifts and you, likewise, need theirs. The body can only thrive when we depend on one another. Commit to investing deeper in the life of the church by using our gifts for the good of the body and its members.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We’ve highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of the book of Romans.

1. Pause and Reflect: A Living Sacrifice

We can sometimes breeze by familiar passages of Scripture, speeding over the words instead of letting the truths of Scripture sink into our minds and hearts. Lectio Divina, or prayerful reading, is a historical Christian practice that has helped generations of Christians to pause and reflect on God’s Word.

Below are the four steps of Lectio Divina, which will help you pray and think deeply about Romans 12:1. Carve out some time this week to go through this exercise. Take your time with each step. This isn’t something to rush through, so make sure you have plenty of time before you start.

Lectio (read): Remove all distractions and quiet your mind before God. Now read Romans 12:1 three times slowly. If you can, read it out loud to yourself. Let the message hit you. After reading it three times, find something that stands out to you. Re-read it a

couple of more times and place emphasis on different words as you read.

Meditatio (meditate): Think about the phrases that stood out to you the most. What do they mean? What do they say about God? What do they say about what God requires of us? What ideas do they draw from Romans 11? How do they contribute to the main idea in Romans 12?

Oratio (pray): Pray through your verse or phrases. Ask God to show you what he's saying through this verse. Take the verse and turn it into a prayer. For example, you could pray, "Thank you, God, for the mercies you give," or, "Teach me, Holy Spirit, to offer my life as a living sacrifice."

Contemplatio (contemplate): Now that you've read, thought, and prayed through Romans 12:1, finish your time in silence. Ask God to speak to you. Pray he'd show you one practical thing you could apply to your life from this passage. Then listen. Write down what he says and then do it.

2. What is God's will for my life?

A question that many Christians ask is, "What is God's will for my life?" What we usually mean by that question is: What career should I pursue? Should I marry this person? Or, should I make this choice or that one? While these are legitimate concerns, they are not what the New Testament authors are primarily talking about when they address God's will. The New Testament is clear about God's will for us.

When have you wondered about God's will for your life? What questions do you wish God would answer about your future? What do you think God's will is for you?

Read Romans 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–6; Romans 8:29.

In these three passages, Paul explicitly tells readers what God's will is for us. His will is that we are transformed, sanctified, and conformed to the image of his Son. **How does Paul's definition of God's will for us differ from how we normally answer the question?**

God's will is not primarily concerned with what we are to do—like job or marriage decisions, for instance—Paul contends that God's will for us is more about the kind of people we are becoming.

According to these passages, what are the things we're not supposed to do and be? What are the things we are supposed to do and be?

One way we can learn God's will is to follow the example of others who are faithfully following Christ. **Who are the people in your life who help you be more like Jesus?**

God's will for your life is more about who you are than what you're doing. But we still have consequential decisions to make, decisions we would like God to guide us in. **How does being conformed to the image of Jesus help us make the right decisions? When faced with a difficult and consequential decision, what questions could you ask yourself to make sure you respond according to God's will?**

How does having a right understanding of God's will help you in your daily life?

If you ever wonder what God's will is for your life, hear these words of the apostle Paul: "For this is God's will: your sanctification." Remember that God is transforming you, sanctifying you, and conforming you to the image of Christ. In what ways can you seek to be holy today?

3. *List of Spiritual Gifts*

Have you ever wondered what spiritual gifts you have? Ever taken a spiritual gift assessment to try and find out? To some degree, we're all curious to learn more about how God has gifted us. The New Testament is not silent about the topic of spiritual gifts. In fact, it's where we get the idea ourselves. But what is a spiritual gift and why does God give them? And what specific gifts can we receive from God once he saves us?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:7.

In 1 Corinthians 12:7, Paul rephrases what we've come to refer to as spiritual gifts. He calls them "a manifestation of the Spirit." The word for manifestation in this text is the Greek word *phanerosis*, which could also be translated as "a disclosure," a "clear display," or a "revelation." In other words, a spiritual gift is the Spirit disclosing himself through a particular skill or competency that he's given you. **How does your view of your gifts change, knowing that they reveal the Spirit who lives in you? How does it change your motivation to exercise your gifts?**

Paul goes on to say that this "manifestation of the Spirit" is given "for the common good." The Spirit gives us gifts not primarily for our benefit, but for the benefit of others. **In what ways do you practice your gifts for the good of other people?**

In all our talk about spiritual gifts, we come to a basic and unavoidable question: what are the spiritual gifts?

Read Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, 28.

Here's a list of the spiritual gifts we find in the Bible.

Romans 12:6–8:

- Prophecy
- Service
- Teaching
- Exhorting
- Giving
- Leading
- Mercy

1 Corinthians 12:4–11:

- Wisdom
- Knowledge
- Faith
- Healing
- Miracles
- Prophecy
- Distinguishing Between Spirits
- Tongues
- Interpretation of Tongues

1 Corinthians 12:28:

- Helping
- Administrating (Note: Some Bible versions translate this word as “leading” or “guidance.”)

While there is ongoing debate as to whether some of these gifts (like prophecy and tongues) are still in operation, the apostle Paul

clearly states that each of the gifts he lists are given and empowered by God. **Do you possess any of these gifts? If so, which one(s)? How did you learn that you have that gift? In what environments and in what ways do you exercise your spiritual gifts?**

Even though Paul includes a lengthy list of spiritual gifts in his New Testament letters, it seems clear that his lists are not exhaustive; there are other gifts given to us by God. **In what other ways would you say God has gifted you? How do you seek to use your gifts in service of the local church? How can you grow in your exercise of the gifts?**

It is right of us to explore the spiritual gifts and learn more about how we've been gifted. But may we never forget this fact: spiritual gifts are given to us by a good and gracious God. Commit yourself to showing gratitude to God for his gifts and to using them "for the common good."

