



Be transformed

Romans 12:1-21 – Leaders version

For a one hour slot, you might like to spend 2 sessions to complete this study

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

What does the passage say and mean?

90 minutes

Read Romans 12

1. This chapter begins with 'therefore'. When we read the word 'therefore' we have to ask ourselves what it is there for. What has Paul written about so far in Romans?

You don't need to get into too much detail, the aim is simply to recap the gospel – we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

*2. **SHOUT-OUT** What does Paul urge us to do in v1, and what do you think this means?

'...in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God...' A sacrifice is something given at cost to the giver, and is to be 1. holy and 2. pleasing to God. The reference to sacrifice is not to OT animal sacrifices for forgiveness (Jesus has fulfilled that), but the burnt offering of Leviticus 6:8-13 (a voluntary act of worship... expression of devotion, commitment and complete surrender to God, NIVSB p150).

Keller says, 'To be a "living sacrifice" is to be fully at God's disposal. It means, actively, to obey God in anything he says in any area of life; and, passively, to be willing to thank God for anything he sends in any area of life.' (2015, p103).

Brainstorm about what sacrifices we might be able to give e.g. time, money, convenience.

*3. How does the Bible describe such sacrifices in v1, and what do you think about this?

'...your spiritual act of worship.' We tend to think that worship means singing and little else. But God says otherwise...

Questions 4-6 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. You need to write them on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs.

*4. **SDL** Read the first half of v2 again. What do you think Paul means by ‘the pattern of this world’?

The mindset of the unbeliever / the surrounding culture. Think of examples – living for self, material desires, ignoring Christ, fear for the future, sinful thoughts and behaviours, etc.

*5. **SDL** What do you think Paul means by ‘the renewing of your mind’?

A new mindset, from Christ – see 1 Cor 2:16, ‘we have the mind of Christ!’. Think about what this might mean – living for Christ, my priorities are lined up with Christ’s priorities, desire to share the good news of Jesus with others, putting others first, assurance of your eternal salvation, spiritual wisdom, etc. This is something that we must continue to do, it’s not something we do when we become a Christian and never have a problem with again.

6. **SDL** What does Paul say will happen when our mind is renewed? (second half of v2)

‘We will be able to test and approve what God’s will is’. Think about what this means. It’s not simply referring to making decisions or to future plans for our ministry, although it can include this. It’s referring to God’s will for us as a believer to obey Christ and bring glory to God – see Eph 1:11-12, we are ‘for the praise of his glory’ and 1 Thess 4:1, ‘It is God’s will that you should be sanctified...’.

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Be honest, do you want a new mindset? Why?

7. Read v3. What does it mean to think of yourself with sober judgement, and how would it change your opinion of yourself if you really did this?

Please make sure you make it clear that this is nothing to do with alcohol! It means to realistically see yourself as you really are, not putting yourself down and not bigging yourself up. The context is with respect to spiritual gifts, v4+, but the principle carries for any situation.

Recognising what you can’t do means you become able to rely on others, recognising what you can do means you can serve others (Keller 2015, p109).

Encourage each person to be try to be honest with themselves and consider whether they have too high, or too low, an opinion of themselves and how this might change in light of having the mind of Christ.

*8. Read v4-8. Why do different people have different gifts from God?

Because, as Christians we are one body. All the gifts are needed for the body to function and all Christians have a gift.

*9. What does the Bible tell us to do with our gifts?

This is not the only list of gifts in the Bible and the aim is not to get caught up on discussing specific gifts. The point of the question is to recognise that we are to use the gifts that God has given us, and to do it well – generously, diligently, cheerfully etc.

10. Read Romans 12:9-10. What does it mean to be devoted to one another in brotherly love?

It's talking about love between Christians, although the principle extends to all relationships. Brotherly love is the love of Christ for other Christians, which includes forgiving, patience, honesty, tolerance, gentleness, kindness, putting others first etc. It doesn't mean seeming to be nice, or loving, but inside feeling hate or talking about the person behind their back. It can mean having the courage (and discernment) to confront another Christian about their behaviour or attitude. Think about practical examples of what this would look like within the prison.

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Think of someone to whom you are not currently showing brotherly love. How can things change?

11. Read v11-13. Which of these things do you find easy, and which do you find hardest?

Think about why we find some of these things harder, and how we can try to change things in these areas.

12. Read v14. Why do you think God tells us to bless those who persecute us, and what do you think this means?

Because, as we are about to read in v19, God (the Son) is the judge, not us – it's not for us to avenge. '...when we identify "evil" too closely with the "evildoer", we believe we need to destroy the evildoer in order to destroy evil. So it seems good to do evil; and we unwittingly become a pawn of the evil force behind the evildoer.' (Keller 2015, p123).

More positively, as we become more like Christ, we take on his character more and more, and, although he didn't mince his words with his enemies, he didn't attack them. Those who are persecuting us are really persecuting Jesus, and they need our forgiveness and our prayer that their hearts would be softened towards him, that they might know him too. Blessing them includes prayer, continuing to acknowledge them (where it is safe to do so), forgiving them, etc. Blessing them also means that the spread of evil does not infect us, and may be stopped in them too.

13. Read v16. Why do you think God needs to tell us to 'be willing to associate with people of low position'? What stops us from doing this, and why is this wrong in God's eyes?

Because people tend to avoid 'people of low position' – our pride gets in the way. It's wrong because in God's eyes we are equal – no-one is more important than anyone else to God. Verses 9-21 show us the way we should live as Christians in relation to other Christians / people in general. 'The essence of love is not to concentrate on our own image, position and needs, but on the needs of others.' (Keller 2015, p121). Take care not to identify specific groups or individuals as you consider this verse.

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In what way might you put Romans 12:16 into practice this week?

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*14. Read v17-19.

Why do we take revenge? Why does God tell us not to take revenge?

We take revenge because we want to see justice done. But we overdo it and give back more than we got... God tells us not to take revenge because he is the judge (Jesus is, Acts 17:31) and he will judge us fairly.

*15. Read v20-21. What does God tell us to do to our enemies, rather than take revenge?

What do you think about this?

(v20 quotes Proverbs 25:21-22). He tells us to bless them – give them food and water! Heaping burning coals on someone's head was not for punishment (such a statement wouldn't fit the context). In Jewish culture, heaping coals on your head was a sign of repentance, so Paul is talking metaphorically about leading your enemy to repentance by your kindness to him, despite his bad treatment of you. (Remember what God did for us when we were still his enemies, Romans 5:8).

16. Read v21, which sums up v9-20. How does the gospel allow us to do this?

The gospel tells us that Jesus has defeated sin, death and hell. If we trust him, he will give us the strength to overcome evil (if we want it). When we do good and not evil, we show that we are changing to be more like him – 'be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (v2).

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How might Romans 12 affect your mind and life this week?

Encourage the group to think of specific and personal examples

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

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