

Study 11: Romans 9: 1-18

- **Activity:**

Election time is an interesting time for our country. It's the time when you see people argue the most and ultimately becomes more of a competition on which side will win rather than an election. In an election, the goal is that one is 'elected' to benefit all. Therefore, the result should be both sides win. Yet, our elections tend to mean separation and one side is now better than the other.

- ❖ Think back to the last election. What are ways that you saw the election more about one side being better than another?
- ❖ What ways have you seen election end up being about both sides winning?
 - Leader: Goal here is to make the group think about the purpose of election and what it is by making them think as well about what it is not.

- **Read 9:1-5**

- ❖ What does Paul recognize about his people, the Israelites, and the rich heritage they have as God's chosen?
 - Adopted as sons; divine glory; covenants; receivers of the law; temple worship and the promises.
 - Patriarchs and the ancestry of Jesus Christ is rooted in them.
- ❖ Why is Paul sad in these verses?
 - Sad that he wished his people got it, even to the point he'd be willing to be cut off from Christ on their behalf.
 - Paul was a man in route to be a Pharisee and understands the depth of how far removed they are from true understanding of what it meant to be chosen.
- ❖ How did the Israelites understand being "chosen" in light of the conversation you had about "election"?
 - They understood being chosen as "we are better than everyone else" so we win! But their being chosen was to be for the benefit of all-that they were chosen to lead others to Yahweh. Paul is sad that they don't understand how much is theirs.
- ❖ In what ways has the "Church" been this way today?
 - Leader: just a good time for folks to talk about ways they've seen churches put more barriers between people and God as opposed to opening the doors for them to be in relationship with Jesus.
- ❖ Because Israel didn't get it right did that mean that God came up with a completely different plan-a plan B (the Church)?
 - Leader: just a time to get folks thoughts. Let them answer and then let them know we are about to answer this question in the next section.

- **Read 9:6-12**

- ❖ How does Paul correct the thinking about who Israel truly is? Who is Israel?
 - Israel is not a people by earthly birth (The Jews) but Israel is a people by promise-God's promise.
 - They had wrong thinking about who was Israel and that is why is seemed as God had to come up with a new plan.
 - The church, all believers, are Israel. So, God is continuing plan A.
- ❖ What examples does Paul use to show this? What's his point?
 - First example is that the child Sarah would have through Abraham (Isaac) is the child of the promise and not the one he had through Hagar (Ishmael). Therefore it's not dependent on natural birth.
 - Second example is that even before Jacob and Esau were born, before they did anything, one was elected (Jacob) and one not. Jacob is Israel, not Esau.
- ❖ Verse 11 tells us that this happened in order for "God's purpose in election might stand". What is God's purpose in election?
 - That no one can say they were right before God by works but instead it is all by his mercy. That man does not have to work his way to God but believe in God and receive his mercy.

- **Read 9:13-18**

- ❖ The statement, "Jacob I loved and Esau I hated" is very disturbing. Break it into 2 parts and ask yourself what is most disturbing: the fact that God loved Jacob or the fact that God hated Esau?
 - Leader: allow folks to talk about this and why it is disturbing.
- ❖ For most, it is disturbing that God hated Esau. But in reading verse 15, what did both Jacob and Esau deserve? Why did they both not get what they deserved?

- You see in 15 that God has extended compassion and mercy. Therefore, he went against what both deserved. Both Esau and Jacob deserved to be hated by God because God hates sin and evil.
- The only reason Jacob didn't get what he deserved was because God showed mercy.
- It should not disturb us that Esau was hated. That's what all of us deserve. It should disturb us that God loved Jacob. We should be able to understand why God hated them both. It should be hard to understand why he loved Jacob.

- ❖ God's purpose in election is described again in verse 16. What would your relationship with God be like if it was up to your desire and effort? In what ways do you still approach your relationship with God with the attitude that it IS up to your desire and effort?
 - Leader: just a time for the group to be honest.

- **Story**

I was on a Cub Scout trip with my son and 9 other boys. I and another leader took them fishing on the other leaders pontoon boat. It was a great day of fishing and every boy was happy as he could be. On our ride back, I watched the boys just enjoying the ride and loving the day-very content. Then, the captain of the boat pointed out one boy and said, "hey, do you want to drive?" You can imagine how excited that boy was. And we all know exactly what every other boy on that boat thought immediately: "Wow, what a cool and kind captain to let someone drive. Boy he's nice." Yea, right. No, everyone of them thought exactly what we would probably think—"Well that's not fair!"

And then I wondered, well, why was that not fair? Every boy on the boat was getting what he was promised-what he deserved- and even more. They were all very satisfied. But, then one person gets more, and all of a sudden it's not fair. The boys loved the captain up until that point. Then all of a sudden they thought the captain was unfair because they didn't get chosen.