Session 9: Romans 12:9–21

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: When we remember the love God has for us, we will extend his love to others both inside and outside the church.

Head Change: To know that God’s love is meant to be both received and shared.

Heart Change: To feel inspired to share the love of God with friends, strangers, and even enemies.

Life Change: To mimic the love of God made visible in the person of Christ by obeying all that he’s commanded us.

OPEN

As a kid, did you play make-believe games? Who were the “bad guys”—your enemies—in those games? What was the fate of your enemies in those games?

In make-believe or real life, most people find it difficult to treat our enemies with any semblance of care or respect. We love and care for our friends and family, and even for many strangers. But our enemies? No way.

In this session, though, we will see that the love God has shown those who were once his enemies is meant to be shared not only with friends, family, and strangers but even with our so-called enemies.

READ

Read Romans 12:9–21.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

According to Jesus, how will the world know that we are his disciples?

What should love within the church feel like?

In addition to the church, what other two groups of people does the gospel compel us to love?

Show Session 9: *Romans 12:9–21* (14 minutes).

DISCUSS

At the beginning of this session, J.D. reminded us of the mercy of God. In light of the mercies of God highlighted in chapter 11, Paul is now showing us the kind of people we are to be. **In what ways does God’s mercy ground us as we begin discussing what’s expected of our behavior?**

Read Romans 12:9–21.

In verses 9–21, Paul writes a lengthy series of commands. And he begins with love, the great command, saying, “Let love be without hypocrisy,” or “Let love be genuine” as it’s translated in the ESV.

What does it mean to love genuinely without hypocrisy?

What are some examples of genuine love that stand out to you? In what ways can you grow in having a genuine love for God and others?

The second half of verse 9 commands us to “detest evil” and “cling to what is good.” **What modern evils do you detest? How**

can clinging to what is good help us grow in our ability to “detest” or “abhor” what is evil?

In verse 10, Paul returns to his command to love, this time using different Greek words. In verse 9, he used the word *agape* for love, here he uses two additional words: *philostorgos* and *philadelphia*. He writes, “Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters.” Don’t just love genuinely; love deeply. Commenting on verse 10, J.D. said that love within the body of Christ should resemble the love of a healthy family. **Who has shown you the kind of love Paul describes here? How has their love impacted you? In what ways do you try to show that kind of love to others?**

*Note: For further study on these Greek words for love, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

In the next several lines, Paul jams as many commands and encouragements into his sentences as he can, instructing the people of God to wholly commit to godly behavior. In verse 11 he says, “Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord.” **What is the common theme between these three commands? In what ways is your service to the Lord marked by diligence in zeal and fervency in the Spirit? What could it look like for you to grow in these areas?**

He goes on in verse 12 to highlight the need for hope, patience, and persistence in prayer because life is not always easy. **In what ways have you endured difficulty? What role did hope play in carrying you through that tough circumstance?**

Paul directs us to keep praying in every circumstance, even difficult ones. **How would you describe your prayer life? What**

can you do to grow more persistent in prayer and more patient in affliction?

Paul, in verse 13, introduces the concept of hospitality, encouraging readers to “pursue” it or “seek to show” it to others. **How would you define the word hospitality? When have you been shown hospitality by someone? In what ways do you seek to show hospitality to others?**

*[Note: For further study on the biblical concept of hospitality, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

One of Paul’s most difficult commands in this passage comes in verse 14 where he tells readers to “Bless those who persecute you,” or those who intentionally mistreat you because of your faith. **Have you ever been persecuted for your Christian faith? How did you respond? What does it look like to respond to being persecuted by blessing our persecutors?**

Verse 15 is a passage that is quoted a lot within the Christian community, and for good reason. Paul instructs us to “rejoice with those who rejoice” and “weep with those who weep.” When we obey this command from Paul, we have the opportunity to, as theologian C.S. Lewis has said, double our neighbor’s joy and halve their sorrow. **How intentional are you in rejoicing with others when they rejoice? When has someone wept with you as you wept? How did their presence help minister to you in your sorrow?**

Paul interjects a sentence in verse 16 that serves as a summation of this entire passage. He says, “Live in harmony with one another.” **What does it mean to live in harmony with others? How do you seek to live in harmony with others in every**

sphere of life—in your neighborhood, at work, recreationally, and online?

Paul goes on to warn us against pride, encouraging us to “associate with the humble.” **In what ways is pride a dangerous sin? How does pride manifest itself in your life?**

Who in your life exhibits great humility? How can you make it a priority to spend more time with—to associate with—that person?

In verses 17–18, Paul circles back to and rephrases an idea that he addressed earlier. He says, “Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes. If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” **How carefully do you think about doing what is honorable to everyone around you? To what lengths do you go to live at peace with everyone? What could change about our society if Christians gave more careful thought to these commands of Paul?**

What one thing could you begin doing today for the sake of living a more honorable life? What could it look like to be more intentional about living at peace with everyone?

Paul concludes chapter 12 by showing readers an alternative to avenging ourselves when we’ve been wronged. Instead of repaying evil with evil, we should feed our enemies when they’re hungry and give them something to drink when they’re thirsty. **Think of someone whom you consider an enemy. What can do you to show kindness to that person? Which of their needs could you meet this week?**

Paul’s final sentence picks up on a statement he made in verse 9. Here, in verse 21, he says “Do not be conquered by evil, but

conquer evil with good.” In place of “conquer,” there are several words that could be used to convey Paul’s meaning, like “overcome” or “overpower.” But his point is clear: the only way we can defeat evil is with good. **What evils are most prominent around you? How can you overcome those evils with good?**

One of J.D.’s main arguments in this session was that God’s love transforms us—it compels us to share his love with other people in our lives, from our church family to complete strangers to our so-called enemies. **In what ways does God’s love for you in Christ compel you to share his love with other people?**

How do you actively seek to love the people in your local church? The strangers and acquaintances you encounter every day? Those who are considered your enemies?

