

week 3 three

Discover

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

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. **4** For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, **5** so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. **6** We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; **7** if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; **8** if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

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

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. **15** Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. **16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. **18** If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. **19** Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. **20** On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.



Discover

Romans chapter thirteen invites us to explore an increasingly controversial topic: politics. Paul asks the Jesus followers to reconsider their relationship with the Roman empire, the most powerful governing force in their midst. What is our relationship with the institutional systems in America? Typical of our unusual study of Romans, we are going to explore chapter thirteen next week and instead turn our attention to chapter twelve. Our aim is that a closer look at chapter twelve will frame our conversation in chapter thirteen.

Chapter twelve represents a distinct shift in the letter. In his commentary on Romans, Douglas Moo describes this transition as Paul's movement from "indicative" to "imperative." The first eleven chapters emphasize Paul's theology and reflect his insights drawn from the scriptures of the Old Testament and the Spirit's voice both in conversation with the church in Rome and their circumstances. Paul begins his conversation with the church in Rome by addressing the underlying perspectives and ideas that are informing the community's actions and stirring conflict. Paul begins with the heart of the matter and then addresses the behavior changes and perspective shifts that are the natural response to Paul's instruction in chapters one through eleven. Chapter twelve perfectly illustrates that we cannot only believe or know things about God or life with God, we must embody the goodness and perfection of God's will in the world around us. Our understanding of God must impact our behavior and actions.

Verses one and two are two of the most widely read verses in the New Testament. Note the word "therefore" that highlights that what follows is in response to the previous conversation. I find it helpful to draw together the last verse of Chapter eleven with these initial verses in chapter twelve. "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."

You can feel the crescendo, the mounting significance, as Paul acknowledges the all-consuming, all encompassing nature of God whose presence and purpose order the universe at the close of chapter eleven. I hear a question at the close of eleven. How do we fit within this God who consumes all things? Paul invites us to release our resistance to God. Paul invites us to willingly lay our bodies down and relinquish our desire to be in control, to live as though everything lives and moves to our will, and become living sacrifices. I am reminded of the words of Jesus "If you cling to your life, you will lose it, and if you let your life go, you will save it." (Luke 17:33, NLT)



Discover

The world teaches us to cling to our lives, to hold fast to power and control, to bend to our own desires. But those who let go of their lives will find that they are consumed by the holy and perfect and good and life giving will of God.

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As living sacrifices to God, we will move, we will speak, we will think, we will feel, we will dwell on the earth as beings who innately know and respond to the will of God. As living sacrifices, we will live even as we die daily to our own will, our own selfish desires. How does this daily death and this new life manifest among us?

Chapter eleven beautifully reveals that we know we are living in complete alignment with the will of God when we use our gifts to bless others, when we love with sincerity, when we hate what is evil, when we respect others more than ourselves, when we serve God with all our strength, when we give to those in need, when we practice hospitality, when we bless our enemies, when we mourn with those who mourn and rejoice with those who rejoice, when we never seek revenge against those who harmed us, when we live at peace with all.

Do our relationships with one another look like this? Do our relationships with our enemies, with those we disagree, look like this? Are we being transformed by God's consuming will that seeks peace and overcomes evil with good? Are we conforming to the world around us that tells us to seek our own will, seek our own good?



Pray

Monday

God of Love and Devotion,

Thank you for the affection, mercy, and recognition that you lavish upon me. Help me to verbally and in action honor and respect everyone. Let me see where I have failed to do so and take action to make it right.

Tuesday

God of Mercy who Loves me Despite my Failures and Shortcomings,

Please make known my thoughts that are harmful and destructive and replace them with your thoughts of love and peace so that I can know and present you better.

Wednesday

God of Grace,

I yield my pride to you. Please show me areas of my life where I am prideful and judgemental. Give me awareness to see myself as your beloved child and see belovedness in others.

Thursday

God of Great Gifts,

Thank you for the many abilities you have given me. I dedicate these talents to your service and glory. Reveal to me the ways to use these gifts to make known your great love and mercy, and grant me the strength to joyfully join you in your work here.

Friday

God of Forgiveness and Reconciliation,

You have overcome evil through your immeasurable goodness. Please give me the mindfulness to respond to the unfairness and evil that is done to me with the strength and power of your goodness. Help me to yield the need for justice into your hands.





Serve

The Gifts from God

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.” Romans 12:3-8

Can you imagine the church that Paul describes in chapter eleven? Can you imagine a community where each member is using their gifts to bless the whole?

My experience in church is that we embrace a distinctly different model than envisioned by Paul, especially in how we use our gifts. On one hand, many are unaware of the particular ways that God has gifted them to bless the body of Christ. This lack of awareness diminishes the confidence to serve or risk potential challenges in the pursuit of discovery of our gifts. Our busy and frantic lifestyles also limit the use of our abilities as exhaustion and multitasking do not make space for the work that God is inviting us into. On the one hand, a portion of the church neglects their giftedness. On the other hand, we devote all our energies attempting to use gifts that we cannot claim from God. We busy ourselves serving the community in ways that do not give us joy or excitement but exhaust us. This is not merely a physical exhaustion, but a weariness in our spirit that settles in us when we strive to do good and beautiful things that God has not asked of us. The result of living together across this spectrum is a church where a few reach their limits serving the community in a variety of roles while the rest remain unaware and unavailable. This model represents the churches where I spent my youth and much of my adulthood. Paul invites us to dreams of another way.

