

In View of God's Mercy: Romans 12 Leaders Notes

It's exciting to be studying Romans 12 together with our groups! These leaders notes will help you prepare the studies for your groups. They'll be in italics and indented. I've also removed the pictures to make it simpler for you to print.

The introduction below pretty much sums up the big idea of the studies. I reckon the big goal you might have for your group is that they:

- *grow in whole hearted devotion to God*
- *become less like the world and more like Jesus*
- *live a life shaped by sincere love.*

In your preparation for these studies you'll probably be spending a bit less time on exegesis and a bit more time on application. It would be great to think / daydream about how your group can particularly apply these verses. There will be questions in the study, but thoughtfulness on your part will allow you to add to / change /improve the application questions for your group.

Good commentaries for Romans are the ones by John Stott (BST) or Douglas Moo (NICNT). I didn't get to look much at Calvin but he's pretty good too.

Hopefully you'll be doing these studies a bit before Greg preaches on the passages. I think this will help people get more out of the sermons.

'How then shall we live?' is one of the classic questions of Christianity. As much as we love thinking about God and his plans and salvation, at some point we want to know how should I live, what should I do and how can I please God more with my life? This applies to our church community as well – how should *we* live, what should *we* do and how can *we* please God more with *our* lives?

All these questions relate to the area of Christian ethics – how we live in response to the gospel and it's what Romans 12 is all about. In this chapter we'll look at things like love, service and humility.

Yet it's important to remember that Christian ethics, and most certainly Romans 12, is not a list of dos and don'ts cut off from the knowledge and love of God (that's legalism). Christian ethics is totally dependent on God's grace and mercy. What we do is shaped not by practicalities but by God's character, the work of Christ and the nature of the church.

We see this clearly in Romans 12 which begins, 'Therefore I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy...' So each week we'll look back at aspects of God's mercy from chapters 1-11 before carefully studying and applying a small section of Romans 12.

Make sure you pray each week (and during the week) that God would be changing you, the group and our church, to please him in our lives in view of his mercies.

Study 1 Romans 12:1 In view of God's mercy...

The big idea of this study is that people realise that all the instructions of Romans 12 depend on God's mercy.

The second big idea is that we must give our whole lives to God for his service.

Take a moment to share how everyone is feeling about studying Romans. Put a mark on this scale for where you're at:

What's Romans? Read it maybe once Got a few ideas I lecture in Romans at Bible college

This is a simple fun question to help gauge where everyone is. We really do want to be helping each other out heaps no matter where we're starting from.

It's really important as a group that we are in this together and help each other wherever we're at. You might like to commit to this now!

Read Romans 12:1. The apostle Paul urges us to do something big! Before we look at that, what does he base this on?

God's mercy / mercies.

God's mercy, or better- 'mercies' (ESV) is the basis for all the instructions of Romans 12. This is what he's been talking about so far in chapters 1-11. We don't want to forget about this foundational stuff, so each week we'll dip back into the previous chapters to shine a light on different aspects of God's mercy. This week: *salvation*.

It will be interesting to see how these review questions go. The point is that we continually remember that the commands and instructions are based on God's mercy. This will help us remember grace and respond joyfully to God's grace with obedience.

If we neglect this there's a danger we'll end up with moralistic Bible studies.

I hope you can see I've chosen major themes of God's mercy through Romans. I've tried to cover these in a way that roughly takes us through the book of Romans in order.

It will be good for people to read Romans again in their own time to keep reinforcing these ideas of mercy.

Split up into 3 groups and answer the following questions from either 1:14-17, 5:6-10 or 10:9-13.

These questions are mostly simple observation. You might not get an answer to each question from each passage.

What do we need saving from?

What or who saves?

What role, if any, do we play?

How does our salvation inspire us to obey God?

We'll ask this question in some format pretty much every week. There's no definite right or wrong answer. For me it would be something like... 'Being saved is great. God is so good that I'll trust him and do whatever he wants me to do.'

Back in 12:1... what does Paul urge us to do? Try using a spider diagram to organise your thoughts.

This should be a good question for logical thinkers. Try to make sure people cover it in as much detail as possible. Try to explore the verse as deeply as you can.

So what does it mean? Try to figure it out for yourself, but my summary/paraphrase is this:

Because of what God has done for us, we should report for duty for God. Give him your whole life / body / soul to do with you whatever he sees fit. Give yourself for his service permanently (you can't take a sacrifice back!). The sacrifice is living – which means we keep going as a sacrifice while alive. It is holy which means special and set apart from God. Also cleansed and pure by the blood of Jesus. We'll be pleasing to God just like the sacrifices were in the OT. He'll actually be pleased with our service which is great.

All this is our reasonable/rational/thoughtful/spiritual worship which is what we were created for. (see box).

It may help to know that 'offer' or 'present' (ESV) is the same word used in 6:13, 16 and 19.

So the sense of 'reporting for duty',

The Greek word behind 'spiritual' is a bit difficult to translate – it only occurs one other time in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:2 where it refers to 'spiritual' rather than physical milk). Commentators explain that it means 'carefully thought out' or 'rational' without necessarily being emotionally cold. It also means a contrast to physical worship with actual priests and animals. So other translations like: 'rational service' (KJV) or 'true and proper service' (NIV11) are helpful.

What do you think this will mean for us in practice?

Have a good think about this question. Obviously applications will be about serving God with our whole life – time, energy, gifts, money, thoughts, speech, pleasures etc.

It can't possibly mean we are half-hearted in serving God. We can't treat God like a 'service provider' etc

Have you ever heard of a Sunday Christian? Listen to Pete's story:

Hopefully the 'story application' will resonate with people in your group. Pete's a great guy

– feel free to ask him more!