- ❖ Most of the time we lose sight of what we actually deserve. So, instead of looking at the mercy and grace of our "captain" and how he went over and beyond with compassion and mercy, we attack the captain and say he is not fair. Romans 9:15-16 should be verses that call us to worship God for his abundance of mercy and compassion yet we question if he is fair at all.
- ❖ This is the story of Adam and Eve and all humanity. God gave them the garden and way more than they could ever imagine and more than they ever needed. Yet, because they didn't give them one thing, they were tempted to believe that God didn't love them and he was not being fair.
- ❖ What are ways you have lost sight of how compassionate and merciful God truly is?
- ❖ Even after identifying these ways, there is still an unsettling in our heart as to why God would choose one and not another. Think again about the purpose of election-to bless all. In light of this, why would God elect Jacob to be loved? Why would God choose Pharaoh to harden? Are you thankful for this?
 - God chose to love Jacob so that no one has to depend on their desire and effort to make it right with God.
 - God chose Pharaoh to show how powerful of a God He is and that His name would be proclaimed and all know Him.
 - Again, the purpose of election is one is chosen to benefit all.
- ❖ What do these passages and the Genesis passages surrounding the story of Esau and Pharaoh tell us happened eternally to these guys?
 - We don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. We can guess all day, but we don't know. But what we do know is we serve a God that is compassionate and merciful and our relationship with him does not depend on our desires or efforts!
- ❖ Close by spending time in prayer thanking God for all the ways you have seen him be merciful and compassionate to you and others around you.

Study 12: Romans 9: 19-33

- **Story:**

I love landscaping projects. When you take on a landscaping project, you have an overall plan and then you tackle each piece of that plan. I remember watching my neighbor, a landscaper; take these steps in his backyard. He didn't change the entire yard but his goal was to change one area knowing the steps he was going to take would affect the entire yard. By making this one area stand out, it would bring out the entire yard. So, he carved out an area, dug up the old plants in that area and got rid of them and even cut down a couple of trees. He then picked out new plants to put in that area and went to creating. All the pieces were coming together as he had imagined. It looked fantastic--for a few months anyway. And then we noticed a couple of the plants were dying and one had a fungus that was killing it. So, he dug those plants out and replaced them.

Just in reference to this story, answer the following questions:

- ❖ What was the ultimate goal of the landscaping project?
 - To affect the entire yard and make the entire yard look great.
- ❖ What steps did the landscaper take to accomplish that goal?
 - Picked out one area and not the entire yard.
 - Removed some plants and picked out other plants.
 - Did not pick every plant or every area of the yard.
- ❖ When the plants were diseased and died, did that mean the landscaper failed at his goal? What did the landscaper do?
 - No, it did not stop the overall plan. What happened to the plants did not stop the plan or mean the landscaper failed. He replaced those plants with new ones.
- ❖ In just reading this story, what would you say about the landscaper?
 - A creator, developer, has a goal in mind and sticking with it.
 - Not mean just because he got rid of some plants and kept others.
 - He was the owner; he could do anything he wanted with that area.
 - He had a heart to make it all look good, not just one part.

- **Read 9:19-24**

- ❖ Paul takes up a reaction to the last section. What is the reaction and why is this the reaction?
 - It is a reaction to the statement that our relationship with God is not based on what we do but on what God does.
 - They want to know why they get blamed then if it's up to what God does.
- ❖ What is the fault that Paul finds in this question?
 - It's the wrong question. It has the wrong attitude.
 - What is created should never question the creator who created them.
- ❖ Why do you think mankind believes it has the right to blame God or to question God?
 - We operate independently of God and believe God created all of this for our glory instead of his.
 - The fall of Adam left the mark in all of us that this world should be about our glory and not God's. We have lost sight that everything is created to bring Him glory.
- ❖ In this section, Paul gives 2 images of how God could have created. What are those images?
 - Some created for noble purposes and others created for common use.
 - Some created to be objects of wrath-prepared for destruction; others prepared to be objects of mercy.
- ❖ When we think about these 2 images, it disturbs us because we think about the things created and what happens to them. Instead, how does our understanding of this change if we see that each was created and serves the purpose of bringing glory to the creator?
 - Something created to be noble instead of common both bring glory to the Creator.
 - Something created for destruction and something created for mercy, both work together to bring glory to the creator.

- ❖ Thinking about the landscaper, did you define him as mean, cruel, and selfish because he destroyed some plants and kept others? Did you define him as unfair because he picked some plants and not others? Why or why not?
 - No, we don't define him as that because our understanding is that he is the creator and the owner and can do what he wants and the ultimate goal is to make it all look great for his enjoyment.

- **Read 9:25-29**
 - ❖ In this section, Paul shows how the OT speaks to what is happening. What is the point he is bringing out in 25 and 26 by referencing the passages in Hosea?
 - That God chooses those that don't deserve to be chosen. It's not about their "deserving" but about what he is up to and his overall goal. It's his mercy.

 - ❖ What is the point he is making in 27-29 by referencing the passages in Isaiah?
 - That all the Israelites deserved to be destroyed. If God had not set aside a remnant, out of mercy, then all of Israel would have been destroyed. God is a merciful God!

 - ❖ How does the illustration of the landscaper help you to understand this better?
 - The landscaper had a goal that he was up to. He didn't pick out plants to destroy and others to keep out of being mean to those particular plants. He chose them because of a greater plan to transform the entire yard for his pleasure.
 - The landscaper could have just dug up the entire back yard and started all over, sparing no section. But, he chose one section and used that section to bless the entire yard. He chose a "remnant" but for the purpose of changing it all.