Can you imagine a community where each person uses their giftedness from God to strengthen one another, teach one another, care for one another, serve and support one another? If your gift is service, Paul invites you to invest your energy and focus in serving others. The community thrives when those who are called by God to teach instruct rather than prophecy. This is not to say that fulfilling a role that is outside of your giftedness is invaluable, but how much more powerful is a church where there is no need for you to step outside of your particular calling from God because your brother is fulfilling his specific role in the church.

This week, our invitation is twofold. First, I invite you to discover and embrace your unique giftedness from God. There are a variety of online assessments available to help you pinpoint your area of giftedness but I encourage you to spend time with God asking him to reveal to you your gift or gifts. As you sit with God in this time of prayer, consider what roles or tasks fill you with joy and restore instead of depleting your energy. Once you sense that you and God discovered your particular giftedness, I invite you to practice using this gift in our community. Is your gift encouragement? Consider who in our community is in need of encouragement and bless them with a phone call or a card. Our second invitation is to recognize how others are using their gifts to strengthen the community. Who among us do you witness serving in a particular capacity with the power and enthusiasm that comes from serving according to the grace we receive from God. Be specific and communicate what you notice with the individual.



Reflect

The following questions are designed to help you reflect more deeply on the themes we explore together as we journey through Paul's letter to the Romans. I invite you to make space to sit with these questions without any need for a quick or clear answer. As you settle into a quiet and comfortable space, I encourage you to discuss these questions with God. Ask God to prompt you, to guide your thoughts, or bring up new questions that could be more helpful to you.

- 1 Paul emphasizes that we can either be transformed to embody the will of God or we can be conformed to the way of life modeled in the world around us. Are there areas or aspects of your life still conforming to the model of the world?
- 2 What is God inviting you to submit to his good, pleasing, and perfect will? What are you releasing and relinquishing in order to become a living sacrifice?
- 3 Have you ever experienced a situation where you felt the joy, energy, and power of using your unique giftedness to serve the body of believers? In contrast to this experience, have you ever felt exhaustion and frustration of serving in roles outside of your giftedness from God?
- 4 The decision to submit our will to the will of God transforms the ways that we interact with one another in the church and with our neighbors outside the church. Paul invites the Christians in Rome to reconsider how they serve and care for one another as one body and how they engage with their non-Christian neighbors. How does your submission to the will of God impact your relationships with others in the church and outside the community?
- 5 What does it look like to relinquish vengeance and justice into the care of God? How does this choice help us overcome evil with good?



Embody

Offer Our Bodies

Paul says a lot about our bodies in chapter eleven. He invites us to "present our bodies as a living sacrifice" and compares the church to a body with many parts. As created things, we are not solely minds and thoughts and emotions. We are bodies that interact with the physical world every second of every day. How do we use our bodies? How do we treat our bodies? How do we interact with other bodies? When Paul invites us to present our bodies as living sacrifices, he is not limiting our sacrifice to our physical bodies, but he does not exclude our bodies as a part of ourselves that we offer to God. How do we offer our physical forms, this creation that God called good, back to the creator? How do we offer our hands, our eyes, our stomach, our reproductive organs, our legs, our whole bodies to God that each part of us will take up space in the world in accordance with the will of God? How can every part of us embody the will of God?

I invite you to find a quiet place to settle your body into a comfortable but alert position. You can sit with your feet resting on the ground. You can lay down on a bed or couch. Choose a position where you are not tempted to fall asleep. As you settle into this position, I invite you to focus on your breath. There is no need to change or adjust your breathing simply pay attention to the rise and fall of your chest or stomach as you breathe. Notice any thoughts that enter your mind and let them move out into the room as you exhale. The goal of this portion of our exercise is to quiet your thoughts until you can focus only your breath.

Once you find your mind is quiet and still, I invite you to notice the different parts of your body and offer each to God. For example, as you draw your attention to your feet engage the muscles in your feet. Move your feet in a circular motion. Clench and unclench your toes. Focus all your attention on your feet and then speak the following prayer to God. God, I offer my feet to you as a living sacrifice. I pray my feet will move and respond to your good, pleasing, and perfect will. Move throughout your body and spend a moment acknowledging the various limbs and organs. Each time, repeat the same prayer.

God, I offer my _____ to you as a living sacrifice. I pray my _____ will move and respond to your good, pleasing, and perfect will.

This exercise reinforces that it is in him and through him and for him that every part of us moves in the world. From our toes, to the furrow of our brow, God invites us to offer our whole selves to be consumed by his will.