I grew up with solid Christian parents who loved me enough to persistently drag me to church as a kid. Dad figured out a few fairly creative ways of getting me out of bed with the use of apparatus like toy snakes and working his way into my dreams by whispering in my ears, "Pete! I'm in your dreams". Classic! I'm really thankful for my parents.

My parents didn't just drag me to church, they opened the Bible with me and prayed with me. However my experience of church and what happened on a Sunday shaped what I thought was the identity of a Christian. Often my family would argue in the car because of the stress of being late. But once we got into the church car park we would chuck on our happy faces and everything was all good. Church was for good, middle class people. Not the broken and needy. At least that's what I thought at the time. Don't get me wrong, I reckon I heard the gospel heaps but I was just so blind. In my teens this led me to 2 things: 1) jumping in and out of churches looking for the next good experience like it was a drug and 2) on one hand being good around my parents and other Christians and on the other hand doing whatever I wanted around my non-Christian mates.

Living a two-faced lifestyle was so tiring. Things changed dramatically when I left home and came to uni. In my first year of uni a few mature Christian guys got alongside me, patiently sharing their lives and God's word with this punk egocentric kid. I hooked into unichurch to find people being open and honest about their struggles with sin and their desperate need of Jesus. To begin with it was weird, they were certainly different to a lot of the Christians I had experienced. I thought I was better than them. But God in his great mercy brought me to my knees and revealed that he owned me. He had bought me with the precious blood of his Son. Jesus wasn't just some pushover guy who died just for my sin. He was the Saviour of the world, the King over everything and He demanded my life.

Currently I still struggle with being a "Sunday Christian" at times. I fall back into old ways and put up this fake facade. But gathering with Jesus' church around his Word has become the dearest place to me. A place that tears down walls. A place that encourages, challenges and spurs people on to live their whole lives for Jesus. A place that reminds and points me back to who Jesus is, what he's done and who I am in Him.

In what ways can we be 'Sunday Christians' like teenage Pete?

This is a simple but personal question – hopefully it will get some good discussion going.

How does Romans 12:1 challenge this kind of Christianity?

Repetition! But it's such a big point its worth driving home.

How do you feel about inviting non-Christians to believe in Jesus and join you in this total worship?

This is a question to promote the Mission M (otherwise not a massive theme in Romans 12). The idea is that inviting people to follow Jesus does mean a cost for them. It's good to be aware of this, but still really want it for people!

'And how is the body, it may be said, to become a sacrifice? Let the eye look on no evil thing, and it has become a sacrifice; let your tongue speak nothing filthy, and it has become an offering; let your hand do no lawless deed, and it has become a whole burnt offering.' John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople about 400AD.

Just a good quote from an old church father.

If you're keen, you could do some extra work during the week:

This is voluntary for your groups, but you might as well ask!

- Read Romans 1-11 to bring you up to speed.
- Read ahead in Romans 12 to get you thinking.

Make sure you pray!

Study 2 Romans 12:2 Total Transformation

The big idea for this study is that we commit ourselves to being different from the world – starting with our thinking.

“Feeling's the new thinking! Take a look around: Politicians feel they know what's best for the country. Footy coaches feel aggrieved by a referee's decision. Commentators feel concern for the economy. Parents feel immunisation and fluoride is bad for their children. Awesome, huh? Why bother with thought, reason or facts when you can just feel the vibe of a situation, Dennis-Denuto-in-The-Castle-style, Your Honour?

You don't have to look far for feelings. One Nation's jettisoned-Queensland candidate Stephanie Banister had plenty when she said during the election campaign she didn't "oppose Islam as a country but I do feel their laws should not be welcome here in Australia". Why learn anything about the second-largest religion in the world when you can just feel whatever you want? It's so liberating!

In the late 50s, the famed American writer, Gore Vidal, took the American theatre to task for feeling over thought, noting "people now say 'I feel' such-and-such to be true rather than 'I think' such-and-such to be true."

Sam de Brito. Sunday Herald 16/9/14

What do you think? Has feeling replaced thinking in our society? Has it happened in our Christian culture as well?

This is a fairly provocative question to get people to try and figure out what our culture is like (including our Christian culture). Some people might agree, others might wonder if their feelings are being invalidated by such a cultural critique. The point is not to arrive at an answer – so don't get too caught up in trying to settle on one!

Romans 12 actually has a lot to say about our minds and thinking. Before we explore verse 2 see if you can remember what we looked at last week.

This is a simple review question. Hopefully things like 'don't be a Sunday Christian' or 'worship God with our whole lives' will come out.

You'll remember that all the teaching of this chapter is based on the mercies of God explained in chapters 1-11. This week we'll look back at *justification*.

Justification is a great theme to review! There's plenty more material on justification in Romans but I went for the most important bit.

Read 3:21-26.

What does justification mean?

Being considered innocent and righteous by our judge. (answers about Jesus could come up here or in the next question)

How is it an act of mercy?

We are definitely not innocent and righteous. We deserve condemnation and punishment. But God justifies us anyway. He imputes our sin and guilt to Jesus (who takes it willingly out of love) and so Jesus takes our punishment. This is being a propitiation.

How does our justification inspire us to obey God?

This can be answered from a personal point of view. One aspect is that because we are righteous by God's justification it makes sense to live up to that righteousness we've been given.

Read Romans 12:2. What are we not to do?

Conform to the pattern of the world / this age. i.e. become like the world around us.

Can you think of examples of how this might actually happen?

Many I would think!

- *Getting drunk because everyone else is*
- *Gossiping because everyone else is*
- *(insert sin here) because everyone else is*
- *Watching too much TV / Doing too much Facebook / gaming / etc*
- *Living to please parents / boyfriend / girlfriend more than God*
- *Striving after things for our kids, the same as every other parent is doing*
 - *eg prioritising sport over Youth Group/church*
 - *valuing marks over growth in character*
- *pursuing success (sport, business, career, beauty, travel) like everyone else...*

'We are not to be like a chameleon which takes its colour from its surroundings.' William Barclay

Powerful quote I think!

