

Small Group Lesson Guides
“Sharing Our Lives” July Series
Based on Romans 12

GENERAL PREPARATION FOR SERIES

Background on Romans

Author: Paul

Date: Most scholars date Romans between AD 55 and 58. It is likely written from Corinth (Greece).

The Roman Church: It’s important to remember that “churches” in Christianity’s early days weren’t like churches as we imagine them now. That is to say, there wasn’t one big building in the community designated specifically for worship, fellowship, and study where all the local believers gathered. Instead, a “church” was often a small group of believers that met regularly in someone’s house. Think about the group of Christians with whom you’ll be sharing this lesson—that’s kind of what church was like for people to whom Paul was writing!

Occasion: Romans, in many ways, is a letter of self-introduction (1:1-17; 15:14-33). Paul has never been to see the Roman believers (in fact, it is unclear how Christianity reached Rome). However, he wants to go, and he also knows that the Romans could help him achieve his future missionary ambitions of taking the Gospel to Spain. Paul’s lack of familiarity with many in the Roman church means that he speaks more generally and coherently than perhaps in other epistles where he speaks to specific congregational issues; this makes the text easier for us, as modern interpreters, to understand.

However, that’s not to say that Paul has no knowledge of the Roman Christians and their struggles. Evidence suggests that the Roman church was having difficulties incorporating Jewish and Gentile believers. In AD 49, Jewish Christians were expelled from Rome, but early in Nero’s reign (AD 54), they were allowed to return; when they did, however, they found that Gentile Christianity was dominant in the area. In this light, portions of Paul’s letter read as an attempt to reveal to both strands of believers that, in Christ, they share a new, unified identity.

Overall Theme: God’s BIG plan of salvation. Paul doesn’t just lay out the story of Jesus; he gives the Romans the story of the Jewish people—the prophets, the wandering, and the inadequacy of humanity to achieve righteousness through the law. Upon this ground, he presents Christ as the answer, the path to freedom.

Situation of Chapter 12: Broadly speaking, chapters 1-11 are theological; they deal with concepts and lay out Paul’s case for the Christian faith. Chapters 12-16 deal with the practicality of what that faith means for the behavior of those who believe. Much of our focal chapter for July, chapter 12, speaks to the way believers should relate to other people, particularly those who share faith with them in the Body of Christ.

Week 1:
“Sharing Our Lives”
Romans 12:1-5

LESSON PREP: COMMENTARY

These insights have been gathered from the Smyth and Helwys and New Interpreter's Bible commentaries on the book of Romans. They are offered here to help discussion leaders prepare for the lesson; feel free to use these insights in your discussion of today's passage with your small group.

- The opening verse indicates that the foundation of all Christian obedience is that we are to offer true sacrificial worship to God
- The “therefore” links what follows to what has come before. Paul had previously (1:16-11:36) spoken of God's righteousness that justifies sinners. It is on this that Paul presents the ethical behavior of Christians. In other words - since God's righteousness has been revealed and Christians have received its benefits, this is how they ought to behave.
- There had been a reaction among some Mediterranean peoples against the sacrifices of animals. Paul was likely speaking in light of this cultural trend, saying that appropriate worship is proper behavior in church and society
- In the second verse Paul presents an intersection of eschatology and ethics - those in Christ are members of the age to come. Therefore new standards of behavior are both possible and commanded.
- If verse 1 focuses on the body, but with the mind being involved, then verse 2 focuses on the renewal of the mind, but the result is that people can work out and practice what is the right thing to do.
- Now that they have died with Christ, Christians are freed from the power of sin. Sin is still possible, but it is not necessary.
- It is only with a transformed mind that one has the capacity of forming the correct Christian ethical judgement in a given moment.
- Paul's point in verse 3 is not that some should feel inferior to others, but that all should exercise their varied gifts on a level with one another.
- One of Paul's most powerful images for explaining the combined unity and diversity of the church is that of the body.
- To speak of one body in Christ is to emphasize the unity of that people despite its obvious diversity.

LESSON GUIDE

Sharing the Topic

The purpose of this section is to introduce the theme for today's lesson.

- **With whom do you “share your life”? Who knows the most about you?** (*Responses will probably be about family, spouses, friends, co-workers, and, hopefully, church members!*)
- Explain that the Church is a place where we can share our lives with one another. In fact, it should be one of the MAIN places we share our lives with people, because the brothers and sisters in the Church share with us the most precious bond of all—faith in Jesus Christ.

Sharing Scripture

The purpose of this section is to introduce the focal passage of today's lesson.

- Take a few minutes to give everyone some background on the book of Romans.
- Introduce that the passage begins by talking about worship—something very important in the life of a church!
- **What do you think of when you think of worship?**
- **What forms of worship are most meaningful to you?**
- Have someone read Romans 12:1-5.

Sharing Insights

The purpose of this section is to examine the focal passage, exploring its meaning and application points.

- Explain that in this passage, Paul takes the idea of sacrificial worship and flips it on its head. The idea of sacrificial worship not involving physical sacrifices was a strange notion to the Jews of Paul's time.
- **What is another example of Paul taking the traditional Jewish thought and giving it new life in light of new life in Christ?** (*A great example is circumcision—Romans 2:25-29*)
- **What do you think that first sentence in verse 2 means?**
- **What are examples in your own life, or that of the modern church, in which the traditional Christian mindset needed to be changed in order “not to conform to the pattern of this world,” as Paul says, but to allow God to transform us and the way we think?** (*The leader may want to have an example or two in mind to spark the discussion; segregation, for instance, would be a great answer to throw out if no one is able to come up with one*)
- Prompt the class to take another look at verse 3. The temptation here may be to measure “the faith God has given us” much in the same way we measure ingredients in a measuring cup.

Thus, causing us to have the mindset, “She has more faith than I do,” or “I definitely have more faith than he does.” However, Paul is not trying to set us up to compare ourselves to one another. He is actually introducing the idea that no one should feel inferior to another. We each have our gifts and our own unique ways of living out our faith.

- **What are some different ways that you see people in this very room or in our church living out their faith?**
- Have the class name some of the various gifts that different people in our congregation have. See how many you can name!
- **Are any of these gifts “better” or “more important” than the others?**
- Verse 5, which ends with Paul saying, “we all belong to each other,” is the theme verse for our series this month. **What do you think Paul means by saying that, in the Body of Christ, “we all belong to each other”?**

Sharing Stories

This section captures the true heart of the July series, which is helping members of the Winter Park Baptist Body of Christ “share their lives” by telling one another more about themselves.

- Have everyone get in pairs or small groups of 3-4. Encourage them to team up with individuals they do not know as well (*remember, a big purpose of this series is to help the people of WPBC get to know each other better, and the best way to do that is by stepping out of our comfort zones a little bit and teaming up with someone new!*).
- Prompt participants to share their responses to the following questions with their partner/group (*give a few minutes in between the questions to allow appropriate time for response*).
 - Today’s topic is Sharing Our Lives. **Looking at our text from today - what part of the passage is (or has been previously) most challenging for you in your faith and your life?**
 - Earlier we discussed times in our lives or in that of the modern church during which we needed to let God change our mindset. **In your group (or with your partner) dive into your faith journey a little more. Talk about a person or experience that helped to bring about an openness to letting God transform you. In other words, name an influential person or formative experience in your faith journey.**
- Have participants stay with their groups/partners, but ask them to share their response to this question with the class: **What is something that you learned about someone that has encouraged you in your faith journey today?**

Sharing Prayers

- Have everyone pray in their groups (or with their partners) for one another.