- **Read 9:30-33**
 - ❖ Why did the Gentiles obtain righteousness and why did the Jews not obtain it?
 - Because the Gentiles pursued it out of faith-not about what they do to earn it, but out of believing what God has done.
 - The Jews pursued it out of works-something they do to earn it.

 - ❖ What was it about Jesus that caused the Jews to stumble?
 - He died for all sins, knowing that no one could keep the law and earn their way to God. But the Jews thought they could and stumbled over the messiah that came to die for sins-not to lift them up to rule.

 - ❖ What are ways that you are tempted to believe that your righteousness is based off of what you do?
 - Leader: just allow the group to share here.

 - ❖ What are ways that you are tempted to live with the thinking that God is a good God IF good things happen to you and a bad God IF bad things happen to you? What changes in your attitude and behavior come when you better understand that you are here to bring glory to God regardless of what happens to you?
 - Leader: just allow the group to share here.

 - ❖ Spend time simply thanking God that He is merciful and ask that His mercy to you might bring Him glory.

Study 13: Romans 10:1-21

- **Activity:**

Imagine someone coming to your door one day and telling you that they have made it possible for you to go to Hawaii for 2 weeks. They let you know that will pay for your airfare, a room in the nicest hotel, any excursions you would like to take, and anything else you want to do. At the same time, they are going to give you the money you would lose for having to take these weeks away. In other words, you lose nothing. You only gain everything!

- ❖ Is there any reason you can think of for not going? Why would anyone NOT take this?
 - Leader: this is a time for the group to think about reasons someone would give for not being a part of great news.
 - Reasons that should be mentioned are "Nothing good like this ever happens and so I can't believe it."; "I don't know the person that is giving this to me and not willing to trust them."
- ❖ If you did take this opportunity, what would you say about the person that gave this trip to you?

Last week Paul made it clear that the only reason any have life is because God is merciful. Our salvation depends on the character of God and the fact that he is gracious and merciful.

- **Read 10:1-4**

- ❖ Paul let's his heart be known about his people. What do we learn about the Israelites?
 - They are zealous for God. But their zeal is based off of knowledge, works; instead of submitting to God's righteousness they established their own.
 - They are self righteous.
- ❖ Who are people that you know that would fit this description: zealous about God but the zeal is based in something other than faith in Christ? What is their zeal built around?
 - Many are "God followers" but their zeal is rooted in their knowledge of God, a political position for God; some are even more zealous about the characteristics of God: grace, love, justice-instead of Christ.
 - Some serve grace more than a God that has been gracious, some serve justice more than a God that is just, some serve love more than a God that is loving.
- ❖ What has Christ opened the door to?
 - The end of the law and us earning our way to right relationship with God. The door for EVERYONE who believes to receive righteousness.

- **Read 10:5-13**

- ❖ Paul uses various Scriptures to tell us Moses' description of righteousness coming by the law and then a description of living by faith. Put in your own words what Paul is saying about living by faith in 6-7.
 - To say we have to do something to get to Jesus in heaven or we have to do something to get to Jesus and bring him out of the depths is to say that it's up to what we do. It is to say that God has not done this.
- ❖ Verses 8-10 tell us what God has done and our part in salvation. How would you summarize these verses?
 - God has brought Jesus to us. He is right there-the living Word-in your mouth and your heart. Our part is to confess and believe what is already true.
- ❖ Many times you hear the language, "Have you made Jesus your Lord?" What are all the ways verses 9-13 would say this statement is wrong? Why is this important?
 - We don't make Jesus Lord. He is Lord, regardless of our belief. We simply confess what is already true.
 - Vs 9 says we "confess" that Jesus is Lord, we don't make him Lord.
 - Vs 10 tells us that our heart and mouth simply acknowledge what is true and submit to it.
 - Vs 12 tells us that Jesus is Lord of all-it then tells us that those that confesses He is Lord will be saved. Their confession though does not make Him Lord, it acknowledges Him as Lord.
 - This is critical because we do not make Jesus Lord. That was what God did.

- ❖ In this section, who does Paul say this good news is for?
 - Vs 11: anyone; vs 12: Lord of all; vs 13: everyone
- ❖ What does this section say about those that don't believe?
 - Nothing! It's completely focused on those that DO!!! So, we can't use this section to jump to conclusions about what happens to those that don't. Celebrate what happens to those that do!
- **Read 10:14-15**
 - ❖ When we think about salvation coming to people only by God's mercy and only to those that God elects, we are left with the question, "then why tell the good news at all if God is going to have mercy on who he wants?" Go back to the discussions we had about what it means to be "elected". Why were the Jews "chosen"? Why is anyone "elected"?
 - For the good of all. God uses the elect, the chosen, the remnant to benefit the whole.
 - ❖ In light of this, what is the call on those that do believe; the elect, the chosen, the remnant in verses 14-15?
 - To tell the good news to EVERYONE! They can't believe unless they hear the good news. We are being sent!
 - ❖ As a believer and follower of Christ, one that has confessed that He is Lord, how does this change your understanding of what it means to be "those that bring good news!"?
 - The good news is not given to me just for me. It is given to me to be the feet of good news for others.
- **Read 10:16-21**
 - ❖ Just because we tell the good news doesn't mean that everyone will believe. But there are reasons beyond God's mercy as to why some won't believe. Paul dismisses 2 reasons some give for why some Israelites did NOT believe. What does he say?
 - Their unbelief was NOT due to not hearing or not understanding.
 - ❖ What does Paul say the Israelites unbelief was rooted in?
 - They were a "disobedient and obstinate people" (vs 21). They didn't want to. They made their own righteousness. They didn't trust the character of God.
 - ❖ We began this weeks study with an illustration about a trip to Hawaii and asked why someone wouldn't take this trip. The good news of Jesus is WAY greater than 2 weeks in Hawaii. If someone hears this good news and understands it, why wouldn't they accept it?
 - They don't trust God. They are choosing to be disobedient. They are choosing their own paths.

