

A child eagerly recited a memory verse to me once, and I casually replied, “*Nice job! Do you know what it means?*” The response was, “*No silly, it’s just in the Bible!*” The encounter got me musing about the perils of [rote memorization](#) where we learn facts with no context or how to apply them. For instance, I aced a grade school state capitals test but never learned about those cities and certainly would fail that test now. Rote memory can be quite a pickle with texts like Philippians 4:13, “*I can do all things through him who strengthens me*” ([click here for context](#)). It’s not saying everyone can lift cars or do stuff we’re not designed for! Disregarding context has made folks grumpy with God over promises He never made.

Romans 12 is another well-known chapter we may not fully grasp. Before diving in, recall that this series is about debunking falsehoods we’ve been raised to believe that disrupt intergenerational spiritual formation. We’re doing the uncomfortable work of unlearning, which is like weeding a garden--no pain, no gain! We’ve discussed how Satan is “*the father of lies*” (cf. John 8:44) who uses various forms of warfare (e.g., spiritual, physical, psychological) to **trick generations into forgetting what God deems essential**. We also dug into how **Church is a family before we’re anything else** and unpacked the term “*family*” to discover **We have much to relearn after being born again**. In today’s time together, we’ll learn how Scripture scrutinizes [our western individualism](#) as we unpack this...

BIG IDEA: Informed Worship Erodes our Exclusivity and Comfort.

I’ll break tradition with this familiar text and read ***Romans 12*** from the New Living Translation. Our text will be on the screen today, starting with ***verses 1-2: 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. 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.*** I often quote this to urge Christians not to be worldly, and

it even contains a Greek word which lends itself to a pretty illustration about caterpillars morphing into butterflies! What I rarely mention, though, is the unpleasant idea in *verse 1*. You may need to buckle up as we ponder Paul's *plea* to not be like *lifeless* or *uninformed animals* who won't *sacrifice* (surrender) *worship* preferences that God finds *unacceptable*. We'll focus on just 5 of the many facts about *worship* in this passage.

1. Worship brings diverse people together. In *verse 1*, *brothers, sisters* and *bodies* are plural! *Verses 4-5* also say that *just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other*. So, one question to consider is: "Which of my worship practices make it seem like Jesus only died for me or for people who look, think, and act like me?"
2. Worship is for the whole body. God seeks more than our brains, souls, and spirits. Some confuse the teachings of Christ with [Gnostic Philosopher Plato](#) by acting as if our physical bodies and this planet should be left behind. Many view church as little more than "*correct content*" which can easily be consumed online without distraction. Others speak of "*saving souls*" with little concern for the entire body. Some leaders say dumb stuff like, "*Let's forget what happened this week and worship*" as if Jesus somehow entered a human body but avoided discomfort. Then there are folks for whom worship is an out-of-body experience disconnected from thought or those worshipping beside them! Our global church family is sort of all over the place, aren't we?
3. Worship involves rethinking things. Our text says God seeks to *transform you into a new person by changing the way you think* and that being *a living sacrifice is truly the way to worship him*. Translations employ terms like *spiritual* or *reasonable* to convey that God craves *worship* that is *true*, *intelligent*, and *informed*. I wonder then, "Which of your worship practices are half-hearted or not biblically informed?", and "What would God like to change about you?"
4. Worship ought to be lively. We're told to be *living sacrifices*, not dead ones! Of course, worship won't always make us happy or ecstatic, but it should

reflect life's ups and downs. Ecclesiastes 3 addresses times...to be born/die, to plant/harvest, to break down/build up; to weep/laugh; to mourn/dance; to keep silent/speak. You get the idea, right? True worship reflects the seasons and stages of life, which makes it diversely integrated. Our gatherings, then, must include all types of songs (e.g. sad/happy, serious/fun, adult/child, even other languages). Our musical diversity may bother you, like if we sing Spanish or childish lyrics, but in Matthew 18 Jesus said, *"Unless you turn and become like children, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven."* Adults who prefer pretense, partiality, and performance find it difficult to rediscover open-hearted, child-like joy.

5. Worship stirs us to sacrifice. Why? **Romans 12** suggests this desire increases in us as we grow in understanding God's mercies for us in Christ. Paul gave several examples of how *being a living sacrifice* looks in a diverse, intergenerational church, but 3 should be plenty for us to appreciate and apply our BIG IDEA: **Informed Worship erodes our exclusivity and comfort**.

#1: Sacrificial worship involves humility. Check out *verse 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*. Jesus modeled how dying to self brings life to everyone around us. 1st century Corinthians notoriously failed to envision God as a baker who *measures out faith and gifts* to create delicacies. Instead of appreciating all the ingredients in their church, they thought certain roles were superior. James 2 calls this the sin of partiality (ranking people by how we perceive their appearance/benefit). I know worship is more than what we do here, and includes how we live, work and play, but let me share a relatable example from the book, *"Intergenerational Christian Formation"* by Dr. Holly Allen et al. (p. 174-175): *"Essentially, the selection of worship leaders communicates something about...the kind of church they are striving to be. If the only people appearing upfront are (one) age group, this says something about the congregation's sense of identity and priorities...in the course of a month, people of all ages should see their life stage reflected in those who (appear*

upfront)...Christine (one of the writers) began considering intergenerational practices when youth in her church expressed anger toward adults who involved them only when they wanted the youth to do something for them rather than with them. These youth had been taught the biblical concepts of the “body of Christ” (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-27), “family of God” (2 Cor 6:18), “priesthood of all believers” (1 Pet 2:4-5), and the “unity of faith” (Phil 2:2) in age-specific environments (but had not) practiced (them) in their church. With no visible modeling of these doctrines, the youth neither fully understood nor practiced them.”