Who in your life needs to be made aware of God’s love for them? What could you do to share God’s love with them this week?

LAST WORD

In the gospel, God has lavished his love on undeserving sinners, blessing those who have cursed him. Instead of returning evil for evil, God has conquered the evil in us with good and will one day conquer evil forever.

We love as God has loved us, living with good intentions and actions toward all people, even our enemies. And in so doing, by God’s grace, we follow the example of Christ, the perfect image of the invisible God who is love.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We’ve highlighted a place where each of the

following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and day to deepen your study of the book of Romans.

1. *Agape, philostorgos, philadelphia, oh my!*

In the English language, the word “love” is extremely versatile. We use it both to convey our affection for a spouse and our affinity for a sports team. **How often do you use the word “love”? What are some of the ways that you use the word?**

Because of its versatility, the word “love” has lost the force of its meaning. In Greek, though, love can be conveyed with several words. In Romans 12:9–10, Paul uses multiple Greek words to communicate the love we are to exercise as followers of Christ.

Read Romans 12:9–10.

In these passages, Paul uses the following words for love: *agape*, *philostorgos*, and *philadelphia*. Below is a rough definition for each:

Agape: Used to convey the active, perfect love of God for his Son and his people. It is unending and non-conditional. It is also the kind of love we are to have for God and even for enemies. *Agape* is also used to refer to the loving bond between a husband and wife.

Philostorgos: As J.D. said, this word is a combination of two different words: *phileo*, which means love between friends, and

storge, meaning affection. It is a deep love that old friends have for one another.

Philadelphia: This can be translated as “brotherly love” or “brotherly kindness.” It is a word that describes the kind of love that siblings have for one another.

There are several takeaways we could highlight, but the most obvious is that Paul is charging us to love one another in a deep, abiding way. **In what ways do you find it difficult to exercise this kind of love? What are the hurdles to loving others as God loves us?**

Do you think any of these hurdles are excuses to not love one another? Why or why not?

Our love is meant to be true and genuine, devoted as that of a husband and wife, familial like that of siblings, and deeply felt. The perfect example of this kind of love is Christ himself, and he invites us to extend his love to others. **What can you do today to exercise the love of Jesus toward those around you?**

2. *Peek at the Greek: Philoxenia*

Hospitality is somewhat of a buzzword within Christian circles today. We often liken it to entertaining guests in a home that’s well put together. And while that’s not unrelated, there is more to Christian hospitality than a hearty meal and a well-dressed table.

Read Romans 12:13.

Paul’s command to be hospitable includes only two words: “pursue hospitality.” From these words, we can conclude at least

one thing: we are to intentionally look for ways to practice hospitality. **When you hear the word hospitality, what thoughts and images come to mind?**

In this passage, Paul's word for hospitality is the word *philoxenia*, which means "entertainment of," "kindness to strangers," or "kindness to the outsider." **How is this definition of hospitality different from how we define it today? Using the biblical definition, what could it look like to be truly hospitable?**

Christians are called to be a hospitable people because God is hospitable. We were all, at one point, outsiders in reference to God. But, through Christ, God has shown kindness to us by welcoming us into his family. **What was life like for you when you were an "outsider"? In what ways has God been hospitable to you? Who did he use to extend his lovingkindness to you?**

God commands us to pursue hospitality because he is serious about welcoming the stranger, the outsider, and the outcast. **Who are the outcasts and outsiders around you who need to be welcomed into life with God? What could you do today to be hospitable to those people?**

Session 10: Romans 13:1–14

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: When we recognize that God has set the governing authorities in place, we will honor and submit to them in obedience to God.

Head Change: To know that government is God’s instrument for punishing the bad and promoting the good.

Heart Change: To feel motivated to submit to the governing authorities as long as it doesn’t require disobedience to God’s commands.

Life Change: To live as an exemplary citizen as an act of obedience to God.

OPEN

Imagine that the government disappeared. What would change about your daily life? How do you think people would respond to having no perceptible governing authority over them?

Nowadays, it’s common for us to hear (or even utter ourselves) grumblings about the government. And for all the ways we might like things done differently, the apostle Paul says that God has put our leaders in place and given them their authority. So, then, what are our responsibilities, even if we don’t like our politicians?

In this session, J.D. unpacks both the responsibilities of those who govern and the responsibilities of those who are governed. It is a timely reminder to help us navigate life in our confused society.

READ

Read Romans 13:1–14.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

Who was most often responsible for inflicting evil on the Roman church?

What are the two main questions this passage answers?

What are the four main obligations of those who are governed?

Show Session 10: *Romans 13:1–14* (15 minutes).

DISCUSS

Politics is one of the most volatile topics of conversation in our society today, even within the church. But we must all reckon with what it means to live out our faith in the society where we live, which includes how we are to relate to those who govern us.

What are some of the most common critiques you hear regarding politics and government? Why do you think politics and government are such touchy subjects?

Read Romans 13:1–7.

In verse 1, Paul makes a statement that could not be any clearer: *everyone* should “submit to the governing authorities.” He then tells us why: “there is no authority except from God, and the

authorities that exist are instituted by God.” Paul makes no qualifications—the default posture of Christians toward their government is one of submission. **What’s your reaction when you read that we are to submit to the governing authorities? Why?**

In what ways can we sometimes fail to submit to the governing authorities? Why do we find submission—especially to governing authority—to be so difficult?

