



Romans (Strengthened by the Gospel) (Week 16/18) Gospel-Shaped Community

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *Tell someone else this week of how you came to believe and specifically about God's kindness to you in getting an opportunity to hear and believe in Jesus Christ.*

Warm-Up

1. What are the common sources of 'life advice' or 'guides for living' that people consult?
2. Why do you think that this type of advice has been common across the ages?
3. What is the best life advice that you have ever received? *What is the worst advice that you've been given?*

Read Romans 12:1-2

4. What is the first word of chapter 12? What do you think it is *there for*? (i.e., think about what the focus of Paul's argument has been so far in chapters 1-11)
5. What does it mean to offer our bodies as a 'living sacrifice'? What are we doing this in response to?
6. What do you think it means to keep God's mercy "in view"?
7. How did God give ways to his people (in the Old Testament) to keep remembering his mercy? What has he given to us? What helps you to keep God's mercy 'in view'?
8. What does Paul say is "proper worship"? Why is this really good news for us?
9. How does offering our lives as a living sacrifice involve both *not confirming* and *being transformed*?
10. How does God's Spirit help transform us? How do we have a role in the 'renewal of your mind'?

Read Romans 12:3-8

11. What are the various ingredients for humility (as put forward by Paul here)?
12. Do you know anyone who is a wonderful example of *humble service*? What stands out about them?
13. Why is it so important that we do not undervalue or overvalue the gifts that we have been given?
14. Why would we have a high value of all of the different gifts of the body? How can you show this?
15. What gifts are listed? Are they exhaustive? What — according to Paul — should we do with our gifts?
16. Who could you encourage in the way that they use their gifts? How might you empower others more?

Read Romans 12:9-21

17. What type of love does Paul call us to express? What does *sincere love* look like?
18. What are we to hate? What are we to cling to? What does this actually mean in practice?
19. Do you ever find it hard to love in *any of these ways*? *Are there particular aspects for you to focus on?*
20. How is our love a faint echo of the love with which God loves us? How does that spur you on?

Apply *What aspect of offering yourself as a living sacrifice can you focus on this coming week?*

Pray *Gracious Father, please help us in the power of your Spirit to continually plumb the depths of your mercy, and so respond with: proper worship, humble service, and sincere love. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

GOING DEEPER

Romans (Strengthened by the Gospel) (Week 16/18) Gospel-Shaped Community

Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Frontline this Week

Who are three people you know, you are not yet following Jesus? Pray for them all week - for soft hearts, opportunities to hear the gospel, and courage for you to share the gospel.

For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (sermon):* “Relating to others” by Vaughan Roberts:
<https://stebbes.org/sermons/relating-to-others/#sermons>
- *Listen (sermon):* “We’ll overcome evil with good” by John Stott:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=50849&show_file=55527
- *Listen (sermon):* “Everyone with a Gift” by Timothy Keller
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/everyone-with-a-gift>
- *Listen (sermon):* “We’ll Conform no Longer” by Chris Wright:
https://allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=50843&show_file=55522
- *Listen (sermons):* Various sermons from St Bart’s on Romans 12:
<https://www.stbarts.com.au/grow/sermons?search=Romans%2012&page-n68j=2>

Series Resources

- *Read:* “Strengthened by the Gospel” by Brian Rosner. 📖
- *Read:* “The Story of God Bible Commentary: Romans” by Michael Bird.
- *Read:* “Into the Heart of Romans” by N. T. Wright. 📖
- *Read:* “Epistle of Paul to the Romans” by F. F. Bruce. 📖
- *Read:* “The Message of Romans” by John Stott. 📖
- *Read:* “The Epistle to the Romans” by Leon Morris. 📖
- *Watch:* “Romans” by the Bible Project:
<https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-romans/>

📖 Available to borrow from the St Bart’s Library (Toowoomba): stbarts.com.au/library

ROMANS (STRENGTHENED BY THE GOSPEL)

*Week 16/18 “Gospel-Shaped Community”
by the Rev’d Adam Lowe (30/08/2026, Toowoomba)*

복음으로 빛어진 공동체 | Wēlpiēth a yēē Bāāi cōk Pīiny
以福音为根基的社群 | சுவிசேஷத்தின்படி வடிவமைக்கப்பட்ட சமுதாயம்

Bible Passage: Romans 12

*Heart of Sermon: That in response to God’s mercy, as Christians and Christian community,
our living should be characterised by proper worship, humble service, and sincere love.*

*Gracious Father, please help us in the power of your Spirit, to continually plumb the depths of your mercy,
and so respond with: proper worship, humble service, and sincere love. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.*

Almost every generation has had their equivalent of a guide to life on how to live.
There are all sorts of sources thrust upon us, or to which we go, offering “wisdom” for living. /

If you can find a bookshop, there will be entire shelves dedicated to self-help.
If you’re a bit younger, your social feeds are likely awash with influencers spruiking the latest life-hack.
And if you’re living on the edge, you might go to AI for advice and direction on how to live.

