



The Book of  
**ROMANS**

**Small Group Study 4: Romans 12–16**

# Week One: Romans 12:1–21

## Key Verse

- “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.” - Romans 12:1–2 (CSB)

## Key Principles

- Living each day in worshipful response to God is the logical response to the mercy God has shown us in Christ.
- We will be changed as we learn to think according to God’s will—clinging to what is good, actively using our gifts for the benefit of the body, and showing love toward all people, without hypocrisy.

## Read

If you could change anything about yourself right now, what would it be? Another word for change is transformation, and it’s not uncommon for any of us to desire some type of transformation—as long as we get to call the shots. If we can remain in control, change seems desirable. We live in a world of self-help, where anyone can tap into the resources of the self, and transformation is available to everyone.

Paul presents a different model for transformation in Romans. God is the one who transforms hell-deserving sinners (1:18–3:23) into God-worshipping saints (5:1–6:23). God changes us by uniting us to Christ through his death and resurrection (6:1–12). Jesus doesn’t merely take the penalty of our sins (3:21–26), but he also grants us his Spirit to battle the power of sin in our lives (8:1–12). The Holy Spirit changes our hearts. He puts sinful desires to death and gives us holy desires for God (8:9–16). Contrary to self-help, Romans shows that God provides the power, the means, and the goals for transformation.

But what is our part in transformation? How exactly do we change? Romans 12–13 answers that question by continuing a line of thought that begins much earlier in Romans. The book of Romans

presents an absolutely righteous God (1:17). This God is not merely to be studied but he is to be hoped in (5:1–8; 8:18–24). We can hope in him because he is forever faithful and true (3:1–8). We can trust that he will never lie, never do wrong, and always come through on his Word (Romans 9–11). When we trust God, we will want to dedicate all of ourselves to him (12:1–2). Transformation comes through knowing, trusting, and obeying God.

Paul begins Romans 12–16 by calling Christians to live for God as “living sacrifices” (12:1). **Living each day in worshipful response to God is the logical response to the mercy God has shown us in Christ.** When we recall and consider that our lives rest on God’s mercy, we no longer try to earn his acceptance or righteousness nor do we disregard his kindness by continuing to sin. We do not deserve the life that God has given us, so it is only reasonable that our lives should belong to him for his glory. That is why Paul calls this living sacrifice our true act of worship (12:1).

When we live this way, we do not conform to the ways of the world (12:2). As we saw in Romans 1, the world has suppressed God’s truth, not honoring him as Creator (Romans 1:18–32). Our world has exchanged God’s truth for its own definition of good and follows ungodly passions rather than conforming to God’s will. Those who are living sacrifices, however, present themselves to the Creator to be transformed and conformed to his likeness and his purposes. Our lives are not our own (1 Corinthians 6:19–20), and this life of sacrifice looks to God for purpose, fulfillment, direction, and authority.

The hard part comes when we try to discern what God’s purposes for us actually are; we struggle to identify God’s will. In Romans 12:2, Paul defines God’s will as “what is good, pleasing, and perfect.” Instead of suppressing the truth (Romans 1:18–32), Paul calls the Roman church to discover God’s will by testing. The Greek word for discern (12:2 CSB) means to *determine worth or value by putting to the test*. What does such testing look like in our everyday lives? It means we test our decisions against the truth of God’s Word so that—in the everyday decisions of life—we prayerfully make choices that glorify God, honor his character, and advance his plans for the world.

If we are thinking according to God’s will, we will assess ourselves correctly in relation to God and others. In Romans 12:3–8, Paul uses an analogy of the human body to illustrate how Christians function together in harmony as the body of Christ. Just as our human bodies are comprised of different parts all working together, the diverse members of the church—each having different gifts and abilities—are meant to work together as one body of Christ.

Paul then describes the life that is pleasing to God by exhorting Christians in verses 9–21 to live as a unified body in specific ways, as united recipients of God’s mercy. First, Paul says love should be “without hypocrisy” (12:9), meaning that our outward actions should match our inward thinking. This goes hand in hand with the second command: “Detest evil; cling to what is good” (12:9). As Christians, we must knit ourselves to what is good, living a life in line with God’s revealed truth. Because of God’s undeserved kindness to all of us in Christ, the genuine love of God for us in the gospel is to be shown toward everyone (12:18). We may be tempted to dismiss people who embarrass us, drain our energy, or get under our skin. However, reflecting on God’s mercy toward us should renew our thinking toward those we naturally push away, to the point we seek to serve even our enemies (12:20). If we could not earn our righteous standing before God, how can we require others to earn love from us?