Paul goes on, in verse 2, to speak candidly about what a refusal to submit means. He says to “resist authority” is to “oppose God’s command” because the existing authorities have been instituted by God. **If Paul equates submission to authority with obedience to God, how serious should we be about submitting to our government and its leaders? Are there any exceptions? What are some examples of possible exceptions?**

*[Note: For further study on the concept of submission, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

He continues his argument in verse 3 saying that good conduct doesn’t lead to judgment and punishment from those in authority, but bad conduct rightly does. **In our society, what are some practical examples of bad conduct that warrants judgment from the governing authorities?**

In verse 4, Paul lays out what J.D. said are the two primary responsibilities of those who govern: they “punish the bad” and “promote the good.” **In what ways do governing authorities punish bad conduct? How do our governing authorities “promote the good”?**

In what ways do governments sometimes get good and bad backward and punish wrongly? What responsibility do Christians have when the government mistakes bad for good?

Since the governing authorities have been instituted by God and are servants of God to punish bad and promote good, Paul repeats, “Therefore, you must submit.” He is emphatic. And remember, the political context in Rome was much different from ours—it could be brutal, even deadly. **How seriously did Paul take the issue of submission to the governing authorities? Why do you think we fail to take submission as seriously as Paul?**

Is it possible to take our submission to the governing authorities too far? How? What are some examples?

We submit “not only because of wrath,” or to avoid punishment, “but also because of [our] conscience.” He is arguing here that our conscience—or our moral compass, directed by the Spirit—tells us that submission to the government is right. **Does your conscience agree with Paul’s assessment? What can we do to make sure that our conscience is tethered to God’s Word? What happens when we ignore or disobey our conscience?**

In verses 6–7, Paul broaches the topic of taxes, explaining why we pay them and then, in case anyone wasn’t clear, explicitly commanding us to pay them. “Pay your obligations to everyone,” he says, “taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor.” **To whom do you owe respect or honor? From whom have you withheld respect or honor? How can you show them respect or honor this week?**

Read Romans 13:8–10.

With verse 8, Paul returns to the theme of love. He tells readers to “love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” **What are you doing to grow in your love for others? Who in your life models love for others well?**

In verses 9–10, Paul explains what he means when he says that loving others fulfills the law. Listing several of the Ten Commandments, he says they can be summed up by God’s command in Leviticus 19 to “Love your neighbor,” or all those you encounter, “as yourself.” **How does loving our neighbor help us obey the commands Paul spells out in this passage?**

One of J.D.’s points regarding our responsibility as citizens is that we have an obligation to engage in the politics of our society. **In what ways is political engagement an act of love? Do you see your own political engagement—speaking, voting, serving—as an opportunity to love and care for your neighbors? What could change about our society if we viewed our political involvement as a means of doing good for our neighbors?**

Paul tells us in verse 10 that “Love does no wrong to a neighbor,” which is why love “is the fulfillment of the law.” *Love does no wrong to a neighbor.* **As Christians, who are your neighbors? What kind of neighbors ought we to be? What can you do to exercise love more consistently for them?**

*[Note: For a reflection on what it means to be a neighbor in a digital world, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

Read Romans 13:11–14.

To close chapter 13, Paul dives into a discussion on the end times, also called eschatology, implying that the end is drawing near. **How often do you think about the return of Christ or the end times? What thoughts and emotions come to mind when you do?**

*[Note: For further study on eschatology, see **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this session.]*

While our discussion of end times can lead us to anxiety or conjecture, it leads Paul to ethics—if “the night is nearly over,” how should we behave? He answers: “discard the deeds of darkness;” “put on the armor of light;” “walk with decency: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy.” If the end is near, our time to do good and to share the gospel is running out. **Why do you think it is essential to be godly in these last days?**

Paul closes chapter 13 with two commands. First, don’t act on premeditated sin. **What sort of sins do we plan? What sinful urges do we long to act on? What can you do to guard against your tendency to make plans to gratify your flesh’s desires?**

Second, Paul says “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Or, as the NIV states, “clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ.” The way we act should look like how Jesus would act. **Thinking of yourself, how does your behavior differ when you are “clothed” with Christ?**

Romans 13 is a chapter preoccupied with love. We submit to the governing authorities because we love God, and we engage in the political process (where we’re allowed) because we love our neighbors, all while we await the return of our beloved savior.

How can love make you a more exemplary citizen and a better neighbor?

LAST WORD

Our politicians, as flawed as they are, have been put in place and empowered by God. They are his servants, meant to promote the good and punish the bad in our society. And God commands us to submit to them.

But our submission is always to be informed by our allegiance to the great commandment—to love God above all else and love our neighbor as ourselves. We may think that we are most effective when venting our frustration with politicians. But, to God, we are most effective when we actively love one another. How might the love of God change your neighborhood, city, and nation?

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of the book of Romans.

1. Submission and Obedience

In Romans 13:1–7, Paul harps on our obligation to governing authorities. How are we to think about this obligation? What exactly does it mean to submit to a government?

Read Romans 13:1–5.

The Greek word that Paul uses in this passage, which we translate as “submit” or “be subject to,” is the word *hypotasso*. It carries with it the connotation of being put in subjection. It may simply mean accepting our role as those without political power.

When we read words like “submit” or “be subject to,” we may assume that it also means to obey. But were that the case, Paul may likely have used the word *hypakouo* to make his point, which is the Greek word we often translate as obedience. That’s not the word he uses.

What is the difference between submission and obedience? In a practical sense, how might the two differ in the context of this passage? Can you disobey the governing authorities and yet remain in submission? How so?

Submission does not necessarily mean unwavering obedience. As Michael J. Gorman says in his commentary on Romans, “if and when disobedience to the authorities [is] called for, submission would still be possible in the sense of submitting to the authorities’ right to mete out consequences for such behavior.” In other words, even when we must disobey the law, we submit to the consequences for breaking the law. **When might disobedience to the authorities be called for in our society? In that scenario, how might someone disobey the authorities while remaining submissive to their authority? What would submission look like in that scenario?**

Submission and obedience are not necessarily synonymous terms. God commands that we *obey* him; he commands that we *submit* to the authorities he’s set in place. When governing authorities dictate that we are to disobey God, our allegiance always lies with God. **What can you do to strengthen your allegiance to God?**

2. *Who is my neighbor?*

In our modern digital age, the definition of “neighbor” has been broadened. When we log onto the internet and begin scrolling the pages of social media, we encounter people from all over the world. Our computers and phones have introduced us to millions of new neighbors. So, what does it mean to be a good neighbor online?