But, of course, this isn’t just a modern fascination!
The Victorian era had an explosion of manuals on etiquette and proper social conduct.
The Puritans in the 17th century were almost comically exhaustive in their rules for households.
And the Ancient world — the world into which Jesus was born — they were also into it, too.

One of my favourite examples is Gaius Musonius Rufus.
He was a Roman Stoic philosopher who lived around the time of Jesus..
His advice for life is as far-ranging as it is far-reaching.
He spoke on how to approach problems. Why kings should study philosophy.
He gave talks on food. On clothing and shelter. On furnishings. And even on cutting your hair.
[Which spoiler alert: he wasn’t too fond of, and just something to be done when it becomes a bit of a bother]

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- There’s never been a shortage of advice on how we are to live.
 - *But as Paul writes to the Roman Christians,
he does so with an entirely different perspective.*
 - He wants them to understand how to live in light of the Gospel.

- *Not simply as a self-improvement project, or to please ourselves or the society that surrounds,* but that — individually and collectively as followers of Jesus, that our lives would be marked out as living sacrifices in response to God's mercy.
- The motivation — on how we are to live, is not because of an inward desire — nor an outward pressure, but in response to WHO GOD IS: he is the merciful one; and how that MERCY has been expressed, not least in the very giving of himself for us.
- That's what Paul has been plumbing the depths of over the past 11 chapters.
- God's mercy is the *springboard* for living differently.
And God's Spirit is the power by which we try. //

Other than the Sermon on the Mount,

I think that Romans 12 is the closest we get to for a guide to living in the New Testament.

- You can — and should — spend your whole lifetime working it through.
- Paul doesn't offer any advice here on your *housing* or *how to cut your hair*.
But that in response to God's mercy, that our lives would be characterised by:

Proper Worship;

Humble Service; *and*

Sincere Love.

PROPER WORSHIP | VERSES 1-2

참된 예배 | Duṣṛ Piēth | 正确的敬拜 | முறையான ஆராதனை

First, *in response to God's mercy, our lives should be characterised by* **proper worship**. Verse 1...

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in **view of God's mercy**, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is —his good, pleasing and perfect will.

It's worth saying that IF it is in **view of God's mercy** *that we are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices*, then it means that we've got to always **keep God's mercy in view!**

- That's certainly what we want to do whenever we gather as God's people.
Each of us needs prompts that punctuate our daily rhythms to remind us of God's mercy, too, We never want God's mercy to be out of view, far from our thoughts, nor pressed upon our hearts./
- *[When we go away and the bikes are loaded on the back of the car, I'm constantly keeping my eye on the rearview mirror in the hope they're still there! How much more we need to keep our eyes on God's mercy!]*
- In response to the Lord's instructions, God's people had all sorts of reminders of his mercy. In the meals they shared, the songs they sung, scriptures read, prayer prayed, clothes worn, architecture built, the ordering of their time, the circumcision of men, even piles of rocks they were told to stack, and — of course, the sacrifices offered to atone for sin.

- It wasn't only messy, but it was costly and constant.
- The sacrificial system wasn't to appease God,
but to remind them that sin has a price and that we're dependent on God's mercy.
- When we think about making a sacrifice, we might think about 'giving something up',
or some sort of minor or major inconvenience: *like the internet running slow...*
- But for God's people — when they thought about sacrifice — it meant death.
Day-after-day, again and again, sacrifice after sacrifice.
- But plot twist! That has all changed.
We no longer have to offer up sacrifices on an altar!
Because Jesus became the perfect sacrifice — offering himself once and for all, for us! /
- And so how do we respond? / By offering our BODIES as a living sacrifice — to *and for God*.
Not in order to earn his MERCY, but in response to his MERCY that has been poured out.

The whole notion of a *living sacrifice* sounds like a contradiction!

