



ROMANS 12

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Lesson 01



Lesson 1: Living Sacrifice



Bible Verses: Romans 12:1-5



Bottom Line: Following Jesus involves making a daily choice to be changed by God in the midst of the Christian family



Topics: humility, change, commitment, family, community, culture

INTRODUCTION

When you open up the book of Romans in your Bible, you are opening the Sam's Club or Costco version of Paul's writing ... it's his biggest letter!

When Paul's letters were assembled in the Bible, they put them together in the order of how long they were, from the longest to the shortest.

You'll notice that **Romans** is the first of Paul's letters in the Bible.

That being said, we won't try to cover all 16 chapters in four weeks.

In fact, this series is going to dive into chapter 12 and walk through just that chapter for four sessions.

Here's a quick introduction if you are not familiar with Paul and this letter, or a quick review if you are.

Paul was a Roman citizen from Tarsus, a city in what would now be eastern Turkey. He was a Pharisee, a strict Jewish teacher and leader known originally as Saul.

He passionately followed God and even sought to have Christians arrested, beaten, and killed because he thought they were going against God.

After a powerful encounter with Jesus that you can read about in Acts 9, Paul not only believed that Jesus was the Messiah, or the "anointed one / rescuer" predicted to come, but he followed Him and helped people who did not know Jesus become followers too!

In fact, he became known as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Gentiles are anyone who is not a Jew.

He greatly increased the spread of Christianity outside its Jewish roots throughout the world.

Although he didn't start the church in Rome, he cared about the people there because he saw all Christians as family.

And logistically, Rome would be a good base of operations as he planned to head further west to areas like what is now Spain to keep spreading the good news about Jesus.

Paul wrote this letter for a few reasons:

1. to provide his fullest explanation of the good news about Jesus;
2. to help the Christians in Rome with instructions for how to live as a unified family of believers, and
3. to guide them in their interactions with or around those who are not believers, even those who persecute them.

You would benefit greatly from reading the first 11 chapters that lead up to where we'll be, and then to keep reading when we are done and finish the complete letter.

That may sound like a lot, but depending on your Bible, it's only about 20 pages of reading.

Starting next week, I'll ask the same set of questions at the beginning of our group time about what you learned if you were able to read or study **Romans 1-12** before coming to our group time.

I'll ask if you noticed anything new while you were reading, what you learned about God, and what stuck out to you from the chapter.

Now, let's dive into today's lesson.

TEACH

Discussion Questions

1. When you hear the phrase “unlikely hero,” what fictional character or characters come to mind? What historical people do you think of? Who are the characters or people that no one would have picked to be the hero because of where they came from or who they used to be ... but who ended up being the perfect one to save the day?
2. Have you ever gotten to know someone through social media, messaging, video chat / FaceTime, etc. with hopes of one day meeting them? This could be a family member, friend, missionary, or celebrity.
3. Have any of you actually gotten to meet someone in-person whom you originally met virtually? What was that like?
4. What do you already know about Saul / Paul, his ministry, and his letters as we start this study?
5. What questions about Saul / Paul, his ministry, and his letters do you have?

Read **Romans 12:1-5** (New Living Translation)

1 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

3 Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.

4 Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function,

5 so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

These five verses are where we will hang out today to learn and be challenged by Paul.

We will start with **verse 1**, which may be familiar to some of you, depending on how long you have been around church.

Depending on the translation, this chapter begins with “and so” or “therefore.”

I'm not sure how closely you have paid attention in your English or grammar classes, but these transition words signal something significant.

And for Paul, this transition is not simply from one sentence, paragraph, or even chapter.

Paul is signaling a shift from all 11 preceding chapters to what he is about to say next.

Basically, Paul is about to explain this – in light of the good news of Jesus, all He has done for us, and all He wants us to be, here is how you should live.

And then Paul gives us an oxymoron, which is a figure of speech with terms that seem to contradict each other: he says to be “**a living and holy sacrifice.**”

Even if you haven't studied much in Leviticus and Jewish worship, or even the Old Testament, you probably know that a sacrifice involves killing something.

So what Paul describes here sounds strange.

How can something that is sacrificed be described as living?

N.T. Wright, a great professor, pastor, and author that you may have encountered if you have used any of the “Verse of the Day” devotion features on the Bible app, explains this well:

One's whole self (that's what Paul means by 'body') must be laid on the altar like a sacrifice in the Temple. The big difference is that, whereas the sacrifice is there to be killed, the Christian's self-offering is actually all about coming alive with the new life that bursts out in unexpected ways once the evil deeds of the self are put to death.