The internet can bring out the worst in us, leading us to say things in comment sections that we would never say to someone in person. Reflect on the following questions to evaluate if you love people online the way God commands us to love them.

- **When you interact with people who disagree with you, how do you speak to them? What kind of language do you use? When you tell others about your disagreement, what words do you use to describe those who disagree with you?**
- **If you looked at your last 30 days of social media interaction, what would you find? What posts would you see? What comments? What did you share?**
- **Are the things you post and share on social media true? Loving? Gracious? Kind? Good?**
- **If a non-Christian looked at your last 30 days of social media use, would they be more inclined to follow Jesus or less inclined?**

There are plenty more questions that we could ask, but each of these sheds light on what kind of neighbor we are. Spend some time honestly grappling with these questions and, after doing so, resolve to view your online interactions as an opportunity to love

the neighbors you encounter there as Christ would have you love them.

3. *Eschatology*

Eschatology is a big theological word that can be intimidating, especially because it refers to the study of the “last things.” **When you hear the word eschatology or consider the end times, what images come to mind? What have you been taught about eschatology? How does your view of eschatology influence your day-to-day life?**

Read Romans 13:11–12.

In Romans 13, Paul uses metaphoric language to discuss the topic of eschatology, but he also presents it as immediately practical and instructive for how we are to live *now*. **What commands does Paul give which prove his belief that eschatology is practical for our daily living? How do Paul’s commands help you live faithfully today?**

Christian eschatology is meant to be a source of hope for the future and guidance for today. It describes Jesus’s return, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the new heavens and new earth. That all might feel far away and irrelevant to our everyday lives, but it is incredibly relevant. If our end is secure, we can live with peace today, even when the world feels like it is falling apart. If Jesus is returning, then the way we live matters. If there is a final judgment, then we should not only be concerned about our own eternity, but the eternal destiny of everyone we meet.

Read Revelation 21:1–4; 22:1–5.

Revelation 21–22 is the most vivid picture we get of “last things.” When Christians talk about our hope, future glory, or heaven, this is the picture in our minds. Jesus will make everything new, undo all the evil in the world, and wipe away all of our suffering. **What stands out to you most about what John describes in these chapters? In what ways do you find yourself encouraged after reading these passages? How can this image of the “last things” spur you on to live faithfully now?**

As Paul says in Romans 13, “our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is nearly over, and the day is near.” Take a moment to thank God that he is taking you to the beautiful end we read about in Revelation 21–22, and that he will keep you to the end.

Session 11: Romans 14:1–15:13

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: Christians belong to one another and follow the example of Christ by serving and seeking each other's good.

Head Change: To know that we are called to accept other Christians and build one another up.

Heart Change: To feel motivated to pursue unity within the church for the good of its members and the glory of God.

Life Change: To pursue unity by prioritizing others' spiritual health over our own preferences and freedoms.

OPEN

What teams have you been a part of? How would you describe the team's chemistry?

One of a team's determining factors of success is its chemistry. How do team members get along? Do they sacrifice for one another? Do they defend one another and seek one another's good? Are team members more concerned with the good of one another or their own accolades and performance? When team members answer these questions selflessly, the team often succeeds.

The church is similar. When we consider the needs of others above our own, the church flourishes and God is glorified. In this

session, J.D. will show us what it takes to achieve health within the local church.

READ

Read Romans 14:1–15:13.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

According to J.D.’s description, what is a church?

What are the three levels of belief in the church outlined by Michael Bird?

What is spiritual maturity?

Show Session 11: *Romans 14:1–15:13* (14 minutes).

DISCUSS

If you were to read all of Paul’s letters, one of the central themes you’d notice is his desire for unity within the church. In this passage, the church’s pursuit of unity is front-of-mind for Paul.

Read Romans 14:1–12.

One thing we often overlook is that the chapter breaks in our Bibles are a modern addition meant to help us navigate our way through the pages of Scripture. But the original letters written by Paul didn’t have chapter or verse numbers. Paul’s words that begin chapter 14 are a continuation of his thoughts that end chapter 13. So, when he says, “Accept anyone who is weak in faith, but don’t argue about disputed matters,” it is directly connected to Romans 13:14. **What connection do you see between Romans 13:14 and Romans 14:1?**

*[Note: To learn more about why and when chapters and verses were added to our Bible, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

Verse 1 couldn't be more challenging for our society. First, he says, "Accept anyone who is weak in faith," or who is a less mature Christian. The word he uses for "accept" is a word that means "to receive kindly or hospitably" or "to admit to one's friendship." **How do you behave toward those who might be "weak in faith"? What could you do to be more welcoming to them?**

Paul's second admonition in this verse is to not "argue about disputed matters." Today, we argue about all kinds of things like politics, theology, worship styles, and much more. **What do our disputes reflect to those who are outside the church? What can we do to get better at obeying Paul's command in this verse?**

In verses 2–4, Paul gives an example of one of the disputed matters that the church in Rome was arguing about. **Using the three levels of belief that J.D. mentioned in this session—matters essential for salvation, matters important to the faith but not essential for salvation, and matters of indifference—how would you categorize each of these matters in terms of importance?**

Do any of these disputes warrant breaking fellowship with fellow Christians? Why, or why not?

Paul says in verse 6 that those who fall on both sides of a dispute can and often do each honor the Lord with their choices. He goes on in verses 10–12 to ask, "Why do you judge your brother or

sister?” Then, “Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister?”

How would you answer the questions Paul poses in these verses?

In what ways does this passage change your perspective? How should you treat people who disagree with you on non-essential issues?