In contrast, what is the positive instruction we're given in verse 2?

be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

How might this happen? Check the following verses: 1:21, 28 (our former state), 8:5-6, 29, 2 Cor 3:18, Eph 4:17-24.

Previously we had futile and depraved thinking. So definitely renewal is needed. The Spirit is crucial (Rom 8). Having the Spirit and living according to the Spirit means we'll start to think like God wants us to think. Also God is the one doing the transforming – he's changing us to be more like Jesus (Rom 8:29, 2 Cor 3:18). Ephesians 4 shows us the importance of teaching.

What is the result of this transformation according to Romans 12:2?

We'll be better able to know what God wants in different situations. i.e. know what is good. This means we'll be better able to please him. This is actually relevant to the topic of guidance. Transforming us by mind renewal is how God guides us. With this at work in us we're better able to make decisions that please God without a specific 'word from God'.

How would you sum up verses 1 and 2?

Have a go at your own personal summary for this one.

How do these verses help us value thinking more?

Lots! God is at work in our minds, by his Spirit. Growth in thinking will help us avoid conformity to the world. Growth in thinking will help us become more like Jesus. It will give us wisdom to know how to please God.

Feelings and emotions are definitely a big feature of Romans 12 (see verses 8,11,12 and 15) but for now, what are some practical ways as a group we can be growing and being transformed this year? Consider this question in regard to:

These questions will hopefully get people making changes and setting goals and encouraging each other.

Bible reading

Read more, try new methods, use Time with God, read with others etc etc.

Thinking about God

Try a Christian book (eg serving without sinking, or Knowing God, or some other classic)

Other options are:

PTC

Good Christian music (even Colin Buchanan is great!)

Meet with someone to read the Bible

Knowing and doing God's will in different situations

Try to be vigilant in pleasing God

Ask God's help

Read Proverbs

Read a book on how to live (try 'a joined up life' by Andrew Cameron)

Follow some good websites (eg Dave Moore's blog 'ministry pragmatics')

The Screwtape Letters (1942), by CS Lewis, is a fictional collection of letters from a senior demon (Screwtape) to a junior demon (Wormwood) who is trying to tempt a Christian away from God ('the Enemy'). Many of his strategies are to do with conformity to the world. Here's a good quote from chapter 12:

'But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.'

This is a great and somewhat chilling quote. Hopefully it has an impact on the people in your group not wanting to conform to the world!

Study 3 Romans 12:3-5 Getting a Reality Check

The Big idea of this study is that we think of ourselves humbly as part of the body. A key application is avoiding value comparisons!

We always seem to be comparing ourselves and being compared. What are the top 5 measures of value and importance we use for these people? Pick a few that are close to home for your group.

This launching question introduces the idea of comparisons. Asking people to use 'the top 5' forces them to be specific and thoughtful.

- university student
 - as an example: 1. Prestigious course, 2. Good marks 3. Reputation for being clever. 4. Awesome social life. 5. looks great.
- parent (baby / pre-school)
- parent (school age kids)
- worker
- sporting team member
- social media user
- other?

What measures do we tend to use for the category 'HBC member'?

This is a pretty full on question but why not go for it! Most likely humour will lighten the mood. But if you're feeling brave you could push people to say what they really think. This will help you get below the surface for this study and really push for change.

God knows about our tendency to measure and compare ourselves! In verses 3-5 we'll be challenged to think rightly about ourselves and others. Pray that God might be teaching us through his word today.

But first a recap: what were verses 1 and 2 about?

Not very exciting question, but valuable repetition!

We also want to reflect on one of God's mercies from earlier in Romans. This helps make sure our Christian ethics are shaped by grace. This week: *reconciliation*.

Read 5:9-11. What was our relationship with God like before he did something about it?

Enemies. We were hostile to him and he was hostile towards us.

What does *reconcile* or *reconciliation* mean? How did this happen for us?

Make peace, reach a peaceful relationship again. This happened through the death of Jesus. This is because our sin and guilt stopped us from being friends with God. Jesus' death removed that sin and guilt and made peace.

How does receiving reconciliation inspire us to obey God?

Again, this is a sort of personal question. For me, we're his friends, we don't need to earn his salvation. Being friends with God is great and makes me want to please him. I don't want to go back to a state of being enemies again.

Read 12:3-5. What are we not to do? How does this connect with verse 2?

Not think more highly of ourselves than we ought. This connects with the 'thinking / mind' theme of verse 2.

Instead, what should we do (verse 3)?

Think with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. This verse is a bit tricky to understand. The measure of faith probably doesn't mean 'different amounts of faith for everyone'.

More likely it's that God has given everyone the same measure:

Stott, quoting Cranfield says: 'Professor Cranfield argues, however, that metron, here means 'a standard by which to measure ourselves'; that this for all Christians is the same, namely saving faith in Christ crucified; and that only this gospel of the cross, indeed only 'Christ himself in whom God's judgment and mercy are revealed', can enable us to measure ourselves soberly.' 326 Cran vol 2 613.

So we should try to think seriously and carefully about ourselves in reference to God and the gospel rather than comparing ourselves to other people.

How does thinking about ourselves as being part of one body help? What is challenging about this teaching?

A body needs every part and are all bound together. It's challenging because we so much want to be free and individual (at least most of the time). But as Christians we're actually bound to each other like different parts of a body. We need to get used to not being an isolated individual!

You might think and reflect on other challenging aspects to this teaching.

What sort of body image comes into your mind – you might like to draw it to help you think through the question.

This is a chance for visual thinkers to explore their thoughts. People might give prominence to different parts. They might wonder what part of the body they are.