Many years ago, I lived in the understanding that I had to convince people that Jesus is good news. I had to defend Jesus. But my thinking began to change from this chapter. It began to change to an understanding that I don't have to defend Jesus. I'm called to be the image of God, not the lawyer of God. Also, I began to understand that the good news of Jesus truly is GREAT news. And if I tell people the good news, and make it clear to them, there is NO reason why they shouldn't believe, other than they are choosing disobedience and their own righteousness. So, I no longer defend God. I simply tell of his amazing mercy and grace and then ask, "why wouldn't you believe in a God that has loved you in this amazing way?"

It is out of our control if a person doesn't believe the good news of Jesus because they are choosing to be disobedient or follow their own paths. But we can control if they hear the good news and have a chance to understand it. If you have accepted Christ, then you are a part of the elect, the chosen-the ones called to tell others the good news of Jesus!

- ❖ Who are people around you in which you need to take this call "to tell" more seriously?

Study 14: Romans 11:1-36

- **Activity:**

Growing up I played a lot of basketball. My coaches always engrained in me; "When a good play happens, it happens because of the whole team. When a bad play happens, it happens because of the whole team." Good thought, but boy I didn't believe it. When games were over, I was sad if we loss, but I was fine with that loss if I played great. When we won, I was fine with the win, but I was angry if I didn't play well. In other words, I was more focused on me and my own play-not the team.

- ❖ Thinking about activities you were a part of growing up, where did you see the same type of thinking in your own life?
 - Leader: this is just a time to get to know your group more and help them reflect on a major point we will address.
- ❖ Thinking about activities you are a part of today: sports, work, a team you serve on, the group you are doing this study in; how do you have this same thinking in these situations?

As we look at Chapter 11, we have to have a "team" mentality. Paul is addressing a people; "the Israelites" and not just individuals. But he is also addressing all of mankind, and not just individuals.

- **Read 11:1-10**

- ❖ Making the transition from chapter 10 to 11, who is it that rejected whom?
 - God did not reject his people-they rejected him over and over.
- ❖ Paul shares another illustration from the OT in the story of Elijah. Elijah believed he was the only person on earth that truly loved God. But he wasn't. Who else loved God and why did they love Him?
 - There were 7000 others that loved God but only because God set them a part.
- ❖ What did Elijah and the 7000 deserve from God? What did they get instead? Why?
 - They too deserved death and to be hated by God. But they received grace in order that no one could say they did something to earn God's love. The only reason they did not bow to Baal was because God was going to use them to bring salvation to others.
- ❖ There was a remnant that God extended grace to and we can see the purpose of his extending grace to them. Would you agree that this was a good thing or a bad thing and why?
 - We would say this was a very good thing because we have hope.
- ❖ We also see that there were people that God harden the heart of. What was the point of hardening their hearts? Would you agree that this was a good thing or a bad thing and why?
 - The hardening of their heart was for the same reason. We don't think this is a good thing though because it seems "unloving". But it was a great thing for the same reason it was a great thing that God set apart a remnant.
- ❖ In verses 5 and 8, Paul talks about the present time. What does he say is true even at the time of his writing? Who is he talking about? Why is this important?
 - There is still a remnant chosen by grace-that means God is keeping his promise still! Still, only reason we have salvation is because of God being faithful and extending grace. Only reason there are still those that have hardened hearts is because God is not done fulfilling the promise and extending it to others. Paul is still talking about those born as Jews.

- **Read 11:11-21**

- ❖ In this section, Paul uses "team" thinking throughout. What do we know is true about the Israelites in this section?
 - They have not fallen beyond redemption. Because of their sin, salvation has come to others.
- ❖ What do we learn about God's power to overcome sin from verses 11-12?
 - He is powerful enough to turn the sin of one people into the salvation of another.
- ❖ Compare verse 12 to Romans 6:4-5. What is the hope in each verse?
 - That we see life in death situations! God redeems.

- ❖ So far in Romans we have seen a lot of language surrounding the elect, the chosen, one party being loved and another being hated. Here again, we see a group of people that have been set apart. What is Paul telling the Gentiles to not forget?
 - The only reason they are in is because of God's grace!
 - They chose to have faith in the work God was doing and not in their own works.
 - It will be tempting to believe they have done something or are better than the Israelites and forget it's only by Grace.
 - He warns them to not let their "inclusion" make them arrogant, but instead fearful of a gracious God.

- ❖ As Christians, it can be tempting to become arrogant because we are "saved". We can be so arrogant to the point that we stop living by faith but in our own works. How have you seen Christians become arrogant? Yourself?
 - Leader: just a time for the group to talk.