Instead of judging others, Paul reminds us that both we and those we judge will stand before God and give an account of our lives.

In light of this reminder, how can we focus more on judging our own behavior rather than the behavior of others?

*[Note: For a quick reflection on Romans 14:11, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

Read Romans 14:13–23.

Instead of judging others, Paul instructs us to seek their good. He says in verse 13, “decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister.” In other words, don’t be a hindrance to the faith and obedience of others. **In what ways can we put stumbling blocks in front of other Christians? How can you become more aware of specific ways in which you can build up the faith of other Christians when you’re with them?**

Though he’s convinced that “nothing is unclean in itself,” Paul recognizes that many things can be, as he said, “stumbling blocks or pitfalls” for people for various reasons. **Do you have any stumbling blocks or pitfalls? If so, what are they?**

How would you advise others to help you avoid positions of vulnerability? In what ways could you apply that advice to your interactions with others?

In verse 17, Paul says that “the kingdom of God is not about eating or drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” He goes on to say, “So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another” (v. 19). **How would you describe what it means to promote peace? In what ways do you strive to be someone who promotes peace?**

What would it take for you to be known as someone who builds others up?

Speaking of eating and drinking, Paul says that “everything is clean,” implying that Christians are at liberty to eat or drink freely. But Paul goes on to say that the exercise of our liberty is not worth causing a brother or sister to stumble. For the sake of our brothers and sisters, it is better to restrict our Christian liberty rather than behave in a way that we feel is ok. **In what ways do you find it difficult to lay down your liberties for the sake of others? Why is it still worth doing? When have you benefited from someone pursuing peace by laying down their Christian freedom for you?**

Romans 14 closes with Paul saying that “everything that is not from faith”—everything not done with our faith in Christ in mind—“is sin.” **What are some things you do that are “not from faith”? What could you do to root everything in your life in your faith in Christ?**

Read Romans 15:1–6.

In verses 1–3, Paul makes an argument that all “who are strong” have an obligation to those who are “without strength.” **Would you consider yourself strong or weak in your faith? Why? Whose strong faith do you benefit from?**

As Paul writes in verses 4–5, we need help with the task of pursuing peace with others and seeking their good above our own. Our help comes from God through his Scriptures which inspire hope, endurance, and encouragement. **In what ways does God’s Word give us hope? How does it encourage us? How does his Word help us to endure?**

God is leading us to harmony with one another so that we “may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with one mind and one voice.” **How does the harmony of God’s people bring him glory?**

In what practical and tangible ways can we pursue harmony with one another?

Read Romans 15:7–13.

Circling back to where he began in chapter 14, Paul repeats, “accept one another, just as Christ also accepted you, to the glory of God.” **How deep does Christ’s acceptance of us go? How deep, then, should our acceptance of others go?**

Paul concludes this section of his letter with a prayer. He models the love and care that he’s just called the Romans to imitate by praying for the church in Rome. **What priority do you place on praying for your friends and fellow church members? What can you do to make prayer a more central part of your service to others?**

In this session, we covered a lot of ground. Paul has divvied out a hefty list of instructions from supporting the weak to laying down our own liberties to serving others as Christ has served us. **How would you summarize this passage in one sentence? What are your major takeaways from this session? Having read the passage and watched this session, what one thing will you do differently in your life beginning today?**

LAST WORD

Love one another. Serve one another. Pursue unity.

These are some of the drumbeats of Paul's message to the church, both in this passage and in many of his other letters. In doing so, we mimic Christ and glorify God by the power of his Spirit. Make it your commitment, then, to carry out the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God by seeking the good of your brothers and sisters above your own preferences and freedoms.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of the book of Romans.

1. The Addition of Chapters and Verse Numbers

As mentioned in the Discuss section, the Bible's original manuscripts do not include chapters and verses. These were later additions meant to help readers navigate our way through the Bible more efficiently. **How might our reading of the Scriptures differ if chapters and verses had never been added?**

Though some form of chapter divisions can be seen as far back as the fourth century, the chapters system as we know it was developed in the thirteenth century by Stephen Langton, who was an Archbishop of Canterbury, and was eventually applied to the Wycliffe English Bible of 1382. Since then, most every Bible translation has followed Langton's model. Chapter divisions, overall, are seen as helpful, and rightfully so. But they do have the potential to disrupt the reading experience by creating unnatural breaks and pauses. **In what ways are the chapter breaks in our Bibles helpful? In what ways might they influence our reading of Scripture in unhelpful ways?**

The versification of the Bible emerged a bit later than chapter divisions. Most scholars agree that the Hebrew Old Testament was divided into verses by a Jewish rabbi named Nathan around A.D. 1448. Then, in the mid-1500s, Robert Estienne divided the Greek New Testament into numbered verses. The Geneva Bible was the first translation to apply his versification, first to the New Testament in 1557 and then to the whole Bible in 1560. **What might have been different about the experience early readers had with the Bible compared to our experience now?**

Visit biblehub.com and read Romans 1–2 using your preferred Bible translation. Before you begin, click on the gear/cogwheel icon and deselect all page options included in that list. Doing so will enable you to read the text with no chapters, verses, or section headings. As you read, pay attention to your reading experience.

Now, using three different translations (CSB, ESV, NIV, for instance), read Romans 1–2 again, this time with verse numbers and headings selected. Again, pay attention to your reading experience. **Did you notice any differences in your**

experience? If so, what were they? Which did you prefer? Why?

While the chapters and verses in our modern Bibles are not inspired aspects of the text, they are nonetheless helpful for us. Take a moment to give thanks for people like Stephen Langton and Robert Estienne, whom God has used to preserve his Word for us. And, if you're up for a new challenge, try reading a version of the Bible that doesn't have numbered verses. Most major English translations now have "Reader's Bibles" in which numbered verses have been removed. Give it a try and see what you think.