Think back to the questions about comparing at the start of the study. What do we need to change about our attitudes to ourselves and others in church?

We've got to stop ranking and comparing! We're all one. So we can't be proud or condescending towards others.

We've got to realise we belong to each other.

'He has not been anything like long enough with the Enemy to have any real humility yet. What he says, even on his knees, about his own sinfulness is all parrot talk. At bottom, he still believes he has run up a very favourable credit-balance in the Enemy's ledger by allowing himself to be converted, and thinks that he is showing great humility and condescension in going to church with these 'smug', commonplace neighbours at all. Keep him in that state of mind as long as you can'.
The Screwtape Letters, chapter 2.

This is a great quote emphasising how important humility is (and how it's something we usually grow in by God's grace).

Study 4 Romans 12:6-8 Gifts in practice

The big idea of this study is that God gives us all different gifts and we can each contribute to the well being of the body. It would be great if people thought seriously about their formal and informal ministries and moved towards greater service.

I grew thinking
I was just an ordinary kid
Just doing things
That ordinary kids did
But years passed me and I began to see
Certain strange abilities
I'm not a hero
But I'm not a freak
I just have...

Very mild superpowers
Very mild superpowers
Like sometimes when I'm cycling
With headphones on
I can predict exactly where I'll be
At the end of a song

From 'Very Mild Superpowers' by Dave O'Doherty. What are your very mild superpowers?

The other lyrics are good too. I'll add them here:

Very mild superpowers
Frequently in kitchens where I've never been
I can sense the location
Of the cups and crockery
I'm talking about

Very mild superpowers
My legs aren't bionic
My eyes aren't x-rays
But I'm a very good judge of whether things will fit through doorways
(Sofas, tables in particular)

But for every mild superpower
There's a mild super-weakness too
I get nauseous round the smell of bins
I'm afraid of certain shop mannequins
I hate the cheese that's individually sliced and vacuum-wrapped in plastic
I can never tell when people are being sarcastic...

(Spoken)
"Oh Dave, I really like that new song"
"Do you?"
"No!"
"Oh..."
Maybe that's because you fear....

My very mild superpowers
Look within
I'm not a mutant
I'm just a man
A man, who happens to be frighteningly good

At getting broken pens
To work... again

This should be a fun question. Hopefully everyone can think of something they're good at.

This will lead into the idea that we all have gifts and abilities of some kind.

Before we look at verses 6-8 about gifts and abilities we'll check back with another fantastic mercy of God. This week it's *freedom and union with Christ*.

Another great mercy! Hopefully this weekly review of God's mercies is keeping your group focussed on grace and not getting to moralistic or legalistic as we do lots of application.

Recap questions in box?

Read Romans 6:1-6. What or who were we slaves to?

Sin

What were/are the different ways we've been united with Christ?

*Baptised into Christ
Baptised into his death
buried with him through baptism
united in his death
united in his resurrection
old self crucified with him*

What does being free mean for a Christian?

*Free from the rule of sin. i.e. inevitable sin with all its terrible consequences.
It means freedom to live a new life that's not dominated by sin.
Some might say freedom to be who we were created to be.*

This connects to ethics and Romans 12. Romans 12 expands on what it means to 'live a new life' as we are united with Christ.

It's all much more motivating for godliness than 'do this or you'll get in trouble'!

Read Romans 12:1-8

How does the teaching about gifts fit in the flow so far?

This would be good for you to work out on your own, but I'll add something in brief:

Because of God's mercies...

We need to be whole-heartedly devoted to God.

This means being different and becoming more like Jesus – especially as our minds are renewed.

We need to think of ourselves as part of the body and not get a big head.

Being part of the body means helping the body function in different ways.

There are 7 gifts in this list (you can find other 'gift lists' in 1 Cor 12, Eph 4:11 and 1 Pet 4:10-11). Fill out the following table:

The NIV smoothes out the Greek in its translation a bit. The ESV or KJV are a bit more accurate. You'll see that it's sometimes about abilities (eg prophecy) and sometimes about roles (eg the one who exhorts...) This is not a big deal, it just means we shouldn't be too dogmatic about formally defining gifts. The emphasis is more on how we conduct ourselves in the role or use the gift for the benefit of others.

I'll fill in some notes in this table but you're best off thinking carefully yourself about each of them.

'Gift'	What it means	An example of using it
<i>prophesying</i>	<p><i>A tricky one! It could be referring to first generation NT prophets. It could also be about the kind of prophecy spoken of in 1 Corinthians. This seems to be words consistent with Scripture that built up the church (1 Cor 14:4, 31)</i></p> <p><i>A good resource could be a talk from Phillip Jensen:</i> http://phillipjensen.com/video/loving-gifts-seek-to-prophecy/</p> <p><i>(I haven't listened to this but I've heard Phillip preach on this elsewhere)</i></p> <p><i>Hopefully Greg will help us out as he preaches.</i></p>	<i>I think it's when someone at church or Growth Group says something biblically informed that is wise and helpful for the moment and builds up the church.</i>
<i>serving</i>	<i>Helping others</i>	<i>Pretty all inclusive! Eg washing dishes, packing up, helping someone move house</i>
<i>teaching</i>	<i>Explaining truth persuasively</i>	<i>Sprout teaching, Youth, GG leading etc</i>
<i>encouraging</i>	<i>Spurring people on in various ways</i>	<i>1:1 ministry, calling up people who haven't been around lately etc</i>
<i>contributing</i>	<i>Giving, sharing</i>	<i>Giving at church, giving extra for things like WAVE or Carols. Supporting missionaries</i>
<i>leadership</i>	<i>Taking charge and moving people forward together in following Jesus</i>	<i>Leadership at home or at church. Growth Group leadership, ministry teams etc</i>
<i>Showing mercy</i>	<i>Helping out particularly those in need.</i>	<i>Helping out 'difficult to love' people?</i>

When you look at this list is your first thought 'what should I do' or 'who will do this for me'? What does this reveal about yourself?