- **Read 11:22-24**
 - ❖ It's easy to read these verses' (and vs 21) and think that it is saying that we can lose our salvation. Why would you say that is what these verses are saying OR not saying?
 - Leader: it's easy to see why people would say this is saying you can lose your salvation. But biggest thing to notice here is that Paul is talking about a "people" being cut off, not individuals. Just like the Israelites, God could cut that people off. He is not talking about an individuals salvation here.

 - ❖ In this section, it's easy to miss the main point of Paul's words: "consider the kindness and sternness of God". What is the point of each?
 - The point of each is to lead people to God!

 - ❖ As you reflect on the day ahead, or the day that has just happened—where do you see God's kindness? Where do you need to remember his sternness?
 - Leader: help the group to honestly reflect on God's grace to them but also to see where God has been stern to those that don't follow his ways.

- **Read 11:25-32**
 - ❖ Verses 25-27 continues team thinking. How would you summarize all the ways that Paul has called his readers to think as a team in this chapter? How does this change your attitude toward those that don't believe?
 - Gentiles and Israelites want to live life separately-as enemies-as competitors. But Paul tells them both that God can and will use both to bring salvation to both.
 - Our attitude is tempted to be "against" those that don't believe. But we need to remember that we have been "spared"/"set apart" in order that others would know God's grace-the very grace that was extended to us!

 - ❖ What do we learn God's has done for all of mankind?
 - That we would never rely on our own obedience as the route to salvation. Therefore, God has given all of mankind over to disobedience in order that all of mankind would see his grace and mercy!

 - ❖ Answer each of these questions:
 - Why were the Gentiles saved?
 - Why are the Israelites saved?
 - Why was Paul saved?
 - Why are you saved?
 - Leader: point here is to make sure everyone understands that the only reason anyone is saved is because of God's mercy. God's law was given to the Israelites to show the rest of the world their disobedience and need of God's mercy. The Israelites were then given to disobedience to see their need of God's mercy.

We are now about to make a major turn in the letter. But to make this turn, you have to recognize that Paul's biggest point in the first 11 chapters is to make clear that NO ONE has done anything to earn salvation. The only reason ANYONE has salvation is because of the **mercy of God**. Paul has worked to paint a very clear picture to all of mankind the **MERCY OF GOD**.

So, to end these first 11 chapters, close in prayer by simply reading out loud **verses 33-36**. If you are doing this study as a group, have one member read these verses aloud for the group. Join Paul in his summary praise...

Study 15: Romans 12:1-21

- **Story:**

One of the hardest counseling sessions I've been a part of was sitting with a married couple when the husband told his wife he had had an affair. I had been in this situation before, but this one was different. As I watched the man tell his wife, his heart was cold, hard, and distant. He didn't care if it hurt her. That was how much his heart had shut down over the years of their marriage. In fact, he confessed that his purpose for having the affair was to make sure their marriage was done-over. He knew that this was the one thing she would not forgive him for and then he was free to be done with the marriage. They didn't have children and his thought was that he could just start all over. But then I watched over the next months the greatest illustration of God's mercy and love come to life.

I took a few weeks with them separately and simply walked with each: the husband's cold heart and the wife's broken heart. I watched her lay her broken heart before the Lord and trust him in amazing ways. He didn't heal her heart quickly. In fact, it got worse. But, one month after the confession, I sat with this couple again. This time she told her husband that she was not going to give up on their marriage. She told him that she was going to give God a shot at doing a miracle. She went on to tell him that she had no trust in him and frankly wanted nothing to do with him. But she also was choosing to stay dependant on a God that had extended her mercy. So, because of that, she was going to keep pursuing their marriage. I remember grinning at him because I knew that was the last thing he wanted to hear. He thought he was off the hook. He thought she was going to "set him free" by telling him the marriage was done. He could escape trying to bring healing to the damage. Little did he know that she was setting him free by choosing to show mercy and not letting him leave the relationship.

The next months brought forth a miracle of the power of God's love being extended through another. Everyday, she chose to love him in very difficult ways and trust God to heal her heart. Everyday, he had to respond to the mercy she was showing him. As the months went by, I watched her heart healed, I watched his heart soften, and I watched the Lord bring life out of death. A year later, this couple again sat in my office and said that this is the first time they have truly had a marriage. They now have a marriage that neither believed would be possible, even before the affair.

I knew why she stayed in the marriage-because of her trust in the mercy God showed her and a belief that if God could raise a man from the dead, he could raise their marriage from death. But I asked him why he stayed in the marriage. He said he didn't have a choice. If she was going to love him despite his unfaithfulness, he had no other choice than to respond to that amazing love. He didn't know how to respond most of the time. He just knew if she was going to forgive him, he couldn't leave the relationship. And over the months, because she loved him, he learned to love her in the way she deserved to be loved.

- ❖ Reflect on this story as a group. What emotions stir in you about this story?
 - Leader: this is just a time to get to know your group more and help them reflect on a major point we will address.
- ❖ Has there ever been a time you've loved someone in this manner or been loved in this manner? What was it like?