- *A sacrifice might be many things, but ALIVE is not one of them! Or at least not for long!*
- But not us! It's like when Lazarus was raised, we're told that the DEAD MAN CAME OUT!
Or when the widow's son was healed: that the dead man sat up and began to speak!
- That's us. We were dead in our sin, but are now alive in Christ.
- And so now, we present ourselves to God, as those who are alive from the dead! Paul
doesn't imagine that's a once-off thing — but we have to keep on daily presenting ourselves.

- Not because the certainty of salvation wavers from one day to the next,
but because our commitment can be flakey, and our hearts can be forgetful.
- There's that terrible joke: that you know the problem with a living sacrifice?
It keeps crawling off the table. / But it's true! /
- It's why for me personally, that one of the prayers that I find so helpful to pray everyday,
even before I even get out of bed, is to offer myself as a living sacrifice to God afresh.
- That's the agenda I want to shape my life — but I need to keep doing it day-by-day.
- Lives that are holy: that is set apart by God and for God *for his pleasure*.
- **This** is what true and proper worship is! God wants us. //
- So often — in all sorts of unhelpful, even unhealthy ways,
we can be desperate to please people and then despair when we can't.
- But the wonderful news is that we offer ourselves as living sacrifices,
not in order to try and earn our place with God,
but as an expression of the place we already have.
- God doesn't leave us in the dark about what pleases him.
He's given us his Spirit who is at work from within.
And he's also given us his word so that we're able to test — that is discern,
what God's good, pleasing, and perfect will is.

Paul gives us two clues on how to go about that.

- It involves resisting that which is not of God: **Do not conform to the pattern of this world.**
In the recognition that we're under constant pressure to conform,
we need to *actively resist* — say *NO* — the bits which are not of God. AND:
- We need to embrace that which is of God: **Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**
Paul's not calling Christians to all be super-intellectuals and rush out and get a PhD.
He's simply recognising — long before modern Psychology was a thing,
that we need to acknowledge that our minds are a battlefield.
- And what we feed our minds and where we spend our thoughts matters.
Paul knew that our thoughts have the power to shape who you are and how we behave.
- God isn't just *renovating* us — we're being *transformed* on the road to glorification.
- So we've got to keep saturating ourselves with the very thoughts of God.
- No wonder Paul wanted to preach the Gospel to the Romans.
Not because they hadn't heard it.
But because they needed to be reminded over-and-over again.
- We're sacrifices that never die.
Because Jesus has died for us.

HUMBLE SERVICE | VERSES 3-8

겸손한 섬김 | Luōi de kur dē Piōu | 谦卑的服事 | தாழ்மையான சேவை

Second, *in response to God's mercy, our lives should be characterised by* **humble service**. Verse 3...

³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

If we are to live lives characterised by humble service, *we need to just remember five things:*

- Humble service begins *not with our gifts but by God's grace.*
Humble service is not *thinking less about yourself BUT thinking about yourself less.*
Humble service focuses *on the gifts we've been given, not that which we do not have.*
Humble service recognises *that every part of the body is needed.*
Humble service involves *us all actually putting our gifts to work.* //
- Sometimes people think that being humble means having a really low view of yourself.
But of course, that can't be the case, because Jesus is the ultimate example of humility.
In fact, humility wasn't viewed positively until Jesus showed the world what humility is.
And he wasn't just the Son of God — but he knew that he was the Son of God. /
- Thinking of ourselves with sober judgement, means seeing ourselves in light of the Gospel.

- When we begin with God's grace,
we have no cause to think too little of ourselves:
Afterall: we've been created in God's image;
redeemed by his Son; *and* empowered by his Spirit
- But it also guards us from thinking too much of ourselves, of being arrogant,
for we not only know that we're sinful, but also because anything we've been given,
is not because of how good we are but because of how good God has been to us,
and that when we're joined with Christ we now are connected as his body.
- Not *me* but *we*.

Paul makes the point in a number of places that the church is Christ's body.

- There are many parts. / None is more important than another.
For they all have different functions and are needed.
And together serve God's purposes. //

In parallel with the rise of Artificial Intelligence, there has also been a race to develop humanoid — human-like robots. Right now, it's still early days. And from time-to-time you may have seen a video of a robot trying to do a task but going haywire, limbs flailing — it almost looks like it's at war with itself. /

When Christians forget they are part of a body — or that they're more or less important than the other,
Or even that they belong to one another — that's kind of what we look like.