*Sometimes we want to be receiving all these things but not giving.
Sometimes we want to be the hero who does everything. We might need to recognise our weakness and receive help from others.*

Imagine you're reading this passage with someone one-to-one and they say: 'I don't think I have any gifts or abilities that would contribute to the church.' How would you respond?

Obviously this part of the Bible would challenge thinking like that. It's a bit hard to give a whole bunch of ideas in leaders notes for something like this. I'll trust your judgment in leading the group on this question.

Have a look at the table above. Which of these are you using now? What are some areas for growth?

*This is a personal question for people in your group.
It would be great to challenge people to put their gifts / abilities and opportunities into practice*

It's a great quote below from 'Serving with Sinking'. Hopefully it encourages your group members.

'(God's gifts) create unity, and they depend on unity. That's why different people have different gifts. It enables us to help one another, and causes us to rely on one another.

So last Sunday, Bill used his teaching gift in the church meeting. That was only possible because several people had used gifts of giving to contribute generously to the church funds, so Bill could be paid as a pastor and have the time to prepare his teaching. Meanwhile, Jane had spent a good few hours sorting out the church accounts and bills, so there lights on and the room was warm. Dave is suffering with bad depression, but took some comfort and hope from the sermon. But he was only there because Steve and Julie took time during the week to use gifts of encouragement and hospitality to hang out with him and help him get to a place where he could bear to be in such a big meeting. But it was good he was there, because Jo brought along a non-Christian friend who is also struggling with depression, so Dave was able to use his gifts of evangelism and wisdom in conversation.'

John Hindley in *Serving Without Sinking*

If you'd like help in starting serving – you can tick the box on the contact card or write a comment. Dave Moore is the pastor for the Ministry M at HBC – he and his team would love to help. So you can also email him and the team at startsserving@hunterbiblechurch.org

Study 5 Romans 12:9-11 Keeping Love Real

The big idea for this study is that we live out genuine and sincere love together. Under this banner of love comes a whole lot of commands and instructions we can put in practice.

If Romans 12 was a colour (or colours), what would it be for you? Why?

This is a great launching/review question for visual thinkers. Everyone else will have to be patient and loving and just give it a go!

The trick is to ask 'why'. Eg Leader: 'Mmmm, so the colour for you is mauve. Why did you choose that?', group member: 'mauve reminds me of unity and togetherness and that's what Romans 12 has been talking about...' etc

It'll be great to get into the gee up of verses 9-11. Before we do we'll remind ourselves about another great mercy of God – *the giving of the Holy Spirit*. Remember that all of these commands are 'in view of God's mercy' (verse 1). We're saved by grace not works!

A great opportunity to reflect on the Holy Spirit (we don't want to neglect it!)

Recap questions in box?

Read Romans 8:12-17. What have we received?

The spirit of sonship

Why is this so good?

*It means that God is our father – we are his children.
The Spirit leads us and helps us to put to death the misdeeds of the body*

What will having the Spirit mean for our lives now?

*We can rejoice that we are children of God
We don't need to fear God in the same way as before
The Spirit helps us live and gives us direction
We can be encouraged that godly living is achievable (especially good when we look at Romans 12)*

Read Romans 12:9-11. Let's try some reverse psychology. If we disobeyed all of these commands what would we, our group and our church would look like? Draw a picture.

This question is a bit of an experiment – the idea is that by looking at the negative we appreciate the positive. So for example, the illustration would be:

Evil people who don't love others who are joyless and short-tempered and unlikely to pray etc etc

a box for drawing

That's pretty depressing! Let's think about how we can put the alternative into practice. For each

verse, have a couple of people try out the role plays (your leader may modify to make them more relevant for your particular group). Use your imagination and play it up if you can! Then share some of your own struggles and ideas in these areas to help each other grow.

Yes I know how much we love role play questions! But seriously, after we get through some awkwardness role plays can really sharpen our thinking and encourage us to put things into practice.

It might also be a good question for the 'learn by doing' people in your group.

The idea is that people would say things like – how about we look at this part of the Bible... how does that verse impact on how you're living at the moment. Looking at other verses in Romans 12 would be good too.

Verse 9. A couple of Christians are meeting up for mutual encouragement. One of them explains that although he's been a Christian for a while he still loves going out and getting drunk on Saturday nights.

You could look at what it might mean to hate evil and cling to what is good. How might clinging to good help remind you not to get drunk.

It would be good to go from here back to other places in Romans 12 that remind us who we are and what God has done for us.

Verse 10: After church someone who's been here for 6 months says to the person sitting next to them: 'I just don't feel loved. My old church was much more loving!'

It's quite possible that their old church was more loving to her, but the Bible urges us to love others with brotherly love. How can we put that into practice ourselves, even if we don't feel massively loved.

Verse 11: A couple of mums are chatting while their kids are playing at the playground. One shares that she's just feeling spiritually down. She used to be so much more excited about being a Christian and serving.

Verse 11 encourages our zeal – perhaps prayer and hope will help. Looking at other verses will help.

The interesting is that the role play format forces people to think theologically and pastorally about these issues.

Study 6 Romans 12:12-13 Sticking it out

The big idea of this study is that we need to endure hardship together and show love through sharing and hospitality.

Can you think of a time when you stuck with something difficult for a long time? What was that like?

One of the themes of this study is continuing with Jesus in the midst of affliction and hardship. The launching question just introduces the theme (as well as helping your group to get to know each other)

These verses in Romans encourage us to 'stick it out' with Jesus while staying other-person centred. Pray that God might challenge and encourage us by his word.