[N. T. Wright, Romans for Everyone Part 2 Chapters 9-16, vol. 10 of Accordance electronic ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 70-71.]

Again, we are jumping in at **chapter 12** of 16 chapters.

Paul is not saying that we do this to earn God's love, but as a response to the extravagant love God has shown us, with both His mercy and grace, as Paul has described in **chapters 1-11**.

This act of giving all of ourselves to God in response to what He has done for us is described as worship.

We often think of worship as a type of music or as what we do in a weekly service where we are together with other believers.

Both of those are accurate, but not complete.

Paul is teaching and reminding those in Rome – and us today – that true worship is an everyday process where we give up our selfish desires to follow Jesus in humility and gratitude, displaying for others the love that God offers everyone and that we have personally experienced in our lives.

So, keep singing those songs – in church and with your headphones or Bluetooth speaker – but also realize that your words, thoughts, and actions in your everyday life are just as much part of your celebrating and honoring God.

Discussion Questions

1. What have you heard or learned about sacrifices in Old Testament worship?
2. What connections can you make between Old Testament sacrifices and the Romans passage we are reading? How about with Jesus?
3. How would you explain what it means to be a living sacrifice?

4. We have looked at what being a living sacrifice means in general. Share a few specific examples of how it would look for you to live your unique life as a living sacrifice.

5. How does this verse encourage or challenge you when it comes to how you have previously thought of or defined worship?

6. What action steps will you take this week to practice this complete view of biblical worship?

Re-read **Romans 12:2** (New Living Translation)

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Paul describes two very different processes in this verse and the choices that each of us makes related to them.

On the one hand, we have the **"behavior and customs of this world."**

Paul points out that the world around us – culture, media, etc. – has a way it wants us to live and spends a lot of time and money trying to get us to live that way.

In contrast, Paul instructs us to **"let God transform you into a new person."**

There's a powerful wordplay going on here that doesn't always come through in the translation.

He is describing what the world is trying to do as making us fit into a mold.

This is similar to pouring plastic into a metal device that sets the shape as the plastic cools.

Or maybe when you were a kid you played with clay or Play-Doh and put it into things that formed the shape.

Paul says this is what the world is trying to do.

In contrast, he asks us to let God change us and the language he uses here is the kind of change a caterpillar undergoes when it becomes a butterfly.

This is not a temporary or small change.

It is a radical change into a new creation.

The verbs for both are present tense, which means they are not one-time decisions but ongoing actions.

We have to continually choose to not allow ourselves to be squeezed into the world's mold for how we should live and who we should become, but instead allow God to radically change us into new people, starting with how we think.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways – good and bad – do you see the people in the world around you trying to influence how you think, talk, act and what you listen to, buy, watch, and click / tap?
2. We often point to the moment when we became a Christian, but God is continually working in us to change us so that we become more like Jesus. How might understanding this process be important to the Christian life? And how is that different than just thinking about it as a one-time decision?
3. In what ways last week did you allow the world to fit you into its mold?
4. In what ways did you allow God to transform you into being more like Jesus?
5. How can you improve your choices and decisions this week to be less conformed and more transformed?

Re-read **Romans 12:3-5** (New Living Translation)

3 Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.

4 Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function,

5 so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

We can summarize Paul's instructions from **verse 3**, even at the risk of maybe being too simple, in just two words: be humble.

This is not false humility, which is pretending to think less of yourself so that others will compliment you and tell you how great you are.

This is also not thinking so little of yourself that you miss out on the fact that you are created in God's image and worth Him sending His only Son on a rescue mission to save you from the penalty of your sins.

Instead, this is taking an honest look at yourself.

Then, we walk into **verses 4 and 5** where we are reminded that we do not exist as solo Christians.

To be a follower of Jesus is to be connected to a community of other followers of Jesus, where each has a responsibility to use their gifts, talents, and abilities to help all the others.

In short, you need everyone else in the church, and everyone else in the church needs you.

We are not healthy and whole until we realize how much we are needed and how much we rely on others to help us follow Jesus well.

Discussion Questions

1. What has been one of your favorite experiences of being on a team or in a club?
2. How was that different than doing something similar on your own?
3. In a moment of real honesty and transparency, what would you say is one of your strengths – something you are naturally good at or have learned to be good at?

4. On the flip-side, what is something that is very difficult for you or what you would describe as a personal weakness?
5. Looking back at question three, how might you be able to use your strengths to help others, especially in the church?
6. What about your weaknesses – how do you need other Christians to help you because you're naturally not as strong at something?