- **Read 12:1-8**

- ❖ The first 11 chapters of Romans makes it clear that we have not earned God's love by what we do and don't do. That truth doesn't change in the last 4 chapters. But as we start these last chapters, what does Paul say to keep in clear view?
 - God's mercy. This is why he spent 11 chapters on it.
- ❖ The subtitle of this Romans study has been "obedience that comes through faith." In the next chapters, Paul will talk a lot about what we do and don't do. What does he say in 12:1 all these acts are?
 - They are acts of worship; living sacrifices; an offering to God-holy and pleasing to him. They are not ways to earn God's love.
- ❖ Most of the time we try to overcome bad behavior by simply stopping the act or doing something different. We then hope that our thinking about things will change. This is the pattern our world tells us to take. But what does Paul tell us is the route for true change in our life? What will be the outcome?
 - We are transformed by the renewing of our mind. In other words, if we don't understand the mercy of God first, then the actions won't change. If we don't understand his love first, the actions won't change.
 - But because of our new thinking on the matter of God's mercy, proper actions can follow.
 - We will even be able to know God's will and see that it is good, pleasing and perfect.
- ❖ What is the first thing Paul calls those in Rome to "do not" do but instead to "do"?

➤ Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought. Instead "with sober judgment" according to what God has given.

❖ Paul gives a list of various gifts that are all given by God's grace. Again, not focusing on what man is doing. List each gift he gives. These are not all the gifts of grace God gives. But looking at this list, has God given you any of these? How do you use them?

➤ Leader: just a chance for the group to recognize God's grace being given.

• **Read 12:9-21**

❖ Paul describes how to show sincere love. In the below area, list all the things that Paul says "to do" and the things he says to "not do":

Do

- Hate what is evil
- Cling to good
- Be devoted to one another
- Honor one another about yourself
- Keep spiritual fervor
- Serve the Lord
- Be joyful in hope
- Be patient in affliction
- Be faithful in prayer
- Share with God's people that are in need
- Practice Hospitality
- Bless those that persecute you
- Rejoice with rejoicers
- Mourn with mourners
- Live in harmony
- Associate with people of lower position
- Do what is right in eyes of everyone
- Live at peace with everyone
- Leave room for God's wrath
- Feed/give water to your enemy
- Overcome evil with good

DO NOT

- lack in zeal
- curse others
- be proud
- be conceited
- repay evil for evil
- take revenge
- be overcome by evil

❖ As you can see, Paul has a strong focus on what we are "to do" as opposed to "not do". Looking at the list of things "to do", which of these is hardest for you and why?

➤ Leader: the next questions are simply to have your group share honestly about where they struggle and succeed in following the ways of Christ.

❖ Which of these have you seen yourself grow in the past year?

❖ Looking at the list of "do not's", which of these do you struggle with and why?

❖ Which of these have you seen yourself grow in the past year?

❖ In view of God's mercy, which of these "do's" and "do not's" will you make your "spiritual act of worship" in the next 6 months?

❖ Verse 18 can be shortened and taken out of context. Many just cling to the second half of this verse: "live at peace with everyone". Why is the first part of this verse critical as well?

➤ Peace is not accomplished by one side only. You may be in a relationship that you are doing all you can to live at peace but the other person wants nothing to do with it.

❖ Think about a relationship you may be in that you are trying to live in peace. What actions in the "do" and "do not" list are you encourage to take in this relationship?

❖ Finish by spending time praying that God would remind you of his mercy to you and that he might bring life to this relationship as you love in the way Christ has loved you.

Study 16: Romans 13:1-14

- **Activity:**

We ended the last study with Paul's words being "do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Paul now turns our attention toward government—a topic for many that would bring the response; "talk about evil"! Many Christians believe that many things our government does or has done are "evil." In response, many Christians return evil for evil but use the language: "I was just choosing the lesser of two evils."

- ❖ What is wrong with the statement "choosing the lesser of two evils" for the Christian?
 - God tells us to overcome evil with good! When we believe we have to return any level of evil for evil, we are missing an opportunity for good. There is NEVER a situation in which we cannot overcome evil with good.

Many times it's hard to know how to respond when authority above you makes decisions that you don't agree with. Especially if those decisions bring the tension of following man over God.

Read each of the following events and answer the below questions for each event:

Acts 4:1-32

Acts 16: 16-40

(for other events read Acts 5:17-42; Acts 21:27-28:30)

- ❖ Where do you see the main characters overcoming evil with good?
 - Acts 4: giving the good news of Jesus; healing a cripple; telling truth but in a manner of respect; kept authority with those in authority to make the decision;
 - Acts 16: preaching good news; casting out an annoying spirit ☺; did not fight against those taking them captive; not escaping from jail; preaching good news to those that held them captive
- ❖ What is the result of doing this in each story?
 - Acts 4: released but then prayed together. Recognized God's hand in the decision of those in authority. Prayed for God's hand to move and enable them to keep speaking. Word of God went forth boldly.
 - Acts 16: Paul and Silas were flogged; thrown into prison; Jailer and family come to know Jesus; wrong of the authorities discovered.
- ❖ Did the main characters rebel against authority? Why or why not?
 - Acts 4: they submitted to authorities decisions and were willing to pay the consequence. They did not bad mouth the authority but called them to question what was right. But their actions to keep preaching were not in rebellion to government but submission to God.
 - Acts 16: no, they never rebelled against authority but submitted to it and even to the point that they paid a heavy price physically.