The 'mercy of God' to review this week is *adoption*.

Adoption is a great mercy to think about. It's a distinctly Christian theme (see Packer's quote). I'd hope that this would be a great motivation for us to be growing in godliness, and responding to the commands of Romans 12.

Read the following verses. What do they tell us about the themes of *fatherhood, inheritance, and adoption*:

4:16-17 *Whether we're Jew or Gentile we have Abraham as our father (if we have faith)*

8:12-17
*Having the Spirit and being led by the Spirit equates to being sons of God. That's because the Spirit we have is the Spirit of the Son / Spirit of Sonship. It's the Spirit that enables us to call on God as Father.
Sonship means we are heirs as well*

8:18-25
We are sons, but we wait the redemption of our bodies. There's a link to what happens with the redemption/renewal of creation. Somehow creation will share our freedom.

8:28-29
We are brothers to Jesus who is the ultimate firstborn. So we share his inheritance. Also God calls us, foreknew us and predestined us for this.

9:6-9
It is the children of the promise who are Abraham's true children or God's children.

“For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. ‘Father’ is the Christian name for God. Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption.”

J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*

How do the blessings spoken of in these verses inspire us to 'offer our bodies as living sacrifices'?

It's inspiring to know that we are God's children. He loves us as a father and now we have the opportunity to serve him!

Read 12:9-13. How would verse 9 work as a title for this whole section?

Pretty well! Sincere love covers everything. It sounds a bit like Col 3:14 NIV Colossians 3:14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

It's also about hating what is evil and clinging to what is good. So everything we're told not to do is evil. Everything we are to do is good. (also fits with the end of the chapter – verse 21: evil and good)

There are 5 commands in these verses. How would you represent each one with a symbol? Check some of the other verses to help:

This is a way of doing an observation question. Hopefully people will read the verses carefully and thoughtfully to do a good job on the symbol.

I'll leave you to look up the helping verses. Some parts might be a bit tricky to understand. The point is though to get what we can from them that might help us understand Romans 12:12-13 better.

'joyful in hope'
5:1-5

'patient in affliction'
8:18-25

'faithful in prayer'
8:26-27

'practice hospitality'
15:23-24, 16:1-2, 23

'share with God's people who are in need'
12:8, 15:25-27

What's the connection between the 3 commands in verse 12?

There's nothing explicit that answers this question that I can see. So we need to use a little bit of imagination to come up with connections.

My thoughts are: When we are afflicted we need to be patient and not sin. While we are afflicted we are forced to put our hope in the future – eternity with God. Affliction often forces us to pray as well, so we should continue to pray.

Romans 5 and 8 put these ideas together a bit as well.

Why would being part of the body (verses 4-5) make a difference as to how we apply verses 12-13?

Suffering is something we do together – we encourage each other through all of this. The need of one person in the body should be shared by the others. Hospitality is an expression of love to other Christians visiting. They are part of the body as well.

Have a go at putting the 5 commands in order from easiest to hardest to apply. Spend some time encouraging each other about this. You'll find that people who find one command 'easier' will have tips and ideas to help people who find that command harder.

It will be interesting to see how different people answer. Try to get everyone to speak so that everyone can appreciate that they can be an encouragement in their area.

Dave Allen, our Membership pastor oversees a ministry to people in need at church. We asked him what are some ways people can 'share with people in need' – especially in regard to their practical needs.

“There are plenty of practical needs out there! For example, mechanical repairs on cars, cleaning house, helping move, DIY. These usually happen within Growth Groups. If people are willing to offer this sort of help beyond their group they could put this on their feedback card to go into a pool of people to be called upon when needed :)”

Two other ways people can help are:

1. Cooking extra meals. Put in takeaway box, labelled with date, name of meal, whether its suitable for food intolerances (eg gluten free) and then put in spare fridge at hub. We use this to provide meals in emergencies or when need is beyond one group's abilities to fulfil.
2. Short-term Financial aid; We provide budgeting help. If the person is assessed as being in cash flow difficulties, we can provide an agreed upon regular amount for a set period of time (weeks or months) in the form of supermarket gift cards so they can buy food. If people would like to go on a list to be called on to provide this help when needed, they can put this on their feedback card.”

Hopefully this note from Dave Allen should be pretty clear.

Hospitality is one of the key commands in this passage. We asked a bunch of people at church about how they do it. There were so many good tips we've put them up on the HBC website. Here's some highlights:

I found reading these really encouraging and heart-warming. I'll put the rest up on the website somewhere – maybe GG resources?

What motivates you to be hospitable?

“Our house is not our own, but God’s, on loan to us, to be used for His kingdom.”

“Sometimes it's hard to put your "wants" aside to be hospitable but God's been teaching us that our marriage and families are not about us and our happiness/ease - they are vessels of pouring out Jesus' love, to bring him glory.”

“my parents model it to me, both when I was a child and now in the way they use their house.”

“previous personal experience of other people's hospitality towards me.”

How do you choose who to invite?

“So at the start of each year I like to think of a couple of people I would like to get to know really well, so I choose a couple of people I will be deliberate in catching up with. In particular I choose a couple of first years who have moved away from home.”

“At the start of the year Growth Group members are a priority to get to know them better quicker.”

“People on the outside, usually people who don't seem to have friends already. At Unichurch, it's often international students.”

What works well?

“We tend to have people over at first, usually over a meal because it is a longer time and gives better opportunity for quality conversation.”

“One of the things we have had to learn is to catch up with people more over coffee/arvo tea or supper.”

“family play dates have been the best thus far”

“At 4:30pm church an easy idea is going out for dinner after church. It's not confrontational and it's a treat! We've also invited people around to our home and just done really easy dinners after church.”