After all, Christ did not retaliate when he was wrongfully harmed; he entrusted his circumstances to God the Father as Judge. Likewise, Christians should follow Jesus and refrain from taking revenge into their own hands because God will soon return to judge everyone (12:19–21). As for us, we are responsible to show genuine love toward all humans who, like ourselves, are equally dependent on God’s mercy.

God, in his mercy, has made us righteous through faith in Christ’s work. We please God by *continuing in faith* as a living sacrifice—presenting our lives, which he has spared, to him in worship. **We will be changed as we learn to think according to God’s will—clinging to what is good, actively using our gifts for the benefit of the body, and showing love toward all people, without hypocrisy.** This is the way of Christ. This is the way of a life lived for the glory of God.

## Study Guide

The following study questions are meant to help us wrestle with the text of Romans and see how the gospel displays God’s righteousness. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question before your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.



**Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul’s major points. Then, read Romans 12:1–21 in preparation for this week’s study.**

## Highlight

Circle all the conjunctions in this passage (words like “therefore,” “so that,” “for,” or “because”).

Make a list of all the commands in Romans 12.

From the list above, put a star beside all the commands that have to do with our relationship with other people.

Highlight any Old Testament quotations in Romans 12. Where are they from? Go back and read those verses in their Old Testament context.

## Explain

Explain how the conjunctions from question 1 impact our understanding of Romans 12. Focus especially on the “therefore” in 12:1.

Revisit the list of commands from Romans 12 in question 2. Paul expects his readers to follow these instructions. Why are Christians called to pursue these behaviors?

In your own words, summarize the teaching that Paul is drawing from the Old Testament quotations.

What is the difference between mercy and grace? Use a dictionary if needed. Why is God’s mercy, instead of grace, the proper motivation for us to present ourselves as a living sacrifice to him in Romans 12:1?

## Apply

In what ways are you being “conformed to this age” (12:1–2), and what would it look like for you to live as a “living sacrifice” to the Lord in these areas?

In the list of practical commands given in verses 9–21, which do you find most difficult to obey and why?

Our total devotion to God has radical implications for our relationship with everyone around us, particularly in the body of Christ (12:5). What are some specific ways you struggle to live in harmony with others? What would it look like for you to take practical steps of repentance?

According to Romans 12:9–21, we are told to bless—and not curse—those who persecute us and not repay anyone evil for evil. What should our response be to the sinful actions of others? How do verses 19 and 21 clarify (and limit) our role?

## Respond in Prayer

Each week of this study guide will include a recommended Scripture passage that helps us focus on the faithfulness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected passage and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this passage on your own at home and together with your small group.

### **This Week's Prayer Passage: Romans 12:1–21**

Read Romans 12:1–21.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **Adoration:** Praise God because his mercy runs so deep that he even extends it to his enemies (Romans 12:1; cf. 5:10). Praise God for all the ways he is righteous and deserving of our sacrifices to him (12:1–2). Glorify God because he is good and his will is perfect (12:2).
- **Confession:** Confess to God the ways we have been stingy and self-serving with the gifts he has given us (12:4–8). Confess to God the ways that we have thought of ourselves more highly than we ought (12:3). Ask for forgiveness for the ways that we have been vengeful in thoughts, words, and deeds (12:14–21).
- **Thanksgiving:** Thank God for giving us unity within the body of Christ (12:3–6, 18). Thank Christ for the gifts he has given to us and for giving us a family that seeks to build us up (12:3–13). Thank God for renewing our minds and opening us up to his eternal truths (12:2).
- **Supplication:** Ask God for help in valuing his mercy and living in view of his mercies (12:1). Ask God for a greater appreciation for our brothers and sisters in Christ and the gifts that he has given them (12:3–8). Pray for a transformed mind so that we can be instruments of peace to those inside and outside of the church (12:9–21).