- **Read Romans 13:1-7**

- ❖ "In view of God's mercy" what instruction does Paul give in these verses?
 - Submit yourself to governing authorities
 - Do not rebel against governing authorities
 - Pay taxes
 - Give what you owe: taxes; revenue; respect; honor.
- ❖ What words in the Acts 4 passage give clarity to Paul's words in 1-2? How does this help you to submit to authority?
 - God set it up for the government during the time of Jesus' life to conspire against Jesus. Jesus submitted to this and did not fight it. He saw that God was over the authority.
 - This should help us as well to see that God is not at distant from our government: even when our government may not be honoring him. God is about his work all the time! It just doesn't look the way we want it to all the time.
- ❖ After reading this passage and the stories above, how do you make sense of what it means to serve God over man and at the same time submit to authority even if authority doesn't honor God?

- Leaders: this is a time for the group just to grapple with this question. Main point would be for you to keep pointing them to the passage and even point back to Romans 12:9-21. Help the group to wrestle with how to live out Romans 12 and 13 together.

- **Read 13:8-14**

- ❖ We learn more about love in these passages. List all the things we learn about love here:

- Stay in debt with the debt of love only
- Commandments are summed up into "love your neighbor as yourself"
- Love does NO harm to your neighbor.
- Love fulfills the law.

- ❖ Paul gives a pep talk to the readers in 11-14. He gives more things to Do and NOT DO. List these things:

DO

- Love understanding the present time
- Put aside the deeds of darkness
- Put on armor of light
- Behave decently
- Clothe yourself with the Lord

DO NOT

- participate in orgies
- participate in drunkenness
- participate in sexual immorality and debauchery
- participate in dissension and jealousy
- think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh

- ❖ Looking at Romans 12 and 13 together, you see that Paul began by focusing on the way the believers were to live among one another (12:3-21) and then focused on how they were to live among those outside the church (13:1-7). Lastly he adds behavior that is for those in and out of the church (13:8-14). Because Paul switches back and forth, what does it tell you about the life of the person following Christ in and out of the church?

- It should look the same in and out. No difference!

- ❖ Romans 12:2 tells us to no longer conform to the pattern of this world. After reading Romans 12 and 13, what are ways you need to confess that you have given into the patterns of this world in dealing with people? How would you ask God to "renew your mind?"

- Leader: after each person shares this, have someone pray over them.

Study 17: Romans 14:1-15:13

- **Activity:**

Pretend that you are a friend of the below two people.

Bill is a Christian and lives beside Jerry who is also a Christian in a neighborhood in which they are the only Christians.

Bill worships at Church A and his church is really focused on reaching the lost. His church encourages him to “get into their lives” and find opportunities to tell and show them the good news of Jesus. Bills greatest opportunity to do this has been hanging out with his neighbors that don't go to church. Instead, they love hanging out in the garage until the wee hours of Saturday night, drinking and playing poker. So, it's become a normal place for Bill to hang out as well. Bill never allows himself to even get close to being drunk, but does enjoy having 2 beers with the group.

Jerry, worships at Church B and his church is really focused on reaching the lost as well. But his church encourages him to “be in the world but not of the world”. He understands that his life being extremely different will be the way that people see the life of Christ is different from the world. So, Jerry never participates in the Saturday night gatherings in the neighborhood. Instead, just before the events happen, Jerry makes a point to go over and invite all his neighbors to church the next day. He then leaves.

Bill and Jerry are friends but they shake their head in disappointment at one another on how each is handling the situation. They often find themselves telling the other they are wrong and arguing. Bill walks away most of the time feeling guilty about hanging out with his neighbors and drinking beer. But he knows he is in their world and knows the long conversations they are having about “religion” and “God”. He also knows that the neighbors can't stand Jerry. So, Jerry also walks away always feeling bad that no one likes him. But he remembers that Scripture says the world would hate him and he sees this as part of serving Jesus.

- ❖ Neither believes the other is being effective for the kingdom of God and come to you because they are tired of arguing all the time. It's even to a point they are deciding to not be friends but know they are “brothers in Christ.” How would you counsel them?
 - Leader: this is just a chance for the group to discuss what is right or wrong about both.

- **Read Romans 14:1-12**

- ❖ What type of matters is Paul discussing here? What other type of matters do not apply in this counsel?
 - He is talking about matters that are disputable-gray areas.
 - He is not talking about matters that are black and white.
- ❖ Paul gives a couple of examples in these passages. Before we look at each example, list all the principles he lays out.
 - Accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgment.
 - Don't look down on the other person; do not condemn the other person
 - Be fully convinced in your mind on your convictions.
 - Live and die for the Lord alone-make all decisions as he is your master
 - Be able to give account for your actions before the Lord-not anothers
- ❖ Why would Paul call the person that only eats vegetables the one that is weak in their faith?
 - The weak person doesn't yet understand that the kingdom of God is not about what you eat or don't eat. Yet, we are not to look down on them because they have not learned this yet. They are still a person of faith!