“I love inviting people to my house for dinner - it seems more life-sharing than meeting in a public place. Doing normal things like watching a movie or playing a card/board game are great. Going for walks is fantastic. For new people, tours of Newcastle and taking advantage of the nice spots in the city is a practical way to spend time together. Going to markets together is good idea.”

What helps it go well in the moment?

“If we're having people over for a meal, I try and make it as easy to cook as I can with the least amount of organising and kitchen time so that I can spend time with people, not with the food!”

“Pray! Pray about the time you spend together, pray for the Holy Spirit to give you words of truth/encouragement/love, pray for the Holy Spirit's leading in conversation and just commit the time to him, trusting he's in control of how it goes.”

“Invite other oldies along too! For dinners, it's worth thinking about who's coming and making sure that someone who can carry conversations is on the list.”

What is rewarding about serving others in this way?

“We are always blessed. It teaches us to put ourselves and our comfort to the side to serve Jesus, but in the end it always blesses us and comforts us that we get to be part of His work.”

“I think being hospitable is a practical way to love people. So I think that motivates me. I love cooking meals for people. I've had a few opportunities to cook some meals for some non-Christian parents from RUSH, and they were pretty surprised that someone would do that and very grateful. So I think it is rewarding to see that they notice something different about Christians, and sharing Christ's love with them.”

“Thinking back to when I was a stranger, it made a massive difference when an older girl befriended me. I grew so much, partly through conversations with those people and partly through seeing the way they lived as Jesus' people, and I want to help other people do the same. In a weird way, every new person at church could be a dear brother/sister/partner in the gospel and we just don't know it yet. That's exciting!”

Study 7 Romans 12:14-16 Harmony

The Big idea of this study is that we need to really connect with one another as members of the body and share our joys and struggles. We also need to be humble and willing to serve without glamour.

Pop quiz! Fill in the blanks from Romans 12 (NIV84):

A quiz is a bit of fun and makes a change. Don't let people get too stressed!

'Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's _____ to offer your _____ as living sacrifices...'

'Do not _____ any longer to the pattern of this _____, but be _____ by the renewing of your _____.'

'Love must be _____'

'Never be lacking in _____ but keep your spiritual _____'

'Be joyful in _____, patient in _____, faithful in _____'

This week we look to a blessing and mercy of God that's kind of future directed – *glory*.

Glory is more future directed, but still a blessing worth dwelling on. It's obviously a massive topic so you'll need some wisdom to keep things on track.

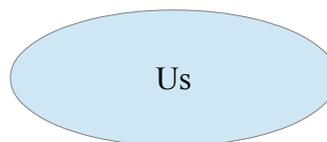
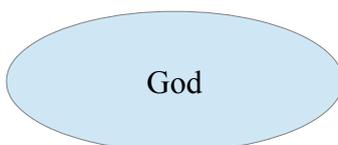
The following verses are every time the word 'glory' or similar appear in chapters 1-11. Look at as many as you can and try to show on the diagram how God shares his glory with us.

There's plenty of material here so I won't give you notes on every verse. If you and your group can pick up even a few things that would be great.

Some key ideas would include:

- *we fall short of God's glory because of sin*
- *Christ has all of God's glory*
- *Because we are united with Christ we hope to share in that glory*
- *All glory ultimately belongs to God.*

Romans. 1:21, 23; 2:7, 10; 3:7, 23; 4:20; 5:2; 6:4; 8:17,18, 21, 30; 9:4, 23; 11:36;



How does sharing in God's glory inspire us to obey him?

This is a personal question but remember we are reflecting on how 'in view of these mercies' we are to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God.

One thought I have is that we needn't worry about not much glory now because God has promised us glory with Christ in the new creation.

Also, if my service gives glory to God that's great – glory is what he deserves!

(Note: this is a massive question! You may need to continue discussions after the study...)

Read 12:14-16. Are there any ideas you don't understand? Make sure you check footnote 'f' for verse 16 (NIV84)

I think understanding the verses themselves is pretty straightforward. Verse 16 is literally just 'the lowly'. It could easily mean people / tasks or things. In the study we'll reflect on applying it in those different ways.

How do these verses fit together? How do they fit with the whole of Romans 12 so far?

I'm not sure how verse 14 fits. It seems to fit more with 17-21. It still is about love and humility though.

15-16 are more about the body and having a common mind and not thinking too highly of ourselves (verse 3)

There's a lot to apply from these verses! We'll consider verse 14 more in the next study. For verse 15 read the quote below and Dave Allen's tips and talk about how we can be living this out.

'Love that is genuine will not respond to a fellow believer's joy with envy or bitterness, but will enter wholeheartedly into that same joy. Similarly, love that is genuine will bring us to identify so intimately with our brothers and sisters in Christ that their sorrow will become ours.'

Doug Moo *Commentary on Romans*

A good quote! Sometimes we can be jealous of people who have things we don't have. We should instead rejoice for them and with them. Hard to do!

We can also secretly take delight in people's struggles – we can think things like 'it serves them right', or 'I told them so' etc... Obviously this is not the way we should live.

Dave Allen has a fair bit of experience rejoicing and grieving with the people of HBC. We asked him how he puts this into practice:

This was very kind of Dave to answer this question. These are really valuable tips.

“I'm not sure I'm good at expressing my emotions but this is what I do

1. I constantly ask God to give me a more gracious heart that genuinely loves people.
2. I preach the gospel of grace to myself so I remember how much I need grace I don't deserve.

3. I listen. In part because I'm not good at thinking on the spot - I like to process things.
4. I admit when I don't know what to say. I express this by saying, 'this is really hard or...
5. ...I ask questions, especially 'how are you feeling?' so they are confident they've really been heard, and it helps me empathise.
6. I don't usually cry on the outside. I weep on the inside - that's me. I think this would be worth knowing for people who don't see themselves as especially touchy feely.
7. I ask if I can pray with them.
8. I talk about it and grieve with my wife Donna.