2. On Romans 14:11

In Romans 14:11, Paul interrupts his argument, or rather grounds his argument, with the words of the prophet Isaiah. It's a startling message meant to give us pause—so much so that it's worth spending a few moments reflecting on it.

Read Romans 14:11 and Isaiah 45:22–23.

Paul reminds us of these words: "As I live, says the Lord"—or, as surely as I am alive—"every knee will bow to me . . ." **What does it mean that one day everyone will kneel before God?**

He goes on, "and every tongue will give praise to God." The prophet Isaiah says it this way: "every tongue will swear allegiance." **What does it mean to swear allegiance to someone or something? What other things or people do we praise or swear allegiance to now? In what ways is God more deserving of our praise and devotion?**

Isaiah 45:22 provides a bit of context to describe why we kneel and swear allegiance to God. We turn to him because he is the only one who can save us. **Why else is God deserving of our praise and allegiance? Take a moment and list all the reasons why God is praiseworthy.**

The judgment seat of God is a frightening place. It is where God's righteous judgment is meted out on all those who are unrighteous. But for those who are in Christ, we need not fear. God's righteous judgment has been poured out on his Son, who absorbed the wrath of the Father in our place.

Indeed, let us give praise to God.

Session 12: Romans 15:14–16:27

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: To fulfill the mission God has given us we must receive the gospel, depend on the Spirit, and conform our lives to what God has revealed in his Word.

Head Change: To know that God has given us a role to play in the mission of his church.

Heart Change: To feel encouraged about the unique assignment God has given us to serve in his mission.

Life Change: To faithfully carry out our role in the mission of God, no matter how ordinary or insignificant it may seem.

OPEN

When you survey your life's ambitions, is being "ordinary" something you want to be? Why, or why not?

In our society, being ordinary is not something most aspire to—it's almost sacrilegious. We want to be influencers and make our mark on the world. But why do we have to be extraordinary to make a mark on the world?

In our final session, J.D. will show us what it takes to make a lasting impact, and it has nothing to do with being extraordinary. Because we believe an extraordinary gospel and are filled with an extraordinary Spirit, we can be thoroughly ordinary—exercising

everyday, ordinary faithfulness—and marvel as God changes the world one ordinary life at a time.

READ

Read Romans 15:14–16:27.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What two questions does Paul’s example in Romans 15 teach us to ask?

What is Paul’s main purpose in the world?

Why is Paul’s personal greeting at the end of Romans 16 so important?

Show Session 12: *Romans 15:14–16:27* (14 minutes).

DISCUSS

Beginning with the second half of Romans 15, Paul starts to draw his letter to a close. In these last passages, he leaves the Roman Christians with some important parting words.

Read Romans 15:14–21.

Paul here commends these brothers and sisters, saying that he’s convinced they are “full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.” Yet, he says he’s written to remind them “more boldly on some points.” **How do you respond when someone reminds you “boldly” of something you already know? Why do you respond the way you do? What can you do to condition your heart to receive their reminder humbly and charitably?**

In verses 15–17, Paul clearly articulates the calling and purpose placed on him by God. **What is your calling? For what purpose has God called you to that work? How did you discover your calling and purpose?**

If you haven't discovered your calling yet, J.D. gave some advice in this session on finding it. He suggested we answer two specific questions: "Where is the Spirit of God moving in my life?" and "What is the Word of God saying to the church?" **How would you answer these two questions?**

In describing the success he's seen in ministry, Paul takes pains to de-center himself from his accomplishments. Instead, he attributes everything to Christ's work through him, accomplished by the power of God's Spirit. **What dangers lie in boasting in ourselves and not in Christ?**

When have you experienced "success" in life? What caused the success? How did you respond?

As a result of Christ's work through him, Paul says in verses 19–20 that he had fulfilled his aim, which was to "preach the gospel where Christ had not been named." As J.D. pointed out, Paul derived this goal directly from the Scriptures, which he quotes in verse 21. **What are your ambitions? In what ways do you seek to keep your ambitions aligned with the Scriptures? Who in your life holds you accountable to this task?**

*[Note: To learn more about the scope of Paul's missionary journeys, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

Read Romans 15:22–29.

In verses 22–24, Paul shares his desire to come and be assisted by the church members in Rome and refreshed by their company. **Who refreshes you and spurs you on in your ministry calling?**

Paul briefly describes the task he’s completing at the time he’s writing this letter, saying that he’s delivering funds that churches in Macedonia and Achaia (or Gentiles) had contributed to “the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” (or Jews). He goes on to make a statement that we’d be wise to make note of. Speaking of those Gentile churches, he says if they “have shared in [Jerusalem’s] spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister to them in material needs.” In other words, people’s spiritual and physical needs are deeply intertwined. **How do you seek to minister to the material and physical needs of others?**

Read Romans 15:30–33.

In verse 30, Paul appeals to his brothers and sisters to “strive together” with him in “fervent” prayer. **What does it mean to “strive” in prayer? Who do you strive together with in prayer? How can you cultivate a prayer life that is “fervent”?**

He asks these believers not just to pray with him but to also pray for him. **Who do you go to when you need prayer? In what ways have you seen God answer those prayers?**

Before he begins to commend and greet those who are in Rome by name, Paul ends chapter 15 with an important statement. He says, “May the God of peace be with all of you. Amen,” which would have been a deeply encouraging statement for a Roman Christian considering the threats they faced in the Roman empire. **In what ways do we need to be reminded that God is the God**

of peace? How has God proven himself to be the God of peace to you?

Read Romans 16:1–16.