- **Read 14:13-23**

- ❖ Again, without getting into the examples, list principles to live by that Paul lays out in these verses:
 - Stop passing judgment
 - Do not put a stumbling block in front of another at any time
 - Act in love by not doing something that would destroy your brothers conviction
 - At same time do not let the other person say the things you are convicted of are wrong.
 - Do what leads to peace and mutual edification
 - Keep the work of God at the forefront, not disputable matters.
 - Do not choose to do something that is against your faith in Christ

- ❖ Paul says to not “not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.” What are the works of God?
 - A person's salvation and growth
 - A person growing in their understanding of the grace of Christ.
 - More people coming to know Jesus and knowing him better.

- ❖ Is there a situation you are currently in that this counsel gives you better direction? What direction do you need to cling to and what steps do you need to take?
 - Leader: just a chance for someone to be honest in their sharing.

- **Read 15:1-13**
 - ❖ How would you put in your own words what Paul is saying in verses 1-6?
 - We should not find pleasure in demeaning another brother just to say we were right. Our ultimate desire should not be to be right, but to build one another up.

 - ❖ How is the counsel in 1-6 different from the “patterns of this world”?
 - Leader: just a time for people to see the difference

 - ❖ Paul is getting close to the end of his letter and is starting to stress what is most important. In looking at 7-13, what would you say is most important for Paul to see come out of this letter?
 - That the Christians work together for the kingdom.
 - That they would see that every single one of them are at God's mercy and we all started at the same place-in disobedience to God. Therefore, none of us has something over the other.
 - That we all glorify God for his mercy and extend that to others!

 - ❖ Where have you allowed “the unimportant things” to keep you from the “work of God” with other believers?

 - ❖ Has there been a time in which you were in a relationship with another believer and you did not see the same on a “disputable” matter and you both handled it really well. Tell about this.

 - ❖ To close, using the counsel Paul has laid out, how would you now counsel the two people in the opening story?

Study 18: Romans 15:14-end

- **Activity:**

Part of our Christian journey is shaped by people God places in our lives. God works through people. Spend time telling one another about the people that have shaped your journey with Christ. What impact have these people had in shaping your image of God and your understanding of who He is? You can share ways this has been shaped in a good manner and/or a bad manner.

- **Read Romans 15:14-22**

- ❖ What do we learn about the church Paul is writing to? Is this the image you had of them all along as we went through this letter? Why or why not?
 - Believers in Christ, committed to following him, full of goodness and complete in knowledge
 - Paul is not writing them as something they don't know but as a reminder of what they do know.
- ❖ What do we learn about Paul's mission and why he has not been able to visit the church here?
 - To Gentiles
 - The call is for Gentiles to be obedient out of their faith
 - His calling and ambition is to preach in places Christ is not known. This is why he has not made it a high priority to get to Rome. They already know of Jesus there.

- **Read 15:23-33**

- ❖ What do we learn about Paul's recent journey and his next plans? What does this tell you about the body of Christ?
 - The good news of Jesus is now spread all through these areas.
 - Paul is heading to Spain, an area yet to know Jesus.
 - He took up a collection while in Macedonia and Achaia and taking this to Jerusalem for the poor there.
 - After Jerusalem, he's heading to Spain and will stop in Rome on the way.
 - We learn that even then it was very, very good for the body of Christ to be about bigger things than what was going on in their own city and their own people. We are called to care for the entire body, together.
- ❖ What does Paul ask for prayer for? Read Acts 20-24 to see this story unfold and how God answered prayers and also about Paul's plans being delayed.
 - To be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea. Judea was filled with unbelieving Jews-Paul's worst enemies.
 - Paul also ask that things go well with the believers in Jerusalem.

- **Read 16:1-16**

- ❖ List all the things that Paul says about the people there in Rome that he's been in contact with along the way.
 - Risked their lives for him and the church
 - The first convert in Asia
 - Worked hard for Rome
 - Relatives that were in prison with him
 - People he loves
 - Tested and approved by Christ
 - One that has been a mother to Paul
- ❖ What does this list tell you about the church in Rome?
 - It's filled with folks that love Jesus and have served him faithfully!
- ❖ The theme of this letter has been "obedience that comes through faith". Where do you see this type of obedience displayed in this list of those Paul greets?
 - They work hard but out of a deep faith in Christ. It's a faith that leads them even to imprisonment but a faith that clings them together to do the work of Christ!

- **Read 16:17-27**

- ❖ We have seen in this chapter how tight the body of Christ can be. In light of that, what is Paul's final warning to the Romans?

- Watch out for anyone that wants to bring about division. They are smooth talkers and use flattery but are about division.
- ❖ Paul finishes by summarizing what he owns as his own: "my gospel". It's not the good news of Paul, but it is a good news that Paul claims and owns. To finish this letter to the Romans, take each of this summary statements and reflect on what you remember in his teaching about each through this letter:
 - Being established by the good news and proclamation of Jesus
 - The revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past
 - The revealing and making known of this mystery through prophetic writings
 - That all nations might believe and obey
 - God's Wisdom
 - Leader: this is just a time to have the group bring closure to the letter and reflect on anything they have learned and stands out.
- ❖ Close by simply reflecting in honest prayer things in this letter that God has engrained in your heart and mind. Ask Him to enable you to be obedient as your faith grows in Him.