- Watching a robot is almost comical (at least for now),
but when it is the body of Christ it's a tragedy.
- We've been freed from comparison for all saved by the same grace,
and whatever gifts we have, have been given by God by his wisdom.
- People can get into a headspin trying to understand what Paul means when he says,
that we should think of ourselves in accordance with the faith God has distributed to you (v.3).
- But note the emphasis is not how much faith we have,
but the one who is the source of the gifts that we do have.
- God has distributed. / We're freed from the tyranny of comparison.
And tasked with the responsibility to ensure the whole body is at work.
- That means, when we see someone serving in a way that we can't,
it shouldn't cause us to look down on them nor ourselves, but to rejoice —
that we're so privileged to be part of Christ's body at work. /
- One of the greatest privileges of serving here at St Bart's
is to see the extraordinary ways that the body is at work in great humility.
- If you think of yourself too highly, you'll be tempted to think you don't need others.
If you think of yourself too lowly, you'll be tempted to think you're not needed.
- Either option is a disaster, because it is limiting the potential of the body. //

We don't have time to go through all the gifts that Paul lists in verses 6 to 7.

- The list of course is not meant to be exhaustive.
Whatever ways you can help serve the body is a gift from God. /
The point is not so much what the gifts are, *but that whatever gift we have that we put it to use.*
 - If it's prophesying *then prophesy.*
Serving *then serve.*
Teaching *then teach.*
Encouraging *then encourage.*
Giving *then give generously.*
Leading *then do it diligently.* / Showing mercy *then do it cheerfully.*
-

In the Return of the King when Sam and Frodo finally reach the slopes of Mount Doom, they're exhausted. They're starving and thirsty. Frodo is at the point of collapse, not least because of the psychological weight of the ring which he carries. Sam knows that he cannot take the ring for him — he knows that burden was for Frodo alone to bear. But watching Frodo crawl forward, Sam knows the one thing he can do... he hoists Frodo onto his back and recommences climbing... saying "I can't carry it for you, but I can carry you".

- Humble service doesn't mean pretending you can do everything.
Sam doesn't grab the ring... he just does what's actually his to do...
- It just means knowing what you've been given, putting it to use,
and helping others to do the same.

SINCERE LOVE | VERSES 9-12

진실된 사랑 | Nhiër Yic | 真诚的爱 | கபடமற்ற அன்பு

Finally, *in response to God's mercy, our lives should be characterised by **sincere love**.* Verse 9...

⁹ Love must be **sincere**. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Note that Paul doesn't just say that we are to love,
but that our love — as followers of Jesus — must be sincere!

- That's the only type of love that will do.
That's the only type of love that is real. / Everything else is fake!
- Real love: IS in response to God's love;
IS expressed actively; *and* IS directed outwardly.
- It involves both hating — or *pushing off* — what is evil;
and also *clinging* — or *being GLUED* — to what is good!
- There's nothing lukewarm in between. /
- And notice — from verse 10 onwards,
Paul has lots of suggestions of what that looks like in practice.

- *We could spend a whole week on each of these instructions and still just be scratching the surface.*
- But Paul isn't calling us to develop a sophisticated theology on each of them, He's urging us — to put love into action in these ways.
- The way you put love into practice is by practicing!
You might want to choose one aspect each day.
There's around 21 examples here,
so you could have one area of daily focus for almost the whole month!
- And incredibly, none of these are really Paul's idea,
because almost each and every one of them finds its parallel with Jesus' words?
- Not least to love one another,
For *by this, all will know that you are my disciples* (cf. John 13:34-35).

Actively and outwardly expressed love *is the key way by which we are not overcome by evil.*

- That doesn't mean that it's not hard along the way.
Mourning with those who mourn.
Blessing those who persecute you.
Rejoicing with those who rejoice.
Not taking revenge. Feeding those who are hungry. Giving drink to those who thirst.
- Does that type of love sound costly? You bet!
- Does that type of love sound painful? At times it will be.

- Does that type of love require us to know others and be known? Absolutely.
- But what other type of love will do?
- C S Lewis famously put it like this:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.

- Simply — it won't be love. /
- The reason that we can love like that,
is because we know that one who *is* love, loves us, and empowers us to do the same.

//

Proper Worship.

Humble Service.

Sincere Love.

- That's what it looks like to live in response to God's mercy.