In the final chapter of Romans, Paul has a list of people he wants to commend and greet, and he begins with a woman named Phoebe. He calls her a “servant” of the church in Cenchreae and instructs his readers to “welcome her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints” and to help her in any way she needs. Paul’s words would have been significant because women weren’t regarded highly in the first century. **Who are the women in your life who are faithful servants of Christ and his church? How can you encourage them for their faithfulness and commend them for their service?**

*[Note: To learn more about the word Paul uses for “servant” in this verse, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

In this block of Scripture, Paul greets at least twenty-seven people by name and, for most of them, identifies a specific reason why he’s thankful for them, which shows how much he valued his personal relationships. **Who do you need to tell today that you’re grateful for them?**

Read verses 3–16 again. As you read, pay attention to the words Paul uses to describe the people he’s greeting and the terms of endearment he uses. **What can we learn about Paul in this passage? How can you use Paul’s greetings here as a prompt to help you pursue the kind of life Scripture calls you to?**

Read Romans 16:17–23.

In his closing remarks, Paul tells his readers to be on guard against those who would sow division and create obstacles to belief. He says to “avoid such people,” because they “do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites.” **What are some of the issues that we’re divided on today? How strongly do you strive to avoid these divisions and the people who sow them? In what ways is division an obstacle to belief?**

Having given a final warning, Paul turns once again to commend the Roman Christians a final time. Because of their reported obedience, he rejoices over them and encourages them to keep at it. **Whose obedience encourages you? How does it motivate you to pursue obedience yourself?**

What can we do to prioritize the communal nature of following Jesus more so than our tendency to operate on our own?

Read Romans 16:25–27.

This letter ends, as so many of Paul’s letters do, with a doxology, or a statement of praise to God. It’s as if Paul is trying to jam as much praise into this statement as he can—he can’t seem to help himself. **What stands out to you about Paul’s doxology? Why is this statement an appropriate ending point for the book of Romans?**

*[Note: For an exercise on singing the doxology, see **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this session.]*

As J.D. said at the beginning of *The Book of Romans: Part 1*, Paul’s letter to the church in Rome is one of the most important theological documents in the literary and biblical canon. It bursts with theological depth unlike any other book. Having studied the

second half of the book now, we have a lot to reflect on. **What are one or two things you want to remember from this study of Romans? What could you do this week to apply that truth to your life? How will you keep what you've learned fresh in your mind now that this series has concluded?**

LAST WORD

The second half of the book of Romans is deeply theological and deeply practical. In it, Paul explores the depths of the gospel and God's mercy, and he calls us as followers of Jesus to live lives marked by love and holiness.

As we close this series, reflect on the truths we've only scratched the surface of in our time together. Consider setting aside an hour or two to read the book of Romans from start to finish, meditating on what God has taught you. Pray that God would firmly fix these truths in your heart so that you can walk in a manner worthy of the gospel.

Note: *This series is split into two parts. The Book of Romans: Part 1 can be found in the RightNow Media library.*

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and day to deepen your study of the book of Romans.

1. *The Scope of Paul's Missionary Journeys*

Beginning in AD 44, the apostle Paul served as a missionary throughout the Roman empire until his death in AD 68. Paul covered a lot of ground, to the extent that he could say, “I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum. . . I no longer have any work to do in these regions” (Rom 15:19, 23). **Have you ever stopped to consider the scope of Paul’s travels? What do you know about his journeys, and what questions do you have?**

Read Acts 13:2–6, 13–14, 51; 14:5–7; 17:1, 10; 18:1; 2 Corinthians 11:25–27.

Beginning in chapter 13, the book of Acts includes the record of Paul’s missionary journeys. It’s an extensive record that gives insight into Paul’s travels, what he faced during his journeys, and the rapid spread of the gospel. But, because we’re not overly familiar with the geography of the region, we can overlook the scope of Paul’s work. Consider the following:

- Paul visited at least forty-nine cities during his missionary travels.
- By some estimates, Paul is believed to have traveled more than 10,000 miles on foot.
- His travels took him as far west as Italy—perhaps even to Spain—and as far east as modern-day Syria, a distance no less than 2,000 miles.
- His journeys were often fraught with danger and hardship.

How do these observations help you better grasp the scope of Paul’s missionary journeys? Which of them is most astonishing to you?

Based on these observations, we can be certain that Paul was extremely committed to carrying out what he believed was God’s

calling on his life. **What can we learn from Paul's commitment to the task he'd been given?**

How can Paul's example help you to endure when you face challenges or difficulties in your ministry?

2. *Peek at the Greek: Diakonos*

In Romans 16:1, the apostle Paul makes a clear statement about a woman named Phoebe. He commends her to his readers, he instructs them to welcome and assist her, and he calls her a servant—a *diakonos*.

Read Romans 16:1.

The word *diakonos* literally means “servant” and is used throughout the New Testament in a number of ways. It is translated as “deacon,” “coworker,” “minister,” and even “courier.” However it's applied, the word refers to a person who renders service and help to others. **Who are the “deacons” or “ministers” in your local church that render service and help to others? How could you let them know that you're thankful for them? What could you do to be of help to them?**

While there is an ongoing debate about Paul's use of the word *diakonos* and how this verse, in particular, relates to the office of deacon within the church, he is clearly using this word to refer to a woman. And in a first-century Roman context, it was a significant thing for Paul to do because women were not viewed as equal to men. **What does it say about Paul that he identifies Phoebe as a servant of the church? What does it say about the Christian faith? What does it say about God?**

Paul and Phoebe both are models for us today. Like Phoebe, we are to be known for our service. Like Paul, we should be quick to commend others for their service. **What can you do to serve your local church? Who can you commend for their service?**

3. *Singing the Doxology*

Nearly three-hundred fifty years ago, Thomas Ken penned the words of a short hymn we refer to simply as “the Doxology.” To this day, many Christians around the world sing this hymn every time they gather. **Have you ever heard of the Doxology? Does your church ever sing this hymn?**

To close *The Book of Romans: Part 2*, it seems appropriate to end the same way Paul ends his letter, with a declaration of praise to God. Though it may feel uncomfortable, consider standing and lifting your hands, and—wherever you are—singing these words aloud as an exclamation of praise:

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.*