The encouraging thing about all this is when I see people still trusting in God's goodness despite their circumstances. We can rejoice and cry together as brothers and sisters.”

The challenges keep on coming with verse 16! Pick one of the application questions to explore:

There's so much application we could do here! You'll have to think about your group and pick one.

How does your pride stop you from living in harmony with others and associating with menial jobs or 'lowly people'?

As mothers or fathers, are we complaining too much about parenting? How might verse 16 challenge our attitudes and behaviours?

“Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool, though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith, my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling, not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith are ridiculing God with all his creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but devil's fools. “ Martin Luther from his sermon 'The Estate of Marriage' 1522

This is quite a famous quote from Martin Luther who was a famous monk/lecturer at the start of the European Reformation.

We asked Dave Moore what are the top 5 'menial tasks' around church. He gave me 6...

Dave Moore is the pastor for Ministry at HBC.

1. Washing up
2. Entering financial records
3. Standing over the photocopier making outlines
4. Picking up rubbish before and after church
5. Getting the trailer to unichurch 3 hours before it starts
6. Cleaning the creche toys

Can you think of any others? How would you feel about volunteering for one of them (startservicing@hunterbiblechurch.org)?

How can we push ourselves in faithful obedience to God's word while still remembering God's grace and not burning out?

There's a good book called 'Serving without Sinking' that is helpful here.

There's some challenging ideas here! Pray for God's help! Try to avoid vague prayers – instead pray for real change about people, ministries and other challenges from the application questions.

Study 8 Romans 12:17-21 Serving our Enemies

The big idea of this study is that we show kindness for people who have hurt us (as possible) instead of seeking revenge.

Most of us deep down have a love of vengeance (especially when it's not against us).

Imagine someone hurt you because you follow Jesus. What are the various ways you'd be tempted to get that person back?

This launching question raises the problem and puts as much detail on it as we can. Hopefully by the end of the study we'll be convinced not to do the things we've talked about here.

The Bible will challenge us today to have a totally different attitude to anyone who hurts us. But for the last time we'll look over one of the many ways in which God has shown us mercy. This week it's our undeserved *election* or *choosing* (and the related idea of *calling*).

This is traditionally a somewhat controversial doctrine. That's not because the Bible isn't clear but because we have trouble accepting what God says! The Bible clearly says that he elects or chooses those he saves and he calls those he chooses.

Read 8:28-39. What do we learn here about being chosen by God ?

God foreknew, predestined and called everyone he justifies. It's great because we can't be separated from his love.

How does this fit with being called (cp 1:6-7, 9:23-24)?

Those whom God has chosen respond to his call to belong to Jesus and be his saints.

How does God's teaching on being chosen and called spur us on to obey him as Romans 12:1 says?

We can be confident that God will not let us go! We are safe in his care! Also, he's shown us great mercy but choosing us and calling us. We can respond in thanksgiving by serving him and giving our lives to him.

Read Romans 12:14-21. How many commands are there about how we should treat our enemies? What do they mean?

Putting a number on it forces people to observe more closely. They are mostly pretty clear. 20B is a bit tricky but we'll look at that in a future question.

Why might we not always be able to live at peace with everyone?

All sorts of reasons! Some are temporary some are permanent.

- *It might not be safe to be near them*
- *They might not want peace at all*

- *They might be dead or separated by distance*
- *We might not be ready spiritually or emotionally to live at peace with someone.*

Read Luke 6:28-35. How does Paul's teaching fit with Jesus' teaching? What does this tell us?

I meant 6:27. It fits pretty well. Jesus has 'pray' as an expression of blessing our enemies.

Look up Proverbs 25:21-22. What is the point of Romans 12:20-21?

This is a bit tricky about what the burning coals on the head mean.

Option 1: If you do good to your enemies that worsens their guilt and eventual punishment. This is like maximising God's wrath against them. But this option doesn't really fit with the tone of the passage.

Option 2: If you do good to your enemies they'll feel embarrassed about hurting you and be shamed into repenting. It's a bit like when David showed kindness to Saul and Saul stopped (briefly) pursuing David (1 Sam 24 and 26). This seems a better way to understand the verse.

'To repay evil for evil is to be overcome by it; to repay good for evil is to overcome evil with good.'
John Stott *Romans commentary*

Summing up, why should we not take revenge as Christians?

A few things:

- *Taking revenge is evil not good. We're supposed to hate evil and cling to what is good*
- *We are commanded not to.*
- *Jesus set the example*
- *It's up to God to take revenge / execute wrath.*

Sometimes if somebody hurts us we say, 'but I have a right to be angry!' We then gather allies, slander that person and pretty much abandon godliness. Are there times you've done this in the past? How can we do things differently the next time someone hurts us?

*Surely we've all done this! When that happens we've got to remember the Bible, and remember our answers from the previous question. And pray for them!
You and your group members will have other helpful ideas as well.*

How might you apply this passage when you talk with your kids about their experiences at school?

*Kids often get a hard time from kids at school – whether or not they are Christian.
I think this passage tells us it's not ok to 'fight back' (are there exceptions to this? I'm not sure) What other strategies can we suggest for our kids?*

You might like to finish by actually praying for people who have hurt you and asking God to bless them.

This is a hard thing to do – but it's right for us to encourage our group members to do this.

These studies have been produced by the Maturity team at Hunter Bible Church (c) 2014. Email questions and feedback to richard@hunterbiblechurch.org

Thank you for leading these studies! By God's grace and kindness hopefully your group members have grown together to become more like Christ.

Please send me your feedback.

If you have any good ideas about questions / variety / creativity please let me know. I'm always trying to gather more ways of building Bible studies.