#1: Sacrificial worship involves **humility**. **#2: Sacrificial worship** involves **helping**. Check out **verse 13: When God's people are in need, be ready to help them**. As we learned last week in Acts 2, gratitude for Christ’s ***sacrifice*** increases our desire to ***sacrifice***. One question I usually hear is: “How much of MY money is God asking for?”, but a one is: “What has Christ given me that I can share?” Believe it or not, 10% was just a starting point for Old Testament people! There’s an [article link](#) in our notes about that and how New Testament churches should fund our work with cheerful, weekly collections where we all give according to ability. We’ll do that in a moment, but **verse 13** also says to ***always be eager to practice hospitality***. The command, therefore, goes way beyond throwing money at the problem!

So, here’s takeaway **#3: Sacrificial worship** involves **hospitality**. **Romans 12** says that gratitude for God’s mercies will make us hospitable (welcoming) like Jesus who took on flesh. I wonder, “What does this imply about our need to have skin in the game?”, and “What does all this imply about our partiality and preferences?” For time’s sake, I’ll cut to the chase...The generous ***welcome*** we receive at the Lord’s Table sets the standard for our tables, homes, and lives. Among other things, it compels us to ***practice hospitality*** or welcome one another as if we all equally matter! Church, therefore, is not just about parts you prefer. It’s not about me speaking every week, you being comfortable with everything we say, our band playing all your favorites, or having a distraction free experience so you get stuff from the message. Something I’ve learned about life is that discomforts or distractions often ARE the message! Moreover, our liturgy is the gospel message embodied, so every part and participant matters from the welcome to the Sunday to

Monday. Following the pattern of the gospel, it should nudge you out of comfort zones. Professor NT Wright (p. 75) warned that, *“It often happens that a particular church, for whatever reason, remains blind and deaf to what God is saying in and through particular people, and never benefits from the grace that God wants to pour out through them.”*

In closing, then, *“What IS the church about?”* It’s everything we find in **Romans 12**, plus Ephesians 4 adds in ideas like: *“Equipping God’s people to do his work and build up Christ’s body; measuring by Christ’s standard; not being immature like children; speaking truth in love; growing more and more like Christ our head; each part doing its own special work and helping the other parts grow, so the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”* We hope you’ll prepare your heart for our next lesson by seriously considering your views of Christ’s body and your participation in it. And remember, wherever you are on your journey of trusting Christ, you don’t have to work through anything alone. Please reach out.

Sunday to Monday Connection: Today’s lesson speaks to the importance of equipping God’s people to do His work, which encompasses all generations in the church community. Serving in your church community is an experience where you’ll develop relationships in which everyone grows from serving alongside each other. As many of you are now aware, during my time at our Welcome Desk, I had the opportunity to develop friendships with other Welcome and Safety Team members. I eventually handed the lead role off to our own Ms. Patty. On any Sunday morning her team is likely one of the first faces you’ll see, and they’ll warmly welcome you with a smile. The members of that team embody hospitality every week, and that’s just one example of folks stepping out of comfort zones to enrich the body of Christ.

- **Question:** Where might Jesus want you to step outside your comfort zone to serve?
- **Next Step:** Ask trusted people how they think your gifts could help build the body of Christ?
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to investigate further what all this might mean for you, please come talk with any of our leaders, or the person who brought you.

Takeaways to discuss with your people (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

1. In what ways has your worship been uninformed, lifeless, and heartless?
2. What are some American or Western philosophies that run contrary to Romans 12?

3. Read James 2 and then discuss these questions: “*How is partiality a form of pushing some folks to the side, and how do we do this at in our homes, offices, churches, and playgrounds?*”
4. In what ways has God gifted you to contribute towards building up this family? Who benefits the most from your God-given resources, and what simple budget AND calendar changes would increase your contribution to kingdom work?
5. What are some ways that churches (in general) have overemphasized certain people or spiritual gifts, and why do you think that?
6. What are some ways that OUR CHURCH has overemphasized certain people or spiritual gifts, and why do you think that? In other words, how are we implying that certain gifted people are more essential than others?”

Quotes related to this passage:

- “People sometimes suggest that living a Christian life means a kind of immaturity, since you are guided not by thinking things through for yourself but by rules and regulations derived from elsewhere. That isn’t Paul’s vision of Christian living. Of course there are plenty of firm boundaries. He will have more to say about them presently. But at the centre of genuine Christianity is a mind awake, alert, not content to take a few guidelines off the peg but determined to understand why human life is meant to be lived in one way rather than another. In fact, it is the way of life of ‘the present age’ which often involves the real human immaturity, as people simply look at the surrounding culture, with all its shallow and silly patterns of behaviour, and copy it unthinkingly.” (Wright